

October 31, 2021

Scholarship Selection Committee  
Foundation for the Advancement of Health Education

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing to highly recommend Mx. Niles Zoschke (pronouns they/them/theirs) for the Dr. Delbert Oberteuffer Graduate Student Scholarship. I met Niles when they joined our research team UTHealth as a graduate research assistant student. Niles and I are both trained anthropologists and we connected on our shared enthusiasm for qualitative research methods. Niles was exactly the right person for working with me on the ethnography in the substance use recovery homes involved in our research.

When we tasked Niles with conducting this sensitive research, they immediately performed with high standards. Niles quickly established trust with our research participants and began collecting critical qualitative data which will help inform the field of substance use recovery. It is clear to me that Niles' many skills and varied training rolls up to the application of professional, sensitive, and competent approaches to important public health work.

Niles was also a teacher's assistant on a course I created entitled "Introduction to Qualitative Research." This was Niles' first official teaching responsibility, even though they have performed health education in many contexts before. My colleague and Niles' supervisor, Dr. Paula Cuccaro, glowed about Niles' professionalism, subject-matter knowledge, careful instruction, and promptness with grading. Now I teach Niles in a more advanced qualitative course. Niles leadership in the class, insights into the readings, and supportive constructive criticism in class discussions is helping teach their classmates the material informally and formally. For example, they stepped up and offered to cover a class when I had a conflict. They instructed their classmates on using computer assisted software for qualitative analysis, a highly technical skill. Their insights into how to use ATLAS.ti were accompanied by explanations of the different ways to use it in public health settings and for course preparation. I have never had a student with this level qualitative knowledge and skillset. Their presence in the class has elevated our discussions to a very high level. In addition, despite their workload, Niles always comes to meetings prepared with evidence of new progress on my research project. They deserve the Dr. Delbert Oberteuffer Graduate Student Scholarship to help them pay tuition for their degree.

Niles' career spans multiple areas and several years. Niles' scholastic foundation is rooted in cultural anthropology and they were awarded as the William Cremin Award for Archaeology. Niles

subsequently worked in public archaeology in a number of contexts, conducting field science and educating the public about findings. They also were awarded the Presidential Scholar Award. As they became interested in applied anthropology, they pursued a Masters of Public Health at St. Louis University. After graduating, Niles applied qualitative research methods in multiple professional settings. They facilitated a university-wide interest group on the methodology, and conducted literary analysis on smoking cessation research for three years. During this time, they performed key-informant interviews with dozens of tobacco control professionals across the country and published the results in five major publications for CDC.

Niles then went on to work for the HIV Prevention Team at the City of St. Louis Department of Health. They applied their cultural anthropology skills to develop and implement an HIV prevention intervention tailored for LGBT youth. Throughout this work, they provided culturally-humble, relevant, and resonant health education to LGBT youth who were largely people of color and at risk for becoming unhoused. During this time, they also partnered with a local health HIV prevention group to conduct a photovoice project focused on telling the stories of Black St. Louisans living with HIV. Photovoice is an advanced qualitative research technique where photographic images are blended with narratives to contextualize a public health problem. Because of Niles' artistic abilities, health education skills, and community activism, these images were selected for display at the Griot Museum of Black History.

The Dr. Delbert Oberteuffer Graduate Student Scholarship will help Niles earn their degree by assisting with tuition. Financial assistance is critical for Niles currently because the COVID-19 pandemic has prevented them from working on the side as a professional photographer. This scholarship will provide Niles the financial support necessary to continue our work and eventually become a published ethnographer among our team. Niles is talented, capable, personable, dedicated, and accountable to their community. Please consider my recommendation on for awarding Niles with the Dr. Delbert Oberteuffer Graduate Student Scholarship.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at the email or phone number below.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Shery McCurdy', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Shery McCurdy, PhD  
Professor