

Personal Statement – Masters in Experimental Psychology

My interest in pursuing graduate study within the field of psychology has been influenced by a variety of factors inclusive of both academic and non-academic experiences. My initial interest in psychology started prior to my undergraduate admittance to XXXXXX, when I had the opportunity to work with students attending an outdoor summer camp in the Washington area. Employed in a counselor position, I had the opportunity to work with both high school and middle school students and develop skills in mentorship, conflict resolution, team building, and programming. The end of the summer brought on new challenges as I was asked to continue on staff for the last session which was entitled, “grief camp.” Designed specifically for students who had recently experienced the loss of one or more parents, grief camp was a highly tumultuous and challenging week. As I listened to one student who had been forced to leave school settings, siblings, and familiar relationships due to the death of one parent and the subsequent suicide of the other, I realized two things; that I was unequipped to deal with such a situation without formal training, and I needed to pursue an academic area that allowed me to work with students. That fall, my first quarter at XXXXXX, I enrolled in Psychology 101.

That summer not only sparked my initial academic interest in psychology, but subsequently influenced my decision to take a variety of courses dealing with abnormal psychology, a course in counseling psychology, and adolescent development. I have continued to work with youth in a mentorship role through a local youth ministry where I have had the opportunity to work with both middle and high school students, and have dealt with a variety of situations inclusive of relational, familial, and parental conflict.

My experience working in a head start preschool classroom has additionally influenced my interest in clinical psychology in relation to pediatric populations. Working as a supporting teacher within the program, I was able to implement curriculum program standards and carry out individualized educational plans for specified students. In addition, I was able to meet with parents and discuss their child’s academic and behavioral progress within the program.

In the winter of XXXXX, my interest in clinical psychology was further developed as I pursued an opportunity to work on Dr. XXXXXXXXXXXX’s study on marital conflict. My responsibilities as a research assistant consisted of the initial research and investigation of study measures utilized in participant assessment packets, assisted with the development of community connections used in the recruitment of participants, assisted with the preparation of IRB documents, the creation and updating of consent forms, data collection and entry, and the supervision of families coming into the research lab. In addition, I served as one of two marital observation coders on the project and assisted in the conceptualization and development of a behavioral coding system utilized to code marital observations, and coded couple behaviors according to the manual. In October of XXXXXX, I presented preliminary project data regarding the effects of mental and physical distress on parental functioning at the annual meeting of the Washington State Psychological Association in Tacoma. Prior to the Washington State Psychological Association Conference, in June of XXXXX, a poster was presented on findings from a XXXXXX project regarding the effects of stigmatized mental illness on employee desirability at the annual XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.

My current research interests lie in the area of clinical psychology, and although specifically pertain to the effects of stress on physical and mental health, are additionally inclusive of adult/child psychopathology, behavioral/attachment disorders in children, health psychology, and developmental psychopathology. The effects of physical and mental distress on parental functioning and its role in child/adolescent maladjustment are of specific interest. Is a combination of physical and mental distress the strongest predictor of parental difficulty, or is having physical and or mental distress alone enough to cause severe parental impairment? In addition, of the two, which is the greatest predictor of parental difficulty, and subsequent child maladjustment? To what degree is positive environment able to mediate child behavior and attachment disorders? These are among some of the topics that I would be interested in pursuing within XXXXX's graduate program. The faculty with whom I would be interested in working with includes Dr. XXXXXXXX and/or Dr. XXXXXXXX.

The Master of Science curriculum in Experimental Psychology at XXXXXXXXXXXX will enable me to complete the necessary graduate training in order to pursue a doctoral program in Clinical Psychology. Specifically, XXXXXXXX's graduate level statistics courses, mentored research requirements, and additional breadth classes in combination with institutional and academic prestige are among the reasons why I consider it to be of great benefit to continue graduate study at XXXXXXXX. Upon completion of the doctoral degree, my current interests lie in working with pediatric and adolescent populations within the field of behavioral medicine. I am additionally interested in continuing to research aspects of health psychology within the clinical field, potentially with a research firm, or within a university setting.