

Emma J. Jones

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Personal Statement

I was raised by a single mother in intercity Knoxville. Growing up in a low-income household surrounded by others like me, I saw issues in my city that needed to be fixed. I wanted to pick a major where I could learn how to do the most good for my community. After taking AP Government in high school and excelling, I was encouraged by my teacher to pursue political science in college. I spent my first two years here at the University of Tennessee as a political science major. Despite my efforts, I was unable to find my niche and figure out just how I could do good as a politician. Having been set on political science since my sophomore year of high school, I was suddenly at a loss for what direction I should be going in. I changed my major to sustainability on a whim after taking a class in the program that I really enjoyed. From there, I began to take social and human geography courses as a part of the program's requirements. It was then that I found my direction. I discovered a discipline in which I could do real, important work that could actually benefit my community. I quickly switched into the space, society, and culture concentration within the Geography major. Later that year, I added a child & family studies minor with the goal of conducting research into the impact food deserts have on early childhood development and a child's academic success.

One hundred percent of the reason that I entered the geography program is because of the faculty. I decided on the major after taking courses with Solange Muñoz and Madhuri Sharma. They are both passionate, smart, caring, and are doing good in the world. They showed me what a career in geography can look like and how I could contribute to my community as a

geographer. I have yet to have a geography professor since that is not completely amazing. Each professor shows me something new and unique about geography and inspires me even more. I have learned historical geography with Dr. Norrell, urban and cultural geography with Dr. Sharma and Dr. Muñoz, sustainability with Dr. Hinten, GIS with Michael Camponovo, career readiness with Kurt Butefish, and Python programming for GIS with Dr. Wu. All of these amazing professors have shown me just how interdisciplinary this field is and are preparing me for a diverse range of professions. I could not ask for a better education than what I am receiving here at UT.

The greatest asset I have gained from this program is direction. Before I entered the geography department, I had a vague idea that I wanted to do good and the community where I wanted to do it. The geography program was able to focus my ambitions and allow me to find my niche. I have been able to hone my potential and find strengths I never knew I had. I always assumed I would be bad at anything related to computers, but with direction from Camponovo and Wu, I have discovered that I can excel in GIS and programming. Now that I have been able to focus my ambitions, I plan to pursue a career in higher education and research. I am combining my love for college and being a student with my desire to conduct research to better my community. I believe that academia is where I can do the most good and best put my skills and strengths to use. My current goal is to conduct research into the impact of food deserts on childhood development. I can use my knowledge of human geography and GIS gained from my major in tandem with my knowledge of human development gained from my child & family studies minor. If children really are the future, I believe that my research can be an asset to my community and the way we distribute resources so that our children can reach their full potentials.