

Global Scholar Grant – Summary of Experiences

Growing up in Scripps Poway Parkway allowed me to discover my passions in an environment that fostered curiosity and drive. While attending Del Norte High School, I was active in student government, was a leader through a student ambassador program and coordinated the Interact Club. These three combined experiences began my journey of meaningful engagement. It helped me develop organizational and management skills, take on the responsibility of being a role-model and begin to learn and appreciate the impact of thoughtful community service. I could not have imagined that these initial high school experiences would give me the tools and interests to pursue a career in global health. I chose to go to Syracuse University to gain a new set of experiences in a new context and it did not disappoint. Throughout my undergraduate degree, I had formative experiences that pushed me to think critically about health and learn how to analyze health from a social justice lens. Besides my public health courses and research, two experiences stand out: Mentoring refugee youth and working in Kenya (twice).

While attending Syracuse University, I mentored and later led a mentoring program that worked to improve the academic and personal success of refugee youth. When leading the program, one of my main efforts was to increase our outreach to the community and expand the program. We were able to increase the number of youths we worked with and the number of mentors working with the youth. Additionally, the retention of mentors was very high and added to the sustainability of the program. Throughout my four years with the program, I formed genuine and meaningful relationships with the youth which allowed me to better understand the social factors that influence health. Given that most of the youth are Somalian and therefore East African, I was excited to study abroad in Nairobi, Kenya to learn more about East Africa.

The first time I went to Kenya, I took public health classes at the University of Nairobi and worked for a local non-profit organization that focused on improving access to health and education. Living and working in Nairobi for five months allowed me to gain a better understanding of East African culture, learn Swahili to better connect with my friends and co-workers and become more familiar with the broad health challenges facing Kenya. I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Kenya and was able to return the following summer to work at a research site in rural Kenya. My previous experiences in Kenya allowed me to adapt quickly to the new environment. I managed the mortality database, supported the data manager with survey creation and did quality control on the data. I worked with the team to identify a meaningful research project that could be useful and help build capacity. This resulted in me developing several wealth indices that can be used for future measurements of wealth. It also resulted in a manuscript which is submitted for publication, in hopes that more funding can be brought to the research site. Additionally, I encouraged the collaboration of my university which has resulted in additional students and researchers supporting the research site. Both of my experiences developed my passion for global health and working in community-based settings. I learned a lot about Kenyan culture, the Kenyan health system and the strengths and weaknesses of access to healthcare in Kenya. It also gave me the opportunity to reflect on how to be impactful in other environments and drive change in a culturally competent manner. As a result, I am now determined to work for global health organizations that address the social determinants of health in low- and middle-income countries.

I feel fortunate to have had these experiences as an undergraduate student because I have solidified my interests in global health generally, and specifically with evaluating and implementing public health programs that seek to address the social determinants of health. I am thrilled to begin my studies in a Master of Science of Demography and Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). LSHTM is a highly specialized international school, affiliated with the University of London, that focuses solely on global health and developing solutions to address vulnerable populations. The program will allow me to further learn how to prevent and treat diseases in the context of public health systems, develop better analytical skills to evaluate health research and learn effective implementation strategies for public health programs in low and middle income countries. I believe that this degree will better equip me with the necessary skills to work thoughtfully and sustainably on health problems in Kenya and more generally in East Africa.