

MCFT Social Action Scholarship

Devon Goss

I believe that I am continually working on promoting social justice throughout the community, the graduate school and the field of couple and family therapy in a wide variety of ways. During my time as an undergraduate, I was particularly active in the area of sexual assault and domestic violence, founding a peer-advocate crisis line for students at my university, serving as a member of a task force on sexual assault and writing my senior thesis on outsiders' perceptions of blame of survivors of sexual assault from a feminist lens. I have continued my work in feminist issues throughout my first year of graduate school by presenting on the topic of domestic violence during the training the MCFT program held in Uganda, volunteering regularly at In Other Words, a non-profit feminist bookstore and community space and by co-facilitating a group for survivors of childhood sexual trauma at the Portland Women's Crisis Line.

In addition to my focus on sexual assault and domestic violence, I have also been active in queer issues. I am currently working with the Graduate Student Union Network to form a queer and ally graduate student group, which I hope will not only provide students with a sense of community at the graduate school, but will also function as an group that can come together and discuss issues that queer and ally students feel need to be addressed within the graduate school or the larger community. Through my activism in the Portland queer community, including being a weekly volunteer at the Q Center, partnering with Basic Rights Oregon on trans justice and marriage equality initiatives and working with NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon on outreach to the LGBTQ community, I have been able to reflect on the ways that non-profits and activist organizations can partner

with mental health professionals in order to address the needs of specific communities. For example, through my work with Basic Rights Oregon on trans-justice issues, I developed an interest in completing a master's thesis on transgender individual's experiences of both support and oppression within their families and within the community at large. It is my hope that through the amplification of marginalized voices, the field of couple and family therapy will gain insight to the experiences of transgender individuals and the essential role that couple and family therapists play in providing an affirming and positive environment for gender-variant individuals.

I believe that I demonstrate the MCFT's program mission of integrity, compassion and a sincere commitment to working with members of diverse groups not only in the activist roles that I currently take within the community, but also in my dedication in this program to constantly push myself to challenge my biases and beliefs and continually work on becoming a more culturally competent couple and family therapist. For example, I knew that working with individuals who identify as religious or spiritual could be a challenging diversity issue for me, so I purposefully took the Treatment Issues: Religion and Spirituality class in order to live up to my commitment of constantly striving on becoming more aware of where my personal biases lie and how I can work on confronting and dismantling them. I feel that this showcases my efforts to prepare myself to work with a variety of diverse individuals in my career.

I also believe that I exemplify the MCFT program mission of dedication to social justice and global citizenship. The program's emphasis on social justice was the central factor for me in choosing this program and has remained at the core of how I approach my day to day life as a graduate student in this program. It is through my constant

intention to keep social justice issues at the center of my life that I have come to realize how truly essential it is for all mental health professionals to see themselves as activists and their careers as activism. When I first entered this program, I was worried that I would have to ignore racism or sexism within the therapy room as to not offend or isolate my clients. However, it is through my work with the above activist communities that I have realized that I can not take an active role in challenging and dismantling oppressive systems in most of my life while staying silent about oppression in my therapy room.

It is important to keep in mind that when mental health professionals don't take a purposeful role as an activist for social justice within their client's lives and the communities, they are making the choice to stay silent; taking no social justice stance is a stance within itself. Because of the very real way that therapists effect change within individuals and families, it is crucial that they are also considering the way that they can make change within the community and world as a whole. As couple and family therapists have a systemic lens, they are uniquely positioned to look and challenge the larger systems that are affecting our clients, and my work within the queer and feminist communities in Portland has prepared me to view and understand the different systems that affect the clients that I will see. I believe that my volunteer, clinical and research social justice work in both feminist and queer issues has been extremely valuable in helping me to become a couple and family therapist that understands the importance of social justice and activism within therapy, which I believe will only benefit my clients and the community in general.