**Loyola University Chicago: Master’s Program in International Higher Education**

Provide a statement regarding your personal and professional interest and goals in international higher education. How will the program advance your professional goals? Please also discuss life experiences that have influenced your view of social justice. Your statement should be 500-1000 words.

Most mornings on my way to the glass studio I would stop at a pasticceria to pick up a pastry to eat in the piazza nearby. As I savored every bite, I would sit and people watch and ponder the day ahead. I was 18 years old and living alone in Siena, Italy while I participated in a five-week stained glass apprenticeship. Soon after I began this morning routine, I was approached in the piazza by a group of young people who wanted to know who I was and what brought me to Siena. They came from varied backgrounds such as Germany, Italy and Serbia. We quickly bonded and became friends, spending many hours at local cafes drinking espresso and reflecting on life. My travels offered me the opportunity to not only learn about other people and their countries of origin, but to also gain a new understanding of myself and my own cultural background. It was through my experience abroad that I learned to appreciate other cultures for what they are, rather than measuring them up against the standards of American culture.

I am interested in Loyola University Chicago’s graduate program in International Higher Education because I hope to aid future students as they embark on their own study abroad excursions. I am especially drawn to the course titled “Student Development in Higher Education” as well as the two-week trip to Rome that focuses on educating students abroad. I believe that traveling to a foreign country is particularly valuable for students’ personal development and intercultural understanding because it offers them the opportunity to view themselves and their heritage from an entirely new perspective. Studying abroad also gives students the ability to recognize and resist ethnocentric tendencies and to therefore be more accepting of diversity. Most of all, it prepares students to become global citizens. In today’s world, I find it is increasingly important for students to have this exposure during their college careers since countries and cultures are now more connected than ever before.

Yet many students, through no fault of their own, may have to limit their opportunities and their dreams due to their socioeconomic background. Two life experiences of mine have had a significant impact on my views toward social and economic justice. The first was through a five-day trip with my university where I traveled to Memphis and the Mississippi Delta to study the racial and musical legacy of the region. During this trip, I visited some of the poorest counties in the nation and became exposed to the vast inequalities that still exist in this country, particularly along lines of race. As I traced the origins of blues music in the south, it struck me as ironic that this music genre has found its way all over the world, but today countless children who come from that tradition have never had the chance to travel beyond the U.S. or even outside the state in which they live. The trip opened my eyes to the fact that racism does not just exist on an interpersonal level, but on an institutional level as well.

My understanding of racial and economic inequality was further shaped by my experience volunteering as a tutor for Cluster Tutoring in Chicago. For two years I worked one-on-one with a high school student from Chicago’s Austin neighborhood, helping her with homework and college planning. From my time at Cluster, I learned that I did not have to travel to the south to witness racial and educational inequity; in fact, I did not need to travel farther than 15 minutes away from where I grew up. When I met Stephanie, she was a freshman in high school but she was reading at sixth-grade level. Within two years, I helped her improve her literacy skills to the point that she was almost reading at her proper grade level. Stephanie was a diligent student with a positive attitude, but the school system she was enrolled in was virtually setting her up for failure. The homework and projects that her teachers assigned were not helping her to build the skills that she would need in college, such as strong writing, analytical thinking and oral communication. When I asked Stephanie to elaborate after she said that her classes were boring, she told me that most of her teachers just lectured the whole class period without engaging the students and leaving little time for questions and clarification at the end.

Both my experience at Cluster and my trip down to the Mississippi Delta revealed that not all children in the U.S. have access to a quality education that equips them for a bright future and offers them the hope of a decent life. In addition, for some children, the value of education and intercultural exchange are not emphasized in their upbringing. For most low-income students, simply making it to college is a large accomplishment in and of itself so many of them may not seek out additional academic enrichment. The recognition of this reality has compelled me to work towards expanding the educational opportunities available to students who live in low-income communities. As a professional in the field of international education, I would hope to make study abroad programs in the U.S. more accessible to students of varied socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. I believe these students could benefit from traveling abroad because it would provide them with an understanding of the world beyond the one in which they were raised. I aspire to earn a master’s degree in International Higher Education so that I can guide students from all walks of life in their journey to become global citizens. The master’s program at Loyola University Chicago will enable me to achieve this objective due to its dedication to social justice and its intent to improve the experience of higher education for all.