I breathed heavily and wiped the sweat from my brow as I took my final steps. My friends surrounded me, smiled, and patted my back. They talked to me, but I was too focused on regaining my breath to notice. All I could think about was sitting down and letting my body rest. While I wish this memory were about finishing a race or some other athletic event, it is instead about walking up two flights of stairs on my way to class during my freshman year of high school. At that time, most routine activities exhausted me due to my worsening congenital heart defect. Thankfully, I later underwent a procedure to better my heart's condition. This event would change my life forever. To this day I still recall lying in the hospital feeling overwhelmed by the commotion around me: the medical staff constantly moving, the indistinct conversations, and the sights and sounds from the machinery in my room. However, despite the chaos surrounding me, I found myself focused on one thing: the likelihood that I would be okay in the long run. The doctors told me that it was more than likely that I would live a long, healthy life, but how did they know? This question stuck with me for years and compelled me to learn about and explore the topic that I now know to be biostatistics. This extended into my college search and led me to attend Rhodes College and major in biomathematics. While at Rhodes, many opportunities came my way, but one gave me firsthand experience with biostatistics. Dr. Jay Fowke from the University of Tennessee Health Science Center invited me to join his lab to assist in investigating prostate cancer disparities in the Memphis metropolitan area. Although I worked on this project for more than a year, it presented new challenges every day. As a result, I was able to explore topics such as medication analysis, nutritional epidemiology, and comorbidity analysis. Additionally, this work allowed me to develop my understanding of logistic regression, non-parametric testing, and, more broadly, coding in R. Most importantly, this experience shed light on the basis from which doctors can assure and inform their patients: statistics.

While I had learned of statistics from my heart procedure, I did not experience its joys until my senior year of high school. My teacher, Mr. Craven, was an eccentric and enthusiastic individual who made statistics fun, exciting, and applicable. As a result, I admired Mr. Craven and he inspired me to pursue a career as an educator. We would often sit and discuss both statistics and pedagogy. These discussions are largely responsible for the development of my career interests. They also prepared me for college, and I left high school excited about my future. Once I arrived at Rhodes College, Dr. Erin Bodine took me under her wing. During my first semester, she asked me to join her research lab as well as to work as a teaching assistant for two of her upcoming classes. Research with Dr. Bodine revolved around working to create a demographic model for endangered Florida plant species using stage-structured matrix models. This work exposed me to the full collaborative research process; including data collection, analysis, and manuscript drafting. The teaching assistantships with Dr. Bodine provided me firsthand experience with teaching and assisting students as well as a behind-the-scenes view of a professor's life and all the effort that teaching requires. Through these teaching assistantships, I solidified my desire to teach and realized that I wish to teach at the college level. Dr. Ibrahim Abdelrazeq also aided in developing my interests. Dr. Abdelrazeq and I have worked on two separate projects, one focused on analyzing survey data to assess the association between religiosity and reaction to tragic death and the other revolving around analyzing data to inform movement through a 1450 BC Greek household. These projects were very different from one another and I found that I enjoyed the variety of research topics that I could investigate through the use of statistics. In addition to conducting research with Dr. Abdelrazeq, I was a student in two of his statistics classes. These classes were engaging, thought-provoking, and application oriented because Dr. Abdelrazeq was an

entertaining, challenging, and enthusiastic professor. As a result, my experience in his classes revealed to me that I not only wanted to teach, but that I wished to teach statistics at the college level.

My journey to biostatistics was a multi-year process that took much time and effort. As much as I wish it weren't true, it took me a very long time to figure out how connect my love for statistics, teaching, research and medicine. However, now that I have, the connection could not be any clearer. I wish to pursue a degree in biostatistics because it would allow me to pursue a career as a college professor. Through working with Dr. Bodine and Dr. Abdelrazeq I learned that, like them, I wish to teach a subject that I love while advising and guiding students toward their dream profession. Additionally, becoming a biostatistician would allow me to work on and conduct research on a variety of topics. While I am most interested in conducting cardiovascular research due to my personal condition, I am both open to and enthusiastic about the idea of being able to pursue research in a wide array of topics like I have at Rhodes College.