

For the last seven years I have worked in the field of education in various capacities, always with a focus on helping students from disadvantaged families. Due to my own background as an independent student who had a good experience in the California foster care system, I know that supportive services can be beneficial. This motivates me to want to address educational and economic inequities, and my current research with AmeriCorps is focused on helping students from low-income communities find solutions for better college access. I would like to continue my research in this area with the goal of contributing to educational policy.

My teaching and advocacy work began during my undergraduate years when I assisted Anthropology professor, Dr. Sara Johnson, and helped jump-start the U-Acre research program that focused on urban gardening in local community facilities. With training provided by a professional biologist in the school's arboretum, I learned to teach junior high school students how to develop a sustainable form of sustenance to reduce food insecurity through a school garden I helped construct. During this time, I also participated as an AB540 advocate with members from the Alliance of Students for an Equal Education. This experience inspired me to write and present to my class a policy brief called The Dreamers Essay, an informative discussion of the impact of education and legislation pertaining to the undocumented immigrant student population.

Nearing graduation, I decided to stay in school for a fifth year, a decision that allowed me to continue my collegiate career as a track and field athlete and to explore educational interests not directly related to my major. This was a turning point in my educational and work life as learning to juggle athletic training, school, work, and difficult family issues really taught me what it means to be disciplined and focused. I enrolled as a full-time student and worked part-time as a writing tutor at the Reading and Writing Center at Riverside Community College in Riverside, California and as a program leader for a non-profit after school enrichment program called Think Together in Ontario, California. While working in these two positions, I learned skills in one-on-one facilitation and classroom management which enabled me to better help many struggling students.

Post graduation, I wanted to improve my Spanish language skills so I moved to Spain to work as an English Language Assistant for the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport. I was placed in a small, poor rural town called Calahorra in the region of La Rioja. I worked at two primary schools, taught private lessons and arranged an informal Spanish lesson each day with native speakers to ensure my improvement. This work led to my current position as the AmeriCorps VISTA College and Career Center Coordinator at New Vision Academy in San Bernardino, California, where I am currently creating a mentorship program specifically aimed to provide foster youth and undocumented immigrant students with better access to college.

My research interest in educational policy emerges out of my work in education and I'm particularly interested in research with students from disadvantaged backgrounds where parental mental health issues are involved. Growing up in foster care, I knew many young people whose educational success was affected by their parents' mental illness and I am interested in exploring policy solutions. I believe my research would fit well with other

work being done in the UCI public policy program by Dr. Thurston Domina and Dr. Maria G. Rendon. I am interested in Dr. Domina's work focusing on student transitions from middle and high school into higher education. Also, Dr. Rendon's research in sociology of education and social policy examines issues similar to my own concern. I believe working with these professors would be helpful and I would benefit greatly from their mentoring.

My motivation to return to graduate school is prompted by the students I see struggling everyday. As a former ward of the court, I am fully aware of the consequences of inadequate support and I want to ensure that all students' academic needs are met. I believe earning a degree in public policy at UCI will allow me to gain valuable training in research, develop my leadership skills, and improve my understanding of policy in order to make significant contributions to remedy these pressing social issues.