

November 14, 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

**Ref. Letter of recommendation for Mr. Sidath Kapukotuwa for The Dr. Delbert Oberteuffer Scholarship**

I have great pleasure in writing this **strong letter of recommendation** for my advisee, Sidath Kapukotuwa, MS, for the **Dr. Delbert Oberteuffer Scholarship** offered through the *Foundation of the Advancement of Health Education*. It is a distinct honor for me to write this letter as Dr. Oberteuffer holds a special place in my heart because I took classes in the Department at *The Ohio State University* where he left his legacy.

I have known Sidath for the **past two years** and he has impressed me with his **ability to set goals, fervently pursue those, apply diligent efforts, and be successful in many of his endeavors**. He is the type of student that we dream of having in our classes – **respectful, thorough, hard-working, critical thinker, and able to go the extra mile**. Before I describe his attributes in detail to you let me briefly tell you about myself and the yardstick that I am using to nominate Sidath. I have been a public health physician and health educator for the past 35 years of which 25 years have been spent in academia. In the process, I have taught more than 6,000 students and have served on over 100 doctoral committees. I have published more than 850 publications (385+ peer-reviewed journal articles) including 15 books thus far in my career. I am ranked in the top one percentile of global scientists from 176 subfields by Elsevier. Based on this background, I would rate Sidath among the **top 1%** of graduate students that I have had the honor of working with across 13 universities and 5 continents.

**a. Academic achievement**

Sidath is an international scholar from Sri Lanka working toward his Ph.D. in Public Health (Social and Behavioral Health) at the *University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV)*. He has **assimilated** and demonstrated the positive aspects of the cultures of both the United States and his native country in a very short time. His grades are exemplary. His cumulative GPA (Masters and Doctoral) is 3.853 with a Ph.D. in Public Health (Social and Behavioral Health) **GPA of 3.925/4.000**. He has completed a total of **36 credits** in his **Ph.D. Public Health (Social and Behavioral Health) program**. In his very first semester in our program, he took the initiative to **write two grants**: “Explaining the correlates of problem gambling behavior based on the multi-theory model (MTM) of health behavior change among college students: A cross-sectional study” and “A phenomenological qualitative study based on the multi-theory model (MTM) of health behavior change to identify factors and ways to design interventions for quitting gambling among older adults.” Both were funded by the Nevada Council on Problem Gambling and UNLV International Gaming Institute for **\$9,000 each**. He has successfully presented the results of the research from these grants at state and national conferences after peer review. Manuscript from one of these he has already published as first author in **Healthcare (Impact factor 2.8)** and the other one is being submitted. He is assiduously working on several other research projects that extend beyond the classroom such as **(1)** a study on theory-based correlates of breastfeeding among pregnant women (manuscript under review), **(2)** a study on the antecedents of outside-of-home eating behavior (manuscript under review), **(3)** a commentary on the multi-theory model of health behavior change (under review); **(4)** a systematic review of applications of the multi-theory model of health behavior change (in preparation), **(5)** a systematic review of yoga interventions for osteoarthritis (presented at the *American Public Health Association* Annual meeting this week; manuscript under preparation), **(6)** a comprehensive review of factors influencing

gambling behaviors among university students (in preparation). He is also planning to submit an extramural grant proposal to get his dissertation funded next year on which he is working meticulously.

**b. Potential for advancing the health of children and youth**

One of the fortes of Sidath's research and service is his **exemplary work with youth**. As mentioned above, he has worked in exploring factors of problem gambling among youth which is a major public health issue in our city of Las Vegas and in the nation. He is planning intervention research in this area. He is also planning several studies among **high school children** to develop healthy behaviors and lifestyles. These studies are in various stages of preparation. Sidath has been working as a Graduate Assistant for the **Office of Academic Assessment**, Office of the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, UNLV for over four years and this has been an invaluable experience for him.

Besides academics, Sidath is actively engaged in **leadership pursuits for youth**. He has served as the Student Body Vice President and Acting President (for a short time) of the Graduate & Professional Students Association (GPSA) at the *University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV)* for a period of two years. In the process, he has led several committees of this important body at our institution. He has also served as a Treasurer and Council Member of this body in the past. Sidath has strong leadership skills. His style is one of leading by example. He sets very high standards for himself, serves as a role model for others, and believes in getting things done. He has a bright career ahead of him and would be an asset to the field of public health.


**c. Professional goals in health education and promotion**

Sidath has immersed himself in pursuit of a career in health education and health promotion through his research and service in this field. He wants to pursue a **career in teaching and research** in health education and health promotion. He is already making good progress in this direction, and I have no doubts that he will excel in this line of work. He has excellent **verbal and written communication skills** that will help him in his teaching career. He is **systematic, devoted, effective, efficient, and brilliant**, which will serve him well in research.

To sum up, Sidath is quite deserving of this scholarship, and I would request the esteemed committee to consider him for this distinguished honor. He has my **unconditional** and **enthusiastic** support. If there are any questions about him, please feel free to reach out to me at manoj.sharma@unlv.edu (email) or 702-895-2687 (phone). Thank you for reviewing this letter.

Kindest regards and love to all.

Sincerely,



Manoj Sharma, MBBS, Ph.D., MCHES®  
Professor & Chair, Department of Social & Behavioral Health  
Adjunct Professor, Department of Internal Medicine

UNLV School of Public Health  
Department of Social and Behavioral Health  
Box 453063 • 4700 S. Maryland Parkway, Suite #335 • Las Vegas, NV 89119  
Tel: 702-895-5090 • Fax: 702-895-5184  
unlv.edu/publichealth