American University

School of Public Affairs Director

Washington, D.C.

20016

Attn: Graduate Selection Committee

When I was a sophomore in high school, I was diagnosed with a pineal gland brain tumor. This tumor pressed on nerves behind my eyes, causing me to have permanent diplopia or double vision. After diagnosis, I underwent brain surgery, several months of chemotherapy, radiation treatments, and countless MRI’s and doctor appointments during which I was only able to continue my high school classes through homebound instruction. These months were by far the most difficult time of my life as all of my routines and norms were suddenly turned on their heads and I had to adapt to living with the side effects of not only the cancer but also the treatments. While I eventually overcame my cancer and was declared “cured” five years later, I did not come through the situation unchanged. One important lesson I learned was that problems are not often as large or frightening as they may seem, especially in the face of a life-threatening illness. A second lesson I learned is that success comes only through hard work and dedication. Whereas before my cancer diagnosis I was able to coast through school relatively easily by relying on my intelligence, my continued diplopia has made reading, writing, and studying much more exhausting as I have to exert more energy to focus my eyes. However, by applying myself and learning how to learn and study more efficiently, I have been able to maintain my high grades and academic performance through my college years.

I am applying to your graduate program in the Department of Public Administration and Policy. The main reason why I am applying to American University is its commitment to experiential learning, particularly through research experiences. This commitment fits perfectly with my long-term career goals as I am ultimately pursuing a career in either the state or federal bureaucracy. Having access to nearby internship opportunities as well as having the ability to uncover causes of policy and administrative problems and their potential solutions through research will contribute directly to my career goals. American University’s interdisciplinary approach to learning is one I am familiar with, and I believe it would make me better suited to deal with difficult problems, questions, and challenges in the future by providing me with opportunities to challenge myself and grow into a more competent and skillful individual. I believe I am an excellent candidate for the high-caliber Public Administration and Policy program offered by American University due to both my personal life situations and my undergraduate education experience.

My diligent work ethic and dedication to learning manifested themselves in several ways throughout my undergraduate career at Bridgewater College. I have intentionally taken on extra challenges in order to push myself and further my learning both in and out of the classroom. First, I participated in the Flory Honors program at Bridgewater College for all four years of my undergraduate education. This program required me to take Honors-designated courses, participate in several honors book clubs, and complete a semester-long honors project. Second, I chose to construct an independent research project with the help of my professor, Dr. Bobbi Gentry, and then parlayed this experience into a summer research project funded by a summer research grant at Bridgewater College. Finally, I have participated in an extracurricular, year-long project called the Showker prize for three out of four years at Bridgewater. The Showker Prize requires interdisciplinary teams of at least five people to identify a problem in society, create a solution for it, and then implement this solution throughout the course of the school year. My Showker projects allowed me to learn how to work effectively with a diverse team to accomplish a series of goals, leading to the creation of an impactful project. I was successful with these projects, winning the competition all three times.

These undergraduate experiences taught me many skills and lessons and allowed me to develop myself into a higher performing and achieving individual. Participation in the Flory Honors program showed me how exciting interacting with other high-performing students and professors can be as we constantly pushed each other to achieve our fullest potential. My independent research projects taught me practical skills, such as how to use IBM SPSS for statistical analysis, as well as personal life lessons, such as how to follow my educational curiosities, how to break down a complex project, and how to stick to a schedule. My experience in the Showker Prize competition taught me how to be both a leader and a follower, how to visualize and conquer a seemingly insurmountable project, and how to do complex, skill-based tasks such as designing advertisement campaigns and building websites.

Due to the experiences I have had, the lessons I have learned, and the skills I have gained in both my personal health challenges and my undergraduate education experience, I believe I am an excellent candidate for the American University Public Administration and Policy program. These things along with my dedication to completing a graduate program will cause me to meet all challenges I may experience in graduate school. I believe that my knowledge of political values, basic personal values, political ideology, party identification, and religion will contribute greatly to the research experience offered at American University.