

My name is Kathryn (Katie) Hintz and I am a senior at Western Michigan University studying Public Health, with an emphasis on Public Health Education. Studying public health has changed me; how I view the world, how I view health issues, and how I know that we can change health outcomes by looking upstream. Education has always been something I've valued, so much so that I studied Elementary Education for the first 2 years of college. Something just didn't feel right and I knew there was a field out there that would better suit my love of social justice and advocacy, healthcare and wellness, and education. I stumbled upon Western Michigan University's public health program and knew it was the perfect fit for me. Public health emphasizes everything I learned about education, but incorporates the empowerment of educating people and communities on their health and how to build self-efficacy in populations. Over the course of my studies, I have been fortunate enough to be a part of some life-changing experiences.

Last May, I went on a study abroad trip with my program to South Africa where we examined the intersection between traditional/tribal health care and modern medicine as it pertains to a multitude of diseases, but specifically HIV/AIDS. I learned so many impactful lessons through the people that I met, the lectures we attended, the community organizations we visited, and the discussions we had with South African students our age. This experience was foundational in my personal growth and my professional development, because it lit a fire in my soul for global health and how cultural differences effect the health of populations. It also pointed me in the direction of maternal/infant health. I saw HIV/AIDS running rampant among young children there because their mothers did not take their medication either at all or correctly and therefore, they passed it onto their child in birth or breastfeeding. This trend was devastating to see, but it also furthered my deep

passion for health education, because they knew there was treatment, but didn't know how effective it was, couldn't access it, or didn't value or trust their healthcare system. Health education can take that situation and empower them through knowledge, which will help them make healthier decisions for themselves and their children; not just because they have to, but because they understand why.

This October, I attended the SOPHE Advocacy Summit, which gave me such useful information on the intersection between voting access and the health of communities. The key note speakers had such valuable experiences to share along with data and action steps that we could implement to be the change in our own communities. Advocacy and social justice have always been areas of interest for me, so it was amazing to see the research reinforce what we have always known; if people are unable to voice their health needs, the health of that community will stay stagnant or seriously decline. I am so grateful for the experience that I gained at this conference by developing pitches that we took to the offices of our Congresspeople and Senators. It was an incredibly empowering feeling to walk into their offices and be able to advocate for communities that have historically been ignored and underserved. I imagine this is what it feels like to be empowered with knowledge about your own body and be in control of the decisions you make regarding your health. Furthermore, I am a member of National SOPHE and my local Great Lakes chapter, because I believe that engagement in many public health organizations comes with greater connections, experiences, and growth in our field. It has been beneficial to stay informed on the current efforts of our health education field and how I can be a part of the change that is happening nationally and locally.

I am in the process of writing a Senior Capstone that is an undergraduate version of a systematic review on Black maternal mortality in the United States.

Recent statistics show a significantly higher rate of maternal mortality in Black women in the United States in comparison to White women. This is a substantial public health inequity and change needs to be made, which is why Black maternal mortality is the issue that I chose to focus my research on in my Senior Capstone. I believe that through research, health education, and advocacy, change can be made in Black maternal health outcomes as well as in the health of populations.

In addition to my studies, I am also the President of Eta Sigma Gamma-Gamma Mu, which is our local chapter of Eta Sigma Gamma, a national health education honorary. I am fortunate enough to lead this bright and fierce group of public health educators and I have learned so much about the field through them and our amazing faculty advisors. Our organization focuses on research, education, service, and advocacy, which are all core values of the health education field. Leading this group has refined my leadership skills, organizational skills, and has given me remarkable experience in the field of public health. We plan and implement programs, tabling events, educational materials, and are a part of community outreach. This semester, I have been working towards establishing and forming a coalition that would partner with other interdisciplinary programs in our College of Health and Human Services to give us a well-rounded view of the health of our campus. I envision this coalition developing further throughout my time as an undergraduate student and over the years to cultivate a healthier campus at Western Michigan University.

I am also a paid public health intern at Kalamazoo County Health and Community Services, which is my local health department. I anticipate further enhancing my skills and knowledge to take with me into my professional career in the future as a health educator. The internship is a well-rounded position that floats me around to different departments, such as epidemiology, Women Infant Children

(WIC), Veterans' Association, food safety, and many more. This is all experience that will make me a better professional and create more of a passion to reach for my career goals.

My goals, though they are professional, have personal motivations as I have sisters who all have children. Being empowered and knowledgeable about your pregnancy, birth, warning signs to look for, and post-partum healing is incredibly important and impactful. Along with other factors, health education makes a huge difference in if they feel scared and unprepared or equipped and brave during this sizeable health event. I want to make that difference by working with organizations that reach women, specifically in marginalized communities, and educating them on their bodies, the experiences they may face, and building self-efficacy in women/birthing people so they feel confident in making informed and healthy choices for themselves and their babies. I would love to work as a health educator for a couple years, either in the United States or abroad in a different country. I would be more than willing and excited to move abroad to a country with poor maternal and infant health outcomes to work with the communities there and build health literacy.

I believe that working in the field can help me gain skills that will better my graduate school experience, but I do hope to save and soon pursue a Master's degree in Public Health (MPH). This money would go towards my current student loan debt, so that I can pursue my MPH at a sooner time. This scholarship money would move up my graduate school timeline significantly and allow me to further my education sooner. After graduate school, I dream of one day planting a local clinic/resource center for women and birthing people with a staff of health educators, a lactation specialist, social workers/counselors, and doulas and nurses to create a safe and healing space for women to seek care and education that

makes them feel strong and empowered in their pregnancy, birth, and post-partum experience. I believe that with my strong leadership and community building skills partnered with an MPH, I can reach women in my local communities and around the world and impact health outcomes. I would love to someday become a professor and be a part of training the next generation of health educators that will change the world. I would be sincerely grateful and believe that this money can make a notable difference in reaching my future goals and aspirations.

Thank you for your kind and thoughtful consideration.

*Kathryn Hintz*