

Sample Rhodes Scholarship Personal Statement—Student #1

Soaked in sweat, I sat deep in thought on the small mound of sand and broken rocks in northern Kenya, where 1.7 million years ago a desperately ill *Homo erectus* woman had died. Her death had entranced me for years. KNM-ER 1808 had died of *Hypervitaminosis A*, wherein an overdose of Vitamin A causes extensive hemorrhaging throughout the skeleton and excruciating pain. Yet a thick rind of diseased bone all over her skeleton—ossified blood clots—tells that 1808 lived for weeks, even months, immobilized by pain and in the middle of the African bush. As noted in *The Wisdom of the Bones*, by Walker and Shipman, that means that someone had cared for her, brought her water, food, and kept away predators. At 1.7 million years of age, 1808's mere pile of bones is a breathtaking, poignant glimpse of how people have struggled with disease over the ages. Since that moment two summers ago, I've been fascinated by humans' relationship with disease. I want to research paleopathology, the study of ancient diseases, in relation to human culture, specifically sex and gender.

At first glance my education doesn't quite reflect my passion for paleopathology. I am often asked how bachelor's degrees in Women's Studies and Anthropology coadunate. Women's Studies and my related community service have honed my analytical skills, led me to the idea of studying sex and gender in relation to disease, and given my life and work a social conscience. I had participated in activism before college, yet my undergraduate experiences radically altered how I viewed the world and its potential for social change. Travel, conversation partnering, activism, and classes in Anthropology, African American, and Women's Studies taught me to think critically about human culture and behavior. Meanwhile, gender-equity organizing and assaults in the local community showed me the need for activism against sexual assault. I've focused on prevention, fueled by a strong personal need to make the world a less painful place. Most inspiring was organizing the "Outrage Rally against Sexual Assault," which attempted to raise awareness about and de-stigmatize assault in response to a series of assaults on the Mythic University campus. This rally had a positive impact in empowering survivors, evidenced by subsequent increased reporting of assault rates.

Organizing has also taught me successful leadership and teamwork skills, applicable to academic and social settings. I've learned the subtleties of integrating multiple perspectives into a shared vision and a success through networking with University administrators, Police Departments, nationally recognized activists, Congress persons, fellow students, and the general public. As head organizer for Mythic University's 20xx "Take Back the Night," attended by more than 500 people, I headed a seven-committee, twenty-person organizing team. In addition to recognition, as with the 20xx Service Award—Mythic University's highest undergraduate award for good citizenry and academics—organizing has honed my critical thinking skills and prepared me for performing innovative and multidisciplinary graduate research.

I want to study the relationship between human pathology and culture, looking specifically at disease in the context of sex and gender in non-modern European

populations. My field of interest is new in paleopathology, so I will integrate paleoepidemiology and paleodemography—the studies of ancient disease processes and population dynamics—with gender and cultural studies and European history, contextualizing disease historically and culturally. My goal is to look at what health and disease can tell us macrocosmically and individually about social and sexual inequity, socioeconomic class, and gender-related quality of life.

Research experiences, such as working as a research assistant in a craniofacial morphometrics lab, studying skulls, and doing field work in Pennsylvania, Kenya, the Orkney Islands, West Virginia, and South Dakota, have prepared me well for graduate school. I've conducted ethnographic, paleontological, demographic, archaeological, cultural, and osteological research. I am currently co-authoring an article on the implications of Forager's mating and marriage practices for sociobiological theory, while working on a research paper on craniofacial morphology in Medieval Denmark. I also completed a senior thesis on Amerindian women's culturally influenced reproductive health issues. With confidence, I want to proceed with graduate work at Oxford to gain a higher degree and greater research opportunities in the midst of British culture.

My work this year at the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of Natural History has galvanized and confirmed my devotion to paleopathology. An anthropological fantasy realized: I am surrounded by invaluable research opportunities and constant, stimulating dialogue with future colleagues, and vast and exotic collections including cave bear skulls, dinosaurs, and the renowned Terry skeletal Collection. Volunteer work cataloguing the Bab edh-Dra skeletal collection and independent research exploring metabolic diseases' effects on the skull using CT imaging technology have taught me the reality of professional research. Concurrently, this year has allowed me to further realize my personal interests. I practice fine arts, read extensively, love to travel, and have a whirlwind tour of Western Europe planned for December. I am hiking and backpacking on the Appalachian Trail, playing rugby, running, and I am training my four-year-old horse for jumping and cross-country riding and competitions.

I believe that my personal interests, experiences, and social conscience would contribute as much as my research skills to Oxford's social and intellectual culture. Oxford offers me an opportunity to pursue a Master's in European Archaeology while taking supplementary courses in pathology, anatomy, modern European History, and social and cultural anthropology. Equally, I could have research guidance from staff in Biological Anthropology and the Human Sciences program, where human culture, biology, and behavior in response to disease are being actively studied. At Oxford, I could nurture and share a unique set of social experiences, nurture and explore my research interests, and contribute an innovative, informative, and multidisciplinary new approach to my field. Ensnoring myself in British culture, intellectual environment, and vigorous research at Oxford is the chance of a lifetime. I hope to be able to seize it.

