

Personal Statement for an Urban Planning Program

Every day on the bus home from work, we pass by a row of abandoned houses. Their windows are boarded up, the paintwork on the front doors is faded and peeling, and the front yards are overgrown with weeds. It always seems faintly tragic to me: a lonely, desolate scene of wasted potential. I think of the people who must have lived in those houses once, and the people who still could if the right approach were taken.

Growing up working class, urban decay becomes depressingly familiar. The sight of a row of abandoned houses does not surprise me, but it continues to bother me. Since graduating from high school, I have been determined to pursue a career in urban planning. While people of my background experience the consequences of urban planning decisions first-hand, we are underrepresented in the field itself.

Ironically, given my motivation, my economic background has made my studies challenging. I was fortunate enough to be awarded a scholarship for my undergraduate studies, but after graduation I took jobs in unrelated fields to help support my parents. In the three years since, I have not lost my ambition. Now I am keen to resume my studies, and I believe I can bring an invaluable perspective to the table: that of the people most impacted by the decisions of urban planners.

One thing that fascinated me about the field during my undergraduate studies was the sheer number of different elements whose interactions constitute a person's experience of an urban environment. Any number of factors could transform the scene I described at the beginning: What if there were no bus route? Better community outreach in the neighborhood? Worse law enforcement? More or fewer jobs available in the area? Some of these factors are out of the hands of an urban planner, but without taking them all into consideration, the planner has an incomplete picture of their task.

Through further study I hope to develop my understanding of how these disparate elements combine and interact to create the urban environment. I am interested in the social, psychological and political effects our surroundings have on our lives. My studies will allow me to work on projects directly affecting the kinds of working-class urban communities I know well. I believe I can bring my own experiences, as well as my education, to bear upon the problem of improving infrastructure and quality of life in these communities.

My ambition as an urban planner is to work with impoverished urban communities. I want to draw on my own and others' experience of these spaces rather than impose a prefabricated plan from above. I believe that by taking cues from the people affected, urban planning can more conscientiously shape the future of our cities. This master's degree is my path toward that goal.