

## Personal Statement

RM UMID: 83171854 School of Kinesiology

***NOTE: locations and names have been edited to preserve privacy.***

As a child I struggled with my weight and self-image. My mom packed lunches with fruit and vegetables while other kids noshed down McDonald's. I remained overweight while they seemed to be skinny. I was ridiculed by my peers based on appearance and this negatively impacted my self-esteem. In the 4<sup>th</sup> grade I was convinced that because I was chubby, I couldn't play sports. In middle school, a friend talked me into joining the cross-country team. Though I ran slowly, I started losing weight. I continued running several miles each week; my weight was in normal range my freshman year in high school. I engaged in a very active lifestyle, running 4 miles several times a week, playing clarinet in marching band, and starting for the volleyball team. I enjoyed every minute.

I studied Chemical Engineering at "University X" with the mindset that life would be fulfilling if I had a job that paid well. I applied myself fully and strove for excellence, but eventually I felt empty. I began attending group fitness classes and discovered others with similar interests. I loved the atmosphere and it motivated me to keep me coming back. I ran with classmates and worked with friends and family who wanted to start some kind of exercise regimen.

After graduating from "University X" in May 2010, I started full-time work in August for an Oil Corporation (based out of AR). My commitment to an active lifestyle and to helping others develop an active lifestyle continued to operate in me despite long, grueling hours at the refineries. I worked towards a Personal Training Certification through the American Fitness and Aerobics Association (AFAA); finding it a great outlet that helped expand my knowledge of how I could help people make lifestyle changes while I completed my engineering work. It became more and more apparent that my engineering career did not match my interests or my person. Despite earning a great salary with benefits, I often found myself pre-occupied with the health of my co-workers. It bothered me that they were not health conscious and as a result struggled with a poor quality of life. At one point, 30 people whom I worked with were being medicated for hypertension or dyslipidemia. In January, I was transferred to a new ethanol plant in Texas as part of the commissioning staff. I again observed the same scenario among coworkers and those whom I supervised. The majority of people were overweight/obese, had poor dietary and exercise habits, took very frequent smoke breaks and/or chewed tobacco, and were heavily medicated for largely preventable chronic conditions. Many looked older than they were and often talked about how they felt older. The fact that they were not taking very good care of themselves began to affect me personally, especially since many of these co-workers were becoming my friends. Motivated by what I heard and observed, I began encouraging co-workers to walk laps around the plant with me when they were 't doing rounds. Many were happy to walk with me because I was positive about what they could do, versus focusing on the things they were not doing or needed to change. I also started to bring extra vegetables like carrots and celery in my lunch to pass around to anyone that wanted some. I was pleased to help those around me make healthier decisions and realized that perhaps I needed to "fix people," not machines. The more I considered, the more I felt that helping people with their health and well-being better fit my caring and motivational personality rather than sitting behind a computer or a set of hand tools.

My fiancée (now husband) was a Public Health student at "University Z" and suggested that I consider Public Health because the field is all about improving the quality of life and well-being of people. I made the decision to change my career, motivated by the experience of helping my co-workers walk and eat healthier. I was particularly interested in helping those who struggle with their weight from a child to adulthood. I applied to the Dietetics program at "University Z" and was admitted; I resigned from engineering in July of 2011 and completed my AFAA Certification in August. Shortly after starting at "University Z" in September of 2011, I was hired as a trainer at the YMCA which has deepened my

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desire to become a more qualified exercise professional as well as a dietitian. I want to help people realize their potential since I know what it feels like to be on the other side. I want to make good health attainable to everyone and I feel that receiving the Masters of Science in Kinesiology from "University Z" will help me accomplish this goal.