

Arielle Domingue
Personal Statement

The maxim “Treat others as you wish to be treated” serves as the foundation upon which my core beliefs were established. For as long as I can remember, my parents have encouraged me to approach situations, despite any preconceived notions I may have, with tolerance, compassion, and commitment. I was raised to accept those whom I considered different from me, empathize with those who are struggling, and lessen the burden for those bearing strife. Even if it was something as simple as bringing in canned goods for my school’s Thanksgiving food drive, I was always encouraged to help those in need.

As I matured and began to discover my individuality, my sense of responsibility also strengthened. I attended a public high school in South Louisiana where, in 2010, forty-nine percent of the student population was eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Unlike many of my peers, my family was financially stable enough for me to participate in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. Although I sometimes took for granted all that my parents provided, they reminded me of our family’s values and encouraged me to share what I had with those less fortunate. I soon became more aware of the struggles and injustices throughout my community and was determined to do what I could to help. Therefore, I took on several leadership roles in various school and community service organizations, coordinated philanthropic fundraisers, tutored struggling students, and volunteered to teach a music and drama class at a non-profit center for the arts. By the end of

my senior year, I concluded that I wanted to spend the rest of my life advocating for those prevented from achieving the liberties they deserve.

When I entered college, I began to realize that the inequalities affecting my community are too complex to simply fix with a helping hand. Although the *Declaration of Independence* claims that all men are created equal and are all endowed with "certain unalienable rights," many struggle daily with "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Many Americans, through no fault of their own, are separated by economic and social conditions that unfairly deny them a voice and render them powerless. As an English education major, I have witnessed firsthand how unfair conditions can prevent children from receiving the basic foundation of an adequate education.

While volunteering for a public elementary school's art project, I observed the challenges caused by financial limitations that the teachers and students face on a daily basis. The walls separating classrooms were mere portable partitions, and everything being said in the adjacent classroom could be clearly heard in ours. The school's art teacher, who travels from class to class with her supplies confined to a portable crate, reminded her students that their art supplies were limited—each student was allowed only one sheet of construction paper, and each group of students shared a box of four mix-matched markers. This experience troubled me, for I recalled how frivolously such materials are used in other schools comprised of students of higher socioeconomic standing.

Although I knew there was little I could do to enhance the school's financial situation, I recognized ways in which I could make a difference. Shortly afterwards,

I became a tutor with the Baton Rouge Youth Coalition and tutored a young man who had never understood his full potential. Because he attended schools that were consistently classified as low achieving, his academic needs were ignored and his potential stifled. This young man was an incredible writer who, despite his lack of formal instruction, understood the complexities of rhetorical analysis and the use of Standard English. However, after years of being overlooked, he became complacent, and attending college was, for him, a faint, distant dream. Though he missed a few tutoring sessions because his mother, a single parent raising three sons, could not take off of work to drive him, through our work together, he ended the school year with more self-confidence than ever before and the hope of taking the ACT and attending college.

Such experiences in the public school system and surrounding communities have propelled me to advocate for those students whose educational rights are ignored simply because of where they live or their family's income. Although poverty and social injustice are prevalent, a solid educational foundation is something that no child should be denied. If I am afforded the opportunity to study law and become a lawyer, I will use my skills for the benefit of those who are disadvantaged simply due to the circumstances of their birth. I hope to one day use my education, leadership ability, and communication skills as a lawyer to advocate for those who have been silenced.