### Career Pathways Experience

Service has always been a prominent part of my life. Beginning in 2016, I have taken almost yearly trips to Tohatchi, New Mexico. Located within the Navajo Reservation, Tohatchi is home to St. Mary’s Mission. At 14, I was exposed to a vastly different culture to my own and given the opportunity to work among their communities. My experiences in Tohatchi brought to life my passion for service. A large component of these “Trips to the Mission” is youth development through bible school. Not only do children on the reservation live vastly different lives environmentally, their resources and opportunities vary from my own as well. Bible school is a chance to empower kids despite the difficulties embedded in their lives. From dance parties to arts and crafts, I gain a sense of fulfillment from encouraging young generations to embrace themselves and their capabilities.

From this passion has grown a strong interest in providing those in need with the resources they desire. Another aspect of my life encapsulating my interest in service is my current part-time position at the Sheakley Boys and Girls Club of Greater Cincinnati. My employment with a non-profit organization has fulfilled many of my personal values. Consideration, selflessness, love, and inclusion motivate me towards my goals. While working alongside children from struggling circumstances, I expanded these values through action. I am constantly working towards considering their point of view, especially how influenced their perspectives may be by their environments. Thus, I strive to make each members’ club experience full of love and acceptance. As one of our most vulnerable populations, children deserve a place they feel welcome, seen, and heard. Intrinsically, selflessness, or the concern for others' well-being, is encouraged. Above all else, I strive to include these values and interests in my future career.

Non-profit organizations are usually established with a form of service in mind. However, their services are not provided to seek profit. Whether services be “welfare provisions, education, community development, international relations, the environment, or arts and culture” (Anheier 4) to name a few, all efforts are driven by fulfilling a specific need rather than gathering the highest profits. In Helmut K. Anheier’s book titled *Nonprofit Organizations: Theory, Management, Policy,* he discusses different types of nonprofit work. From “service organizations like the Rotary Club” (Anheier 6) to “museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York” (Anheier 4), nonprofits serve a variety of audiences to provide several services. Their services can range from a local to national audience, establishing different relationships with society throughout each level.

As a current employee at a local-level nonprofit, I have grown to learn how the organization works towards fulfilling their mission. Mission statements are a “strategic management tool” (Pandey 2017) used by nonprofit organizations to advertise the purpose behind their work. As a Program Lead at the Boys and Girls Club, I have been an active part in fulfilling their mission “to enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, and responsible citizens” (BGCA). I would consider the nonprofit work I am engaged in part of the “human services” subgroup Anaheier mentions in his book. More specifically, my field of work is considered youth development. Over the last few months, I have learned more about not only the reality of day-to-day nonprofit work but how the organization functions at different administrative levels. For example, each Boys and Girls Club’s “leadership team” is composed of a Director, Program Coordinator, and Education Coordinator. I gained some insight on how non-profit leadership can function after conducting an interview with my club’s Program Coordinator, Sage Knight.

Working in a non-profit dedicated to youth development has added new components to my professional goals. Regardless of which career pathway I pursue, I plan to dedicate at least a portion of my efforts towards youth development initiatives. Working alongside youth has improved my ability to understand how points of view and ways of life can differ within the same community. Another benefit, as noted by my supervisor, is being part of “the journey of our older members who are working towards high school graduation” (S. Knight, interview, March 21, 2024). Staff are dedicated to ensuring club members not only recognize but reach their fullest potential. In her experience, Knight notes kids are more than willing to learn, to express themselves, and to grow, but they need the necessary resources to do so. However, the non-profit world today struggles with understaffing, underfunding, and overwork.

Every career pathway comes with challenges. In terms of youth development non-profit work, a large challenge is staff retention. An inability to keep staff for “the long haul” tends to weaken an organization’s ability to communicate, organize, and fulfill the needs of their audiences effectively. Because of the non-profit sector’s struggle with maintaining consistent staffing, volunteers are often sought to alleviate the workload. Knight offers advice to those interested in non-profit work by encouraging networking and connection. She said, “I promise you that there is no one who works in non-profit work that doesn't want to talk about the cause they are passionate about!” (S. Knight, interview, March 21, 2024). In other words, my degree is not necessarily required to pursue work in the non-profit sector. If you carry a passion for service, the non-profit sector is a fitting profession.

In terms of using my degree to pursue a career, I must obtain a bachelor's degree to enter my desired legal profession. Beyond my degree, I must pass the LSAT, or the Law School Admissions Test. After I graduate with a Juris Doctorate degree, I must take the bar exam to become a licensed attorney. According to U.S. News, the median salary for lawyers is $135,740. Many affluent attorneys work for wealthy individuals and corporations. Financially, I strive to achieve financial freedom. Coming from a middle-class family as a first-generation college student, the desire for financial stability has always been a priority. My end-goal of becoming an attorney should aid me in achieving my financial goals. Beyond finances, pursuing a career as an attorney fulfills my passion for service through law. In the most ideal career, I would practice criminal law as a prosecutor.

Preparation for the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) can be extensive. On average, 3 months' worth of studying is required to manage a sufficient score. Throughout my research, however, I have discovered several resources meant to provide practice tests, tips, and strategies for completing the test. One resource I have utilized during my time at UC is the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC). Ironically, considering my alternative career choices, the LSAC is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of “law and justice by promoting access, equity, and fairness in law school admission” (LSAC). As an online resource, the LSAC provides services meant to aid students in choosing a law school, applying for the school, and preparing for the LSAT.

