

Dr. Becky J. Smith Scholarship Essay

While most may begin to imagine their ideal career path during the years they spend on a university campus, or even after entering the workforce, the passion I have for health education began long before I began my four years at The University of Alabama. Although small in numbers, the student population of my high school benefitted from a diverse student population, which allowed me to glean insight from those whose lived experiences differed greatly from my own. One such opportunity came in the form of a close friend of mine. She had been born without the ability to hear—as a result undergoing cochlear implant surgery in her infancy. Nevertheless, she persevered, and I had the opportunity to aid in her advocacy efforts on behalf of those with cochlear implants when I spoke before the Alabama House of Representatives on behalf of she and her family, providing some modicum of insight into her experiences and the experiences of her doctors. Experiences like this were what acted as catalysts for the passion I would soon have for health education—ones that would allow me to learn from the experiences of others, and in turn, educate those who may not have had the opportunity to hear such experiences firsthand. As I matriculated into a university student, I began to grasp an idea of my own passions and interests were through various opportunities that I have had at The University of Alabama. First and perhaps foremost, I was nominated by the Health Education and Promotion Department Chair to partake in the University's Crenshaw Leadership Academy, where I learned from professors and professionals in the field and had the opportunity to present my findings on professionalism and its intersectionality with cultural competence in Health Education and Promotion before a committee of students, faculty, staff, and administration of the College of Human Environmental Sciences and at the University's Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity conference. Furthermore, I have led research regarding mental health in

Alabama for the Blackburn Institute, and presented said research before students, staff, and Advisory Board members, as well as incorporated my passion for health education and promotion into other organizations where I lead, such as helping to coordinate a meal swipe drive on campus in partnership with the student food pantry and the Student Government Association, acting as a fundraiser for the University of Alabama's Dance Marathon's partnership with Children's Miracle Network hospitals, and as a member of Hands In Health—a health education student organization. Each of these experiences have furthered my desire for future education and have broadened my idea of what health education and promotion means in people-focused practice.

As I close out my four years at The University of Alabama, it has become increasingly important for me to decide what I desire to do in the future, both as a career path and as an individual with a background in health education and promotion. In the fall of 2023, I hope to attend law school, and complete a dual program where I will attain a Juris Doctorate as well as a Master of Public Health. As a result, I have spent much of my winter break studying for the LSAT in the hope that the dedication I have now will aid in the achievement of my future professional goals in health law, policy, or administration. Furthermore, I also hope to gain my Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) certification after I graduate. Although it seems as though I may be chasing degrees for the sake of having more letters behind my name, I know that I am going into each environment that I hope to enter with purpose and drive for gaining as wide a breadth of knowledge as I can to benefit both myself and the populations that I work with in the future.

The only inhibiting factor in all of this is nearly everyone's inhibiting factor—money. Although some refer to envy as the green-eyed monster, I would deign to assert that money may

be the true green-eyed monster, and one that I hope plays as little a factor as possible through my application for various scholarship opportunities. Being a triplet, I deeply understand the necessity for intelligent financial decision-making, and do not seek any of the opportunities I have without a clear financial plan in action. Although I am still a student, I know my “life” has started, and the debt that I am saddled with now will be something that I carry with me for years after I leave a classroom for the last time. I know that the path I will be going down will be a financially strenuous one, but I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to apply for scholarship opportunities like the Becky J. Smith Scholarship in the hopes that I can continue my education and move into a professional environment afterwards with as much knowledge and clarity as I can possess to improve the lives of as many people as possible.