

Perhaps my greatest joy growing up was when I finally learned how to speak. Because of a severe hearing impairment, sign language had been my first mode of communication. At a time when deaf educators were touting a strict oral-only approach to language training, my education was an experiment. After two years of expressing my needs through frustrated kicks and screams, the delight at understanding that my hands could convey meanings and ideas heightened my desire to use my voice in the same way. So great was my interest that within six months I transformed from shy hand gestures to piping-out full sentences.

My fascination with words, and more importantly, with communication came to show itself in all areas of my life. My pre-college days were filled with acting, conducting my high-school marching band and public-speaking. With the help of teachers who let me discover music through vibration and honed my speaking with informal diction lessons, I fell in love with creating human connections through sounds and silence.

By the end of my high-school career I had delivered speeches from New York to California, twice receiving the honor of xxxxxxxx state title and in 2002 the NFL National Championship in Oratory. While at college, I sought to give back the amazing gift my teachers had made possible and began teaching speechwriting and oratory to students in Chicago and Indiana as well as at national camps in San Diego and Ft. Lauderdale. Language had become for me more than simply a way to converse with others. It had emerged as a vital link between individuals and their ability to contribute to their communities.

My calling became clearer after speaking to a crowd of teenagers at a xxxxxxxx Conference in 2004. Interspersed among my audience were kids who, due to physical or cognitive disabilities, had faced formidable obstacles in learning and communicating. Yet they had risen to become young leaders in their districts. Learning of their experiences, combined with my own, aroused my interest in understanding the circumstances surrounding communication barriers in the deaf and hard of hearing. During my senior year at Rutgers, I focused my honors thesis on the history of Deaf Education.

At the same time that I was studying deaf education in America, an internship with the Embassy of Jordan in Washington, D.C. gave me the opportunity to delve into international policy. It was during this period when I was researching deaf education and interning in international affairs, that my interest expanded. The comparisons between educational systems fascinated me: Jordanian educational policies differ from American policies, but concerning the deaf and hard of hearing, both reflect remnants of British educational philosophy. My experience at the Jordanian Embassy and my formal research inspired me to look deeper into the international field of education.

Following college, I decided to serve for ten months with the AmeriCorps in Nashville, Tennessee, a state that has one of the highest percentages of disabled citizens, including those who are blind, hard of hearing, and deaf. There, I worked with the non-profit, xxxxxxxx, in sight-loss prevention amongst the uninsured and underinsured population.

Our services were meant to restore sight to children and adults who were struggling to participate in their classrooms and the workforce. However, our outreach staff was limited. As a response to this need, I began a collaborative project with Vanderbilt and Lipscomb Universities to spearhead Eye Adopt, a pilot program connecting university students to the Nashville community through vision screenings. This successful joint effort to empower the civic participation of those with sight loss encouraged me to do the same for the deaf and hard of hearing. At the end of my service, I accepted a position as a public policy analyst for the Disability Law and Advocacy Center of Tennessee, where I am eagerly expanding my understanding of national and international disability issues.

The Department of Education at Oxford University is dedicated to the comparative analysis of worldwide educational systems and developments. Experienced professors involved in policy and deaf education include Dr. *First and Last Name*, who specializes in International Education Policy, Dr. *Last Name* and Dr. *Last Name*, both of whom have done award-winning work with literacy and mathematical comprehension in deaf education. The MSc Education: Comparative and International course also integrates the opportunity to study at UNESCO, the OECD, and the Institute for International Educational Planning (IIEP), organizations that specialize in the current international issues and social climates affecting education.

There are three main reasons why I have chosen to pursue this course of study at Oxford. The first is my inherent interest in deaf education as a student who grew up within the deaf education system. In addition, my work teaching students the skills of assembling ideas and delivering them effectively has allowed me to share the independence that I discovered can be derived from communication. For those with obstacles, it is this skill and self-sufficiency that I wish to help them achieve. Secondly, the academic training and work experience I possess will give me a firm background to guide my graduate studies. My degree in political science and history, my research work in deaf education, my current position as a policy analyst in disability law--all lay relevant groundwork not only for learning what changes must be made in international education but also for preparing me to understand how these changes are to be accomplished. Most importantly, however, there is a need in the international education community for a more unified network of resources for deaf students. While there are such educational institutions of higher learning as Gallaudet University, and such service organizations as the International Deaf Children's Society, Global Deaf Connection, Viataal International, and various technology-service providers, no formal umbrella organization brings all these resources together or cultivates partnerships among them. My dream is to create such an organization, and in doing so, to grow a network of partners in global resources for deaf education.