

Please write a brief essay describing your research interests and career goals, and the reasons you wish to pursue graduate work at Dartmouth College. Include any special information that does not appear above that will help us evaluate your application.

Growing up in the Upper Valley, Dartmouth College was always a dream for me. Though my interests in music education lead me elsewhere for my undergraduate studies, I've kept that dream tucked in a small corner of my mind. In order to explain my reasoning behind my interest in the MALS program, I must first supplement my story with a bit of my family's background. My maternal grandfather, Donald Newell of Laconia, was a proud Penobscot elder in his later years. He didn't always take pride in his ancestry; growing up in the depression and serving in World War II taught my grandfather to suppress his heritage. Only later in his life did he and his wife, Beverly Newell, reconnect with their Native traditions and become beloved and respected members of the native community in northern New England.

I remotely connected my mother's family to Native American culture when I was younger, but I didn't fully grasp their involvement and my own interests until I was in college. My curiosity was sparked with the unfortunate passing of my grandmother to lung cancer. I couldn't understand and accept how tobacco, a sacred herb to the Native culture, could be altered and poisoned enough to take the life of such a wonderful woman. I realized then that life flashes by far too quickly and the people we love will not always be around. I began attending powwows and council meetings with my grandfather and uncle, Peter Newell, to spend more time with them. Through the hardship of losing my grandmother, I found that this somewhat hidden society filled the hole in my heart. The Native community of New England helped me reclaim myself and discover unknown passion and pride for my heritage.

In my senior year at Plymouth State University, I took a class entitled "Philosophical and Historical Perspectives on the Child in Society". Our final assignment was to write a research paper on a controversial issue in education. Given my interests at the time, I chose to research the Native American education system and was appalled, but not entirely surprised, to discover that Native students hold the highest dropout rate of any other ethnic minority in the country. I turned in my paper thinking I had a fresh subject and a solid case. When the paper was returned, my teacher failed to see the controversy in Native American education. I was furious that she had the nerve to brush aside my hard work and clear proof. That was the moment when I realized that the majority of Americans do not understand nor realize the extent of our European forefathers' damage on the Native American population. Most Americans do not apprehend that reservation life is comparable to that of a third world country. To this day that single moment, when my teacher made such an uneducated and uninformed opinion about a true tragedy within our country, continues to fuel my mission to bring light to the issues not being addressed within the reservation school system and way of life.

Due to these aforementioned experiences, I decided I would use my talents and skills to give back to the Native American community in any way I could. I am in my second year of teaching at Browning High School, in the heart of the Blackfeet Reservation in northwestern Montana. I moved 2,600 miles across the country to take this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to pursue my dream of working with Native American students. Taking this job was the most difficult decision I've ever had to make, but also the most rewarding. My job as the Choir Director at Browning High School is a challenge each and every day. Unlike a teacher back on the east coast, I am rarely praised for my hard work and long hours.

Despite the constant struggles and an overwhelming lack of support, I know I am making a difference. I have a small group of returning students that have stood by my side this year and I

can see improvements in their behavior. They have passion and hope. Veteran teachers in the district have told me I've gained respect and trust, both within the student body and with fellow teachers. It's a daunting task, but I moved to Montana to work with the Blackfeet people and give these children something worth fighting for. They've struggled for too long and I believe I can reach at least some of them through music.

The reason for pursuing a Masters degree with Dartmouth is deeply rooted in the traits that were passed down from my mother, who received them from my grandmother. We are caretakers and teachers, filled with passion and kindness. From a young age I have wanted to help people; only now am I realizing how I can make that dream a reality. By continuing my education with the MALS Program, I hope to become a voice and an advocate for Native American children. I listen to the struggles my students go through daily and I constantly ask myself what I can do to help. They need a way to break the vicious cycle of self-destruction and make their community see that they need help. I want to be the voice of reason for my students who don't have the courage or strength to stand up and demand respect – respect for self, others, community, and all things that make us human. I see the pain in their eyes and feel it in my heart. While these ideas are controversial, I truly believe that I can make a difference for these beautiful people if given the chance. A simple music teacher can make music and lift us up with song, but a song is not quite enough. The MALS Program will give me the tools I need to change the future of my resilient students and create a better life for Native Americans everywhere.

I have not yet figured out where this road will lead me. I plan to continue teaching music because it gives students an outlet through creative performance. Whether I work my way into an administrative position in education, move into social work, or continue educating the young people of this country, I know that the MALS Program will enable me to continue working with this community and help them. My research on the reservation system and whether or not it is aiding in self-sufficiency and success will give both tactical evidence to my cause and further fuel my passion for creating a better life for my students.

Research Proposal

Reservation life for Native Americans is equivalent to life in a third world country on many levels and the history leading up to this unfortunate situation should not be seen as anything other than a genocide. The civil rights movement may have lifted segregation for African Americans, but where is the justice for Native Americans? They are forced to live on barren, overpopulated, government-issued land because they have no choice. Years of government regulation have created a people nearly incapable of self-sufficiency.

I would like to research the downfall of the Native American reservation system and propose that the solution to the issues that plague our tribes lies within the idea of the reservation itself. My research will consist of finding a correlation between success of Native Americans in modern America and living outside of reservation boundaries, without the assistance of welfare and other reservation services. I would like to verify the connection between success and the amount of education an individual receives. Success is difficult to measure, but I would take into account yearly earnings, education, and a range of other things. Working within the Blackfeet reservation school district, I have seen first hand the innate tendencies of Native American families to live off food stamps and welfare and refuse to work, not because of a physical or mental handicap, but because the system allows it to happen.

I believe that in order to put a stop to the downward spiral Native Americans are caught in, we need to get rid of the reservation system as a whole. There is a double standard with Native Americans: tribes claim they are a sovereign nation, yet their people are not required to go through all the steps any other "foreigner" would in order to live, visit, or work in the United States. The reservation mindset is one of privilege and a false sense of security; it is skewed by years of segregation and discrimination. I propose that we get rid of the reservation system altogether and allow Native Americans to be treated as equal citizens of the United States of America. If tribes do not wish to take this opportunity, they should have to adhere to the same rules and regulations of any other sovereign nation. I am not saying we should take away the benefits that many of our tribes need, but rather that families should be held accountable for maintaining a productive and healthy lifestyle in order to obtain such services.

That is not to say the reservation land would be taken from the tribe. On the contrary, the land would be used as cultural centers for learning and preserving the Native American culture. Tribal colleges would still function and anyone wishing to live in the traditional way could choose to do so within the comfort and security of this land. Time and effort would be taken to clean up the communities and make these historical sites something to be proud of.