

Selection Committee,

My educational career has had its share of rollercoaster ups and downs. I am the first in my family to go to college to receive an undergraduate bachelor's degree. I am the first-born citizen in my family and a proud Latina daughter of an undocumented immigrant mother. My educational career has definitely presented many hardships for me dating back to my senior year of high school. Not knowing much about the college process, more importantly, the financial aspect of it has definitely been the biggest stressor of my journey. However, navigating college alone has shaped me into a self-sufficient adult. It has taught me how to advocate for myself and others in my position sharing the identity of being first-generation. In my time at George Mason University, I transformed from a shy student to a student leader both on campus and in my own community and have held several positions on executive boards of different organizations who advocate for marginalized communities. This has all helped shaped the life goals I now have.

My goal is to become a teacher or youth development coordinator in refugee camps or places that house children who have been trafficked. My major here at Mason is Conflict Analysis and Resolution, I selected this major because it was broad in terms of what you can do with this degree. I have a passion for advocating and wanting to help those who have been oppressed. Through this major, I have taken different kinds of migration and international communities' courses and have found that the community of children who have been rescued from trafficking rings are the community I want to work with. Through a human trafficking course I took this spring, we were able to skype with teenagers from the Philippines who have been rescued and now live in a youth home dedicated to helping them go to school and achieve their dreams of being more than just a "victim." My major will help me achieve my goals because I have been able to meet so many practitioners who have been working with these communities for years and have been able to network to find opportunities once I graduate. To further help my chances at achieving my goals I plan to take some time off after I graduate undergrad to do two years in the Peace Corps working with youth development wherever they have available. Once I've completed my time with the Peace Corps, I plan to get my master's in Education to be able to work in a high school here in Virginia where graduation rates are a bit lower in order to gain experience in working with at-risk youth while also helping them get back on a clear path.

As with all prosperous careers, this will take years in order for me to get to the goal I want to achieve but these are the steppingstones that will help me get to my overall goal. My major has put me in contact with so many people that I can learn from and gain opportunities from by being able to incorporate the concepts I've learned in the classes I've taken. My major has also helped me in my current jobs as an AVID tutor for FCPS and a mentor to high school students in the Early Identification Program by letting me incorporate conflict transformation techniques whenever a student has had an issue, like creating an open dialogue between conflicting parties. Through my major, I have also had the opportunity to present my research to practitioners in the field currently and gain critical feedback that will help me when I enter the field and have to present more research. The amount of academically stimulating opportunities that I have gained have made me a better student when it comes to how I engage with the content and material in class through discussions and simulations. The Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution has allowed me to explore topics I have a passion for and make it my own by letting me create my own concentration in Migrant Struggles and Victimization which has a lot to do with why people migrate and the consequences it can have for predominantly youth.

Once I am successfully in the field, I plan to work alongside other nonprofit organizations whose mission is to help youth who have been trafficked get back into going to school and achieving the goals they once had for themselves prior to being trafficked or help them create new dreams. My hope is to work all-over the world in different camps or youth homes as a teacher and mentor using conflict techniques that I have learned to interact with them effectively. An important mindset that one of my professors has left me with is; we should be listening to these youth to understand them and let them teach us instead of inserting what we have learned as a “one fits all” ideology. The impact I want to have with these children and teenagers is that they can be whatever they want to be, and no one can take that from them no matter what.

I feel confident that I will be able to achieve my goals with all the tools that my major has given me and hope the selection committee feels the same after reading my submission. With the help of this scholarship it will help alleviate the financial pressure I feel each semester when I first register for classes and have to scramble to find the financial means to afford my classes. I’m in my last year of undergrad and COVID-19 has caused me to lose both my jobs as they’re closed until further notice. It has been an extremely hard time to find a new place of employment during this time and makes me fear that I might not be able to return for fall semester this year.

Thank you for reading my submission and I look forward to hearing your decision.

Katherine Trejo