

## Personal Statement\_Kemberly Nertulus

I am from the tough ring-less hands of my mother. The hands of a woman who collected calluses from scrubbing the floors covering the American soil that she fought so hard to reach. The hands carried me through the littered streets of my neighborhood to the bus stop that was our designated transportation. The hands that held mine as we walked into the graffiti-riddled school, which seemed a predestined place for kids like me, the school at arm's length, the one we could afford and access. Her hands wiped my tears as she left me at that preschool, leaving behind the salty residue of hope she had in me for success.

With her dreams that I camouflaged as my own during that first day of preschool, I chose to follow through with them because I wanted to make my mother proud. From that day on, commuting to school, whether by walking in the blazing sun or waiting for the bus, was worthwhile because each step led to a golden path of success. A path that gave value to a future that my mother didn't get a chance to discover for herself, one that I would walk for her. For her, I thought I could carry the weight of the stethoscope that she hoped one day would be roped around my neck, the emblem that would prove I've succeeded and proved her sacrifices had been worth it.

On the first day of high school, I convinced myself that good grades and high scores would determine my value. I even joined the medical academy, a "choice program." But it wasn't much of my choice at the time, just another stepping stone to what I thought meant success. Honor roll, medical certifications, ribbons, and countless other accomplishments proved that I excelled in my studies. This is what I wanted, right? But I realized I wasn't happy. All these years, I was living for my mother, and not myself.

I wanted to try my own hand at discovering what I liked to do, and what I wanted to become and weave the future I truly wanted. While I knew that pursuing medicine would make my mother proud and that she also wanted the best for me, when I looked into my future it seemed like it would be an endless cycle of trying to make my mother happy. During my sophomore year of high school, I decided to join a highly selective program called Path to College, which unlocked an unlimited amount of possibilities and guidance for me, and most importantly, introduced me to my mentor. She pushed me out of my comfort zone and motivated me to attend workshops, virtual school tours, career fairs, museums, and countless other activities. She was the first person to embolden me to pursue my interests and take my future into my own hands.

Slowly, I started making choices that liberated me and enlightened me about the possibilities of becoming successful in ways other than becoming a doctor as my mother wished. Joining programs such as the National Honor Society, Climate READY, Women of Tomorrow, and even working at Chick-fil-A have been significant components of my growth. Although my mother may see these things as futile, I still appreciate her for the sacrifices and love she provided over the years. Without it, I wouldn't be who I am today. But I am ready to take on my journey. A journey with a university education and a career I choose, one that will bring my family a secure future and what matters most, my happiness.

