

# A Lifelong Commitment to Buffalo

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Personal Essay - application for Michael J. Krasner Scholarship

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There is something about this city that draws you in and makes you want to care. Working downtown I have met many travelers from Europe and around the world who come to Buffalo to see the architecture, historical places, and a strong artistic culture that is integral to the Queen City. Residents will cite strangers helping them with a flat tire or pushing their car through two feet of snow as evidence that this city truly is the city of Good Neighbors. But friendly neighbors and stunning architecture are hardly reasons to pursue a career in a particular city. Why, then, have I chosen to live and work in Buffalo after I obtain my Master's degree?

My name is Brittany and integral to who I am is my connection and commitment to Buffalo. I was born and raised here, in Riverside, a part of the city that has seen steadily increasing crime and decreasing investment but I continue to live there despite many neighbors moving out. Even when I had the opportunity to get an apartment in Allentown or the Elmwood village before grad school, I chose to find a place here. So I'm used to sticking by a place that seems like a sinking ship because I believe the citizens of neighborhood can make a difference and I see my Master's degree as a tool for change. Beyond being fiercely loyal to my neighborhood and Buffalo as a whole, I recognize the faults. I see the mistakes of the past including poor highway placement, faulty public transit decisions, a hollow downtown, and a lack of commitment to regional connections. These planning problems are by no means reasons that would convince me to practice planning elsewhere. In fact, what better city is there than Buffalo if you want to use your degree to make positive changes? Buffalo has tremendous opportunity for a comeback as a transportation hub or even a technology hub if we focus on regional connections and the strong higher education resource. The prospect of giving back to the city that has given so much to me is what made me want to be a planner; I plan to focus my future career on environmental, sustainable planning for the Buffalo-Niagara region.

The work I have chosen to do both inside and outside the classroom has been primarily focused on Buffalo. My undergraduate degree is in Environmental Science from the University at Buffalo and much of my class work either focused on environmental issues particular to Buffalo or I chose to do research

pertaining specifically to this region such as invasive species throughout the Great Lakes. During my undergraduate study, I also interned at the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning. My work was focused in the division of environmental compliance where I worked on increasing awareness about recycling to schools and citizens throughout Erie County. I also answered questions about recycling and proper waste disposal from citizens and groups. By the end of my undergraduate career I had achieved a 3.75 gpa and had been inducted into Phi Beta Kappa international honors society.

In graduate school, I have focused my study from environmental science in general to Environmental and Land Use Planning. Much of the class work I have done focuses specifically on Buffalo and if given the opportunity, I have chosen to do research that has had direct benefits for the City of Buffalo. For example, last semester I did a city-wide recycling survey for a statistics class that was both unique in method and useful enough to be presented to the City of Buffalo in official reports and this semester I, along with my partners, hope to present a municipal housing recycling plan to the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority. I am working on connecting with non-profit and government organizations so that students who are in planning school might be able to have the experience of doing research that will be useful to these groups while earning credit. There are two main goals of this project. First, By connecting students to these groups, I hope to take advantage of the tremendous intelligence resource in Buffalo by helping local groups benefit from the technical knowledge of planning students. Second, I hope to show students that there are projects in Buffalo that could greatly benefit from their skills and despite the current economic situation; there are professional opportunities in Buffalo. I am also currently working with the Erie County Environmental Education Institute as assistant project coordinator for the Great Lakes Student Summit. This event brings students from three states and two countries to Buffalo to connect with environmental professionals and learn about the value of recycling and restoration in maintaining the unique habitats and resources of Western New York and the entire Great Lakes basin. This scholarship would allow me the time to work on these projects as well as pursue internship opportunities next year that would further strengthen my connection to Buffalo's planning process.

Even though I am very committed to Buffalo and aware of the problems therein, I am also well-traveled and have lived abroad. For almost seven months I lived Beijing, China which gave me the tremendous opportunity to make cross-cultural comparisons about the planning of cities and regional connections. At that time I often spoke with citizens who were acutely aware of the rapidly shifting urban environment in order to try to understand their perspective. My time in Beijing and these conversations

along with various opportunities I've had to travel have given me a unique, worldly perspective on the built form and environmental problems that arise out of various planning practices. Traveling is one of my passions and I hope to have the opportunity to use travelling as a way to explore new cultures and perspectives on planning and the urban form but my home will always be here.

Buffalo is the reason I want to study planning. Planning is often the subject of much discussion in this city because we live, work, and study in a place that has been plagued by bad planning decisions but it hasn't been all mistakes. There have been strides to connect my neighborhood, Riverside, with the Niagara River despite the highway that separates the two, efforts have been made to revitalize the much lamented waterfront, and the windmills on the Bethlehem Steel site are the perfect example of Buffalo using old industrial lands to create a new, green image. A greener image coupled with investment in technology and transportation infrastructure will, I believe, propel Buffalo into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a force to be reckoned with and I am excited to be a part of this process.