

The personal statement should address the following issues (limit to 2-3 pages with no specific formatting): 1. What is your interest in public health, and how do you think you will use the Master of Public Health (MPH) degree in your future career? 2. What are your career goals? That is, what kind of work inspires you including the types of activities you hope to undertake in your career? 3. Tell us about your experiences (paid or unpaid) that form your thinking about nutrition as a career.

My interest in nutrition began at a young age, when instead of eating Oreos for my afternoon snack, I preferred to eat vegetables. However, nutrition as it relates to health first became significant to me when I was diagnosed with food allergies and began researching about how to maintain proper nutrition while meeting my dietary restrictions, as well as how to prepare nourishing meals for myself. It was around this time that I attended *BODIES, The Exhibition*, which sparked my interest in human physiology and the adverse effects that disease and poor nutrition can have on the body. From the exhibition, I learned that roughly half of all American adults have one or more preventable chronic diseases, of which several are related to poor diet, and a growing number experience at least one food allergy. Through these experiences, my early interest in nutrition quickly evolved into a commitment to help others learn about the value of healthful choices in our overall wellbeing and to contribute to the improvement of available community food options. The Master of Public Health program at the University of North Carolina with a concentration in Nutrition will prepare me to achieve my professional aspirations to improve community education and practices surrounding food, diet, and health through developing and improving health policies.

As a first year student at the University of Connecticut, I began working in my own community to support GROW Windham, a non-profit organization which focuses on promoting access to healthy food through community food projects, community gardens, and youth programs in public schools. After my realization that health conditions could be improved through proper nutrition, it was important to me to contribute to disseminating information about how to maintain proper nutrition. Throughout my time at the UConn, I facilitated several of the programs run by GROW Windham, including K-12 programming, the Summer Food Service program, and the Windham Community Food Network, which

deepened my desire to communicate with others about health and wellness. In GROW Windham's K-12 programming, students learned about nutrition and food justice, as well as practiced kitchen skills and prepared healthy snacks. Promoting healthy habits and views about nutrition to children in the community has made me passionate about developing more school-based programs to make this information more wide-spread. Furthermore, to increase participation in their Summer Food Service Program and encourage increased vegetable intake, I collaborated with AmeriCorps volunteers to hold food tastings incorporating locally grown vegetables at various program sites in the area for several years. This experience gave me the opportunity to learn about increasing public awareness of healthy food and diet and become a leader in my community.

I also became involved in the Windham Community Food Network, which is an alliance of individuals representing the community, farmers, business owners, and other partners who came together to promote access to healthy food and to identify and highlight community needs. The report we developed to identify and highlight the community's needs led me to realize my interest in nutrition and health legislation. This project brought to light the alarming percentage of individuals living in poverty and receiving food stamps, the rates of obesity and diabetes, and the percentage of the population with limited access to food and it shocked me to know that these issues were going unnoticed. For this reason, I now recognize the importance of contributing to the dissemination of information about community needs to state officials, as simply communicating the facts can lead to widespread change.

To expand upon my nutritional science coursework for my major, I pursued clinical experience working at Windham Hospital and was able to collaborate with their diabetes educator. We created a handbook including recommendations for overall healthful eating and portion sizes, tips for reading food labels, examples of serving sizes for each macronutrient, and carbohydrate counting that could be used by patients. This project afforded me the opportunity to enhance my knowledge of diabetes management through the perspective of an experienced dietician. Additionally, I served as a dietary aide at a long-

term inpatient care facility which increased my interest and skill in applying nutrition to assist individuals in managing their health conditions. I enjoyed working with the residents and building rapport while ensuring their meal choices were consistent with their prescribed diet as well as with nursing staff as I assisted them with patients' dietary concerns. These experiences increased my interest in working with a variety of populations to provide nutritional support and exposed me further to the extent to which diet can impact one's health.

Following my graduation from UConn, I worked with the SNAP-Ed organization, a program that teaches individuals about good nutrition, how to make food dollars stretch further, and about physical activity. Providing small groups with brief lessons on incorporating lean proteins, increasing whole grain intake, and promoting a heart-healthy diet to improve nutrition helped me to realize the extent to which I enjoy educating others about their health. I also worked with mothers, specifically, to provide them information regarding proper nutrition for their children and provide advice and guidance on how to foster healthy eating habits while keeping in mind any logistical and lifestyle restrictions. This work was particularly rewarding and helped me to recognize how much improved policies as well as evidence-based programs and communications are needed in nutrition.

Pursuing my graduate degree in Public Health will allow me to work on improving health policy and ensure that the needs of the community are communicated and provided for. As an advocate for and educator about diet and nutrition, I am confident that my work in this area can have a significant positive impact. The Master of Public Health program with a Nutrition Concentration at UNC fits well with my professional aspirations and will support me in contributing to the field of public health nutrition. The program's focus on developing professionals who contribute to the practice of public health, food and human nutrition science, and nutrition programs and public services will provide me with a robust background of education to support my work in the community. I look forward to discussing my interests and experiences further and expressing my desire to become a future leader in nutrition and dietetics on a local and global scale.