

# Personal Statement

## Matthew Kowalski

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During my sophomore and junior years at Michigan State University, I had the opportunity to be a resident assistant. Perhaps the most significant impact of this position was the extent of training that it provided on diversity and the challenges facing underrepresented groups in higher education.

As a resident assistant, I was assigned a group of students and tasked with ensuring their safety, helping them to build a strong community, and providing education on diversity and inclusion. In order to be an effective educator, I underwent a two week training before each school year and received supplemental training on various topics each week during the year. With this knowledge, I organized and ran events on campus focused on presenting resources available to minority groups and on educating students about different cultures. Some events included trivia nights on important women in history, Black History Month presentations, and general resource fairs. I also helped organize and run events with student organizations like the black caucuses and the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA). The most notable of these was a week-long celebration of the Chinese New Year. In addition to cultural events, I was instrumental in planning academic events, such as "Cupcakes, Canines, and Cramming" which provided students a study session with cupcakes and therapy dogs during finals week. These events kept me educated on diversity issues and provided me with strategies to educate others.

In my position, I also dealt with students during difficult times, such as mental breakdowns, alcohol and drug incidences, and relationship challenges. These experiences have shown through in my teaching and patience with students. When I was a teaching assistant, I often found students struggling with the material because of outside circumstances in their life. Using my training, I had patience, listened if they wanted to talk, and offered resources that could help, before gently guided them through the material. As a teaching assistant in graduate school, this patience will help me to connect with and better support students. Furthermore, my time as a resident assistant has proven helpful in my personal life when communicating across cultural differences. In graduate school, I hope to apply this experience with my colleagues so that I can build lasting and productive relationships.

In addition to my diversity knowledge, I would like to note the impact that COVID-19 had on my application. This fall semester, I accepted a research position at KU Leuven, Belgium, working with Dr. Bosmans and her interdisciplinary medical physics and computational mathematics group. The group is focused on the optimization of a psuedo-3D model observer for emerging 2D mammography applications. My project was to build a generative adversarial network to simulate breast lesions and conduct virtual clinical trials. The project would have been evaluated by a paper, similar to a master's thesis, reviewed by Dr. Bosmans and two of her colleagues, along with a public oral presentation and defense. Unfortunately, the program was cancelled due to concerns regarding COVID-19 and I was unable to go.