My LSAT score can influence which law schools accept my application. Beyond my four years of law school, however, the LSAT score holds less value. From the *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies,* Richard Sander and Jane Bambauer discuss the impact social class, law school prestige, and law school performance have on career success. From their research, they discovered a “consistent theme that performance in law school—as measured by law school grades—is the most important predictor of career success” (Sander, et al). Despite their conclusions, aspiring law students tend to anchor their priorities in how “elite” a law school is considered. The Law School Admissions Council reports “when students are deciding between schools of even modestly different levels of eliteness, ranking tends to drive decisions” (LSAC). As an aspiring law student myself, I concur with most students surveyed, as I have placed great emphasis on the prestige of the schools I will eventually apply to and attend. By engaging in my career pathways research, I have been able to shift my perspective towards what even associates at large firms consider most important: excelling in law school, regardless of location.

In addition to striving towards maintaining a solid GPA throughout law school, I can also tailor my course schedule towards a specific field of law. My original plans included pursuing criminal law. I have been on the victim’s side of a few criminal cases and both losses fueled my passion for being a voice for the voiceless. I work towards correcting wrongs or filling needs, which are both qualities of a prosecutor. In one review essay titled On Becoming and Being a Prosecutor, the author notes a prosecutor’s “goal is not merely to ‘win’ but also to see that ‘justice is done” (Belsky). My motivation towards service has always closely aligned with my desire for social justice. Above all else, I hope to provide justice in some way, shape, or form to those facing injustice. Another field of law offering the opportunity for justice is civil rights. According to the LSAC, full-time civil rights attorneys often work in non-profits organizations. Pursuing this field of law could conjoin my career interests.

Another potential career pathway I could include in my future is politics. My grandpa, Earl Schmidt, dedicated most of his life to the political world. In Reading, the town I grew up in, my grandfather served as Mayor. In total, his career consisted of 12 years serving on city council, nine years as Mayor, and two years as the President of Council. His experience included several interactions with high-ranking politicians, including past President Bill Clinton. Hearing of the impact he had on the community that built me has fascinated me since childhood. When interviewed for my research, my grandpa had several pieces of wise advice for how his career impacted his life and for those considering a career in politics. With an early interest in government, my grandfather “wanted to be part of the role government has in making the city a better place to live for its residents” (E. Schmidt, interview, March 31, 2024). Alongside my values like consideration and inclusion, patience and open-mindedness are attributes I place high value on. True understanding is only achieved by listening openly and being patient with someone’s ability to respond. My grandpa noted the same traits as helpful in this line of work, emphasizing how you use the information people choose to offer. He commented, “compromise and understand that even if things aren’t done exactly how you imagined, they can still work” (E. Schmidt, interview, March 31, 2024). Politics seems to provide the necessary opportunities to use my values and interests to their fullest potential.

However, the act of implementing my values into the political world could be difficult. Through my own personal observation, I have noticed a growing divide in the political landscape of the United States. The growing distance between political parties is not a new concept, however, and has been a work in progress over the last 40 years. As Christopher Hare and Keith T. Poole note in The Polarization of Contemporary American Politics, differing perspectives of the everchanging social and cultural issues of our nation separated major political parties. More specifically, “the end result is that the Democratic and Republican parties have become more ideologically homogeneous and are now deeply polarized” (Hare, et al). Working in such polarizing circumstances poses roadblocks for implementing policy. With a lack of compromise in contemporary politics, which differs from the “era when DC politicians from opposite sides of the aisle could come together to have a drink, share a joke, and even occasionally pass legislation” (Hare, et al) working among all members of the political spectrum may be a more difficult, long-lasting process. Politics, as my original career interest, has motivated me to make positive change within my community but in today’s climate I am faced with an extra challenge in attempting to alleviate the polarization.

In high school, I was directly exposed to polarization in politics. As a junior, I was recruited by my personal finance teacher to advocate for Senate Bill 1. The main goal of the legislation was to require Ohio high schools to provide students with a personal finance course throughout their four years. The course must be stand-alone from other courses to ensure the curriculum is being used appropriately and thoroughly. The process began by meeting regularly with an Ohio Senator to discuss adjustments policymakers had suggested. I was experiencing firsthand the discourse needed to finalize a piece of legislation. We traveled to the Statehouse in Columbus on a few different occasions to discuss and adjust the legislation to ensure it was as effective as possible. Once details were finalized, three of my fellow students and I provided our own personal statements regarding how personal finance has impacted our lives. As the bill entered the testimonial portion of the legislative process, I shared with the Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee my experience as a first-generation college student who benefitted from the curriculum of a personal finance course. This committee included members from both ends of the political spectrum who carry different experiences and perspectives. I fielded questions from committee members to encourage their ability to compromise and pass Senate Bill 1. As of 2022, our bill was passed with an almost unanimous vote. Now, students in Ohio will receive an education in financial literacy and will be more prepared for their lives after school.

Regardless of the challenges I may face when pursuing my career, I feel more prepared following my extensive research. Following undergraduate school, I will begin my preparation for the LSAT. I have researched the potential timeline for my test prep, have found prep courses, and am working towards finding a school best-fitting for my goals. In some ways, these career pathways I have interest in can work together. During my research, I have decided it is possible to achieve goals in all three career pathways. Volunteering in non-profits, or even representing them legally, securing my Juris Doctorate degree, and incorporating political advocacy are goals I can work towards throughout my post-graduate life. In many ways, these career pathways emphasize and require the values and interests I carry. My passion for service, inclusion, consideration, patience, and open-mindedness are used within each of these careers. Despite whichever career takes precedent, my research has shown my career interests can and will align with what I find important.

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