

Student's Name

Professor's Name

Course Name/Code

Date

Graduate School Essay Example for Columbia: Public Health and Oncology

My mother's cancer diagnosis arrived during my sophomore year in biology, between two midterms. Over the following eight months, I learned more about healthcare in the United States than I had in my previous 19 years: about what insurance covers and what it does not, about the geography of specialist care in rural counties, about the difference between a treatment plan and access to one. I graduated with a degree in biology and a research focus in oncology not because I planned it that way, but because I could not think about anything else.

For three years after graduation I worked as a research coordinator at a cancer center in Charlotte, North Carolina, managing clinical trials and designing a community outreach program aimed at improving trial enrollment among rural and Black patients, populations historically excluded from the research that guides treatment decisions. I worked closely with Dr. David Park to build enrollment pipelines that addressed the specific barriers his earlier research had identified: transportation, distrust of medical institutions, and the time cost of participation.

Columbia's graduate program in Public Health draws me specifically because of the program's dual focus on cancer epidemiology and health systems research, and because of Professor Elena Reyes's work on community-based participatory research in cancer prevention. I want to develop the methodological skills to design and evaluate interventions that reduce disparities not just in cancer incidence but in clinical trial representation, a gap that shapes which treatments ever reach the populations who need them most.