

Student's Name

Professor's Name

Course Name/Code

Date

Autobiographical Sketch — Marcus Okafor

Persona: Marcus Okafor, 24, applying for a graduate program in public policy

I was born in Lagos, Nigeria, in 2001, the second of four children raised by a schoolteacher mother and a civil engineer father. My early years were shaped by two things that would later define my professional interests: the infrastructure projects my father worked on — roads, bridges, water systems — and the gap between the communities those projects were meant to serve and the communities that actually benefited from them. That gap became the question I have spent the last several years trying to understand.

We relocated to Toronto, Canada, when I was eleven. The move was disorienting in the ways that most immigrant transitions are — language was not the barrier, but culture was, and I spent my first two years in Canada quietly observing how institutions worked and who they worked for. I attended Thorncliffe Park Public School and later Marc Garneau Collegiate Institute, where I excelled in social sciences and history. My teachers frequently noted that I asked questions about systems rather than about events — not "what happened" but "why was it set up this way" and "who decided."

I completed my undergraduate degree in Political Science and Economics at the University of Toronto in 2023, graduating with distinction. My thesis examined municipal water infrastructure policy in three mid-sized Canadian cities, analysing how procurement decisions mapped onto demographic data in ways that consistently disadvantaged lower-income and immigrant-majority neighbourhoods. The research required fourteen months of access-to-information requests, stakeholder interviews, and data analysis — work that taught

me that policy problems are rarely technical failures. They are almost always failures of priority.

Outside my academic work, I served for three years as a volunteer policy researcher with a Toronto-based community legal clinic, helping residents of social housing navigate disputes with municipal maintenance contractors. That experience grounded my academic interests in the texture of real administrative failure — the missed deadlines, the untranslated notices, the complaint processes designed to exhaust rather than resolve. It also confirmed that the work I want to do sits at the intersection of policy design and community accountability.

I am applying to this programme because its research focus on urban governance and institutional equity aligns precisely with the questions my undergraduate work raised but could not fully answer. I bring to it a grounding in both quantitative policy analysis and qualitative community research, a willingness to work across disciplines, and a clear sense of the problems I intend to spend my career addressing.



CollegeEssays