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Iowa City

Statement of Purpose

Dear admissions committee members,

My decision to apply for the Masters' in Social Work at the University of Iowa is the result of years of reflection on ways to better align my career with my sense of purpose and personal values. Through this statement, I plan to articulate those reflections.

In the next five years, I intend to be practicing as a therapist in a clinical setting under supervision and working towards independent licensure.

For the past ten years, my passion for understanding the challenges of resident immigrant and linguistic minority students in higher education has fueled my career as a developmental "English as a Second Language" (ESL) instructor and advocate for students, as well as teaching English at the university level in China. In that time, I've observed both first- and second-hand that adapting to a new culture and acquiring fluency in a new language presents unique mental health challenges. In addition, as a queer and neurodiverse individual myself, I have an interest in acquiring further skills to help clients navigate similar challenges and can approach these topics with sensitivity and understanding.

I want my work to be firmly rooted in the micro level through individual and small group practice, though I know I will seek out ways to make changes at larger scales, just as I have in my role as an ESL instructor. I believe that changes in the community and policy level should be motivated, if not led, by the people who live in those communities. The initiatives I am involved in would be better executed with a deeper understanding of peoples' needs, the risks they are sensitive to, and their consent. It would also be a great opportunity to help bring willing community members into positions where they can lead and have their own voices heard. I believe the MSW program at UI would provide the training necessary to excel in both micro and meso levels of practice.

I'm choosing social work because it offers training for a holistic approach as a therapist compared to other paths such as psychology, mental health counseling, or education. While instrumental in understanding the mind, a pure psychological approach would not adequately address the influence of societal factors such as poverty and discrimination. Additionally, social work is extremely versatile, which appeals to my curiosity and love of learning as there will always be new areas to explore. It is also a well-defined and regulated career, so I can be confident that my colleagues are equally as trained and passionate about the work we do.

I believe my strengths in cross-cultural communication, curiosity, associative thinking, and observation skills would serve the profession well. Over years of working with resident immigrant, international, and foreign students, I have developed a strong sense of empathy and humility when working with others in my work. During the program, I want to focus on building my understanding of trauma and mental health issues outside of my current expertise to develop as a more well-rounded therapist as well as gain practical experience applying my skill set in more diverse situations.

As a native of eastern Iowa, I have a strong network of friends, families, and colleagues that are willing to support me as I take this next step in my career. Having been both a student and faculty at the University of Iowa itself, I am aware of the types of resources available to students including the Grad Success Center for help with funding and career planning and the Student Care and Assistance program for crisis management. Given my teaching experience, I believe I would also be a strong candidate for a graduate teaching assistantship, and I have professional resources to draw on to ensure my success in the program.

The committee will note that I was unable to obtain an academic reference for this application. It has been over 10 years since my last academic program, and sadly, many of the professors I worked with have passed away. I have not been able to reach other professors or facilitators of professional development courses that I have taken. I hope that my transcripts will be sufficient along with the knowledge that during my undergraduate years, I excelled in my honors coursework and as well as serving on the Undergraduate Student Advisory Board, both of which were supervised by Dr. Jill Beckman in the Department of Linguistics; all on top of working multiple jobs. During the graduate coursework of the program, I worked as a graduate teaching assistant which involved similar responsibilities as full-time instructors including being instructor of record of the courses I taught. In that time, I also served in the ESL Programs as a tutor for international scholars. As a low income and first-generation college student, I relied on a hard work ethic, perseverance, and resourcefulness to complete my studies, and am now only more equipped to do so again.

I am excited for the potential to pursue this path and to develop myself as a more trained and capable servant of my communities. I am committed to approaching this change in career with integrity and respect while acknowledging the privilege and responsibility involved.

Sincerely,

William J. Denny

February 21, 2024