

Alyssa Theroux

Dr. Mary K. Beyrer Graduate Student Scholarship Essay

Health Education encompasses a wide variety of professional interests and as a student, I continually seek ways to expand my educational experience beyond the traditional classroom setting by participating in diverse campus organizations, engaging with professionals from multiple disciplines and leveraging these connections to secure two internships. Through these experiences, as well as personal observation of health disparities in my community and globally, I am compelled to further my education and pursue a Masters of Science degree concentrating in a public health program. In order to pursue my goal, I will have to find ways to financially support my education through scholarship, graduate assistantships and part-time employment.

As an undergraduate student I have participated in many organizations to continue to explore my individual interests and diversify my knowledge base with the intention of how to apply health promotions ideals. I have worked with the Special Olympics, Bears VAX Campaign, Break for Bears Safety Campaign, NABHOLZ Worksite Health Screening Volunteer, Student Associate for Biz at Bear and Communication Partners Volunteer. Additionally, I am a member of the President's Leadership Fellows, LEAD Team, Delta Zeta Sorority, Intramural Campus Sports, Wesley Student Ministry, Health Sciences Club, Pre-Physical Therapy Club, Arkansas Center of Research for Economics (ACRE) and Arkansas Society of Public Health Education (SOPHE). Through these many organizations I have been able to network within the campus and community to secure opportunities to shadow professionals in the areas of Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Counseling & Therapy, and School Psychology. All these engagements have built on my ability to appreciate the many facets of how and where health promotion touches a community.

Currently, I work as an intern at HealthTech Arkansas, which is an innovation incubator working to fight health disparities and improve cardiovascular health in rural Arkansas. HealthTech Arkansas

promotes health services and education through innovations in technology or medical devices. As the intern at HealthTech Arkansas, I coordinate programming and partnerships between national and international health promotion focussed organizations such as the American Heart Association, SWPDC, and Adaption Health. I also work with the largest health systems and universities in the state to promote health, research, and innovation throughout Arkansas. Lastly, I research health disparities and investigate possible solutions for these problems. Additionally, in January, 2022, I will begin a second internship with a Non-Government Organization (NGO) in Niger, Africa called Providence--Chiloumaz. Providence--Chiloumaz is an NGO that promotes community health and women's health in Niger. As their intern, I will help develop a health education program for the priority population. What excites me most about educating these individuals on health, is how much of a large-scale impact this seemingly small act has on the community. Health education has a direct life changing impact on underprivileged populations and is often overlooked and underappreciated in comparison to large scale international aid programs.

Finally, this summer, I will complete my Health Promotion Bachelor of Science Degree and French Minor by studying abroad through two consecutive programs offered by the departments of Health Promotion and World Languages. During these programs I will have the opportunity to study global health systems and cultural differences first hand. These opportunities are a vital component to appreciating the differences of global health systems and how they work in adverse or conjunction. A long term professional goal of mine, while working in the field of health promotion, is to raise awareness of health disparities and tackle global health challenges through education, promotion, and epidemiological research. I am passionate about finding a resolution to the health disparities and unequal access to healthcare and resources domestically and globally. Health education needs to be more prevalent and widely emphasized throughout all areas, and unfortunately the little health education we do receive is mainly directed towards well-funded school districts, worksites, and large health care

systems. Thus communities without these developed institutions do not have access to the same education and their health statuses reflect this.

I have personally witnessed the vast differences in health education and resources within my community. Although I have lived in a suburb of Saint Louis, Missouri, with access to some of the best healthcare and health education in the nation, I also witnessed the disparity of the urban community as well as rural Missouri. The stark contrast in the health education I was provided, compared to the people I met from urban underfunded districts and rural understaffed districts, is something that has stuck with me ever since my first volunteering experiences through my church youth group. I took for granted the health literacy I was provided and realized the importance of health education in underserved communities. The rate of obesity, unplanned pregnancies, substance dependency, risky behaviors and chronic diseases made such an impression on me, I decided to turn my mission into a profession. Many issues of health inequity can be solved by implementing health education in all socioeconomic classes, races and geographic regions. The health educators have been tasked with implementing programs to educate on a small scale of individual communities, however a bigger impact could be made with consistent and cooperative education globally.

These experiences have allowed me to take my education beyond the classroom and promote health in a real-world setting. After earning my Bachelor of Science in Health Promotion, I plan to pursue a Masters of Science in Health Promotion/Public Health concentrating on Epidemiology. This additional education will enable me to achieve my long term career goals and advocate for health education in disadvantaged, underserved communities. Receiving this scholarship would support and enable me to complete my study abroad education and continue to pursue a masters degree within the field. Both of these endeavors will deepen my understanding and experience in Health Education, however without this scholarship, I could not financially afford to do them. Health education goes beyond putting a temporary bandage on the problem; it provides beneficial lifelong solutions to health issues worldwide. I believe the core mission of health promotion is to teach others how to help

themselves so that they can live a better quality of life. As the famous proverb wisely says, “give a man a fish you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish you feed him for a lifetime”. I feel this parable encompasses the essence of health promotion and health education and depicts why the field is so intriguing to me. My passion for health promotion and education began at a very young age and has since blossomed into a part of who I am and what I want to achieve personally and professionally. Receiving this scholarship will be like finding the missing piece to a puzzle that completes my educational picture.