Sample Rhodes Scholarship Personal Statement—Student #2

Personal Statement by Janet Lerner for the Rhodes Scholarship

I have found my mentor, and I'd like to tell you who it is and how this has come about. I have not yet met him face-to-face, but he has already taught me how to begin this essay with his words. Professor Anthony D. Nuttall, writing in his book *Openings*, tells us, "...All good openings are somehow naturally rooted, more or less remote, of an original creative act: in medias res, as against 'In the beginning'." Nuttall describes the importance of an opening by demonstrating the difference between the actual opening lines and the first sense of action, which will become the plot.

The "original creative act" to which he refers applies as well to young scholars. I recognize now that I am in the process of becoming the scholar I will always be becoming. This process currently involves research that is the basis for my senior honors thesis: investigating two British poets' incorporation of classical Greek and Roman mythology into their poetry. I have begun studying Geoffrey Chaucer and Alfred Lord Tennyson, both of whom make active use of myth in their works. The philosophy of intertextuality, a specific interest of Professor Nuttall's, is apparent in his research on the influence of Roman and Greek classics on British poets, the very topic I have chosen for my honors thesis. While I am learning from reading Professor Nuttall's books, specifically his *A Common Sky: Philosophy and the Literary Imagination*, the opportunity to work with him would inspire me to pursue further research in this field and enrich my understanding of literature and its critical theories.

My interest in British poets and their use of classical literature evolves from a paper I presented at the 20xx Novus Et Antiquus Conference. I had the privilege of being selected as one of five undergraduates to attend this faculty conference, where I presented my work on classical mythology's influence on the medieval author Geoffrey Chaucer's poems *The Knight's Tale* and *The Parliament of Fowls*. There Chaucer uses the Roman gods and goddesses to orchestrate the fates of the two female characters. Through the intervention of these deities, Chaucer shows compassion for women and grants mercy to both females. My experience as a college junior presenting a paper at a faculty conference proved gratifying on another level as well: I was pleased to receive guidance from the professors, and also to be complimented on my pronunciation of Middle English quotations.

I came to Chaucer only after reading Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot*. In this Arthurian romance, Chrétien represents Lancelot as conflicted—the kind of chivalrous knight whom one expects to find only in myth, yet, in violation of the code of honor, desirous of his lord's queen. I began thinking of the tales of the Arthurian knights as more than legendary—as potentially credible historical accounts. I wrote a paper on Gawain's rhetoric as a means to elicit specific responses in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Gawain's rhetorical strategies and their manipulations ultimately led him to a

deeper personal recognition and self-acceptance. This early exercise alerted me to strategies of language in the Middle Ages.

A post-graduate education at Oxford based on personal tutorials and independent research is precisely the type of program I now need to pursue. Through several independent study courses in my undergraduate curriculum, I have become even more self-motivated and have been gratified to discover that discussion between teacher and student has helped me develop my best work.

Professor Nuttall is a Fellow of Oxford's New College, the ideal place to continue my studies in medieval literature because it was built at the height of the medieval period, the era on which I plan to focus in my graduate study. I was pleased to discover that New College is also one of only four colleges that participate in the Oxford Access Scheme, a program that reaches out to inner-city students and encourages them to seek a higher education. This program provides all students with an equal opportunity to apply to a university as prestigious as Oxford. In participating in this program, New College seeks qualified students who may not have the socio-economic ability or confidence to apply to and attend Oxford. I would like to become involved in this program because I have worked with students in similar situations from the Boys and Girls Club near my hometown, and have found supporting these students to be very rewarding.

My reasons for applying for a Rhodes Scholarship to work with Professor Nuttall have roots in a study I undertook in 20xx. While reading Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, I found a single line in which the allegorical unicorn becomes a link between the medieval era and the Renaissance. I became interested in the villain Sebastian's professed disbelief in the unicorn, that imaginary animal symbolic of Jesus Christ in medieval bestiaries. My research on the historical symbolism of the unicorn in medieval literature led me to conclude that in rejecting the unicorn, Sebastian implies that he also rejects Christianity. An interesting aspect of *The Tempest* that I have not yet pursued is the masque, in which the Roman goddesses Iris, Ceres, and Juno descend upon the island in preparation for Miranda and Ferdinand's wedding. My earlier interest in Shakespeare's use of the allegorical unicorn will create a focus for study when combined with the masque of the Roman goddesses in *The Tempest*. Shakespeare's integration of Christianity and classical mythology is yet another area I would like to explore with Professor Nuttall, for not only has he published on philosophy; he has also written *Two Concepts of Allegory: A Study of Shakespeare's The Tempest and the Logic of Allegorical Expression*.

The adventure of Sir Gawain—which leads him to a deeper understanding of self—is not unlike the journey I have undertaken, a journey I hope will lead me to Oxford University, its Bodleian Library, and study with Anthony Nuttall and other mentors. Oxford will provide me the opportunity to learn directly from authorities in my field who will help guide me in my quest to become a scholar. Like Gawain, I am striving to realize my potential through my own adventure.