

Coming to the University of North Dakota in 2019 for my freshman year I thought I had my entire life planned out. I thought I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life and began to write out the next 5 years of my life. As determined as I was I wanted to succeed, I wanted to push myself and start the career I thought I had wanted for myself as soon as possible. But the University of North Dakota had a different plan for me. At the time I didn't know my journey at the University of North Dakota would start to pave the way for a career path that I truly feel like I have been called to follow.

Coming into the University of North Dakota with 53 college credits from post secondary options from my college preparatory highschool put the pressure on me to decide the career path that I thought I needed to stick with in college. I knew I had close to two years of college already completed and would be jumping right into my junior level classes. My start at university was not as smooth as I had planned. I found myself doubting the career path I had chosen for myself as I didn't find it as fulfilling as I thought it would be. I knew from a young age working with children I wanted to work in pediatrics. I always had a strong desire to help others and always wanted to apply that desire into my future career. So when a career fair came to my high school and I was accidentally placed into the room for Occupational Therapy I felt immediately like that was what I wanted to do. Underprepared but yet ambitious I dove right into my freshman year meeting with my advisor to start my application into the doctoral program. The stress of juggling my freshman year, moving away from home for the first time, meeting new people, and living the college experience weighed heavily on me. I felt for the first time the plan I had made for myself maybe wasn't the plan that was meant to be for.

The idea of Occupational Therapy was always appealing as I wanted to help others but the desire I had within myself never felt completed. For years leading up to coming to university

I began working with various different organizations that helped advocate for pediatric cancer. That is where I found my passion. I saw something I didn't like, children fighting cancer only receiving 4% of national government funding towards cancer research, and decided I was going to fight for them. I began to form relationships with fighters and survivors through a project in my senior capstone class where I personally had the opportunity to meet and hear stories about why these children feel like they deserve more than four percent of funding. From listening to their stories and forming relationships I knew I had to do something to continue this passion of helping others and more specifically helping others in their journey with pediatric cancer.

I first heard about Child's Life Speciality and how it might be an option for a career path for me when I messaged a family I grew close with who had a 13-year-old fighting cancer. At the time, I started to doubt if occupational therapy, the career I was currently pursuing at the University of North Dakota, would be the right fit for me. The mother of the daughter who I formed a close relationship expressed to me that the largest impact on her daughter's treatment from professionals was through counseling and the child's life specialty program. I never thought that this career would be a part of rehabilitation in someone's journey until that moment. I began to do my research and I discovered a whole new career option that I felt compelled to look into. So immediately I called my advisor and decided to switch my major as I felt that was the best option for me. Immediately after I began my path to pursue an education in child life, I was so excited for my next adventure. I was determined. I was ambitious. I want to work in this field as I feel so passionate about it. I want to help others who might not be able to understand what is going on or why things happen. I want to make a difference and be an understanding and helpful individual. I decided in order to get to this goal it was time to buckle down on my education. I started taking extra credits, looking for internships, and my next steps in my education career.

Before I knew it, I was graduating in two years with my bachelor degree in a degree I felt excited about. Instead of feeling doubt and stress I was excited, I am excited to apply to graduate school and hopefully perusal this dream of mine.

I feel like in a short amount of time I have accomplished a lot. I am the type of individual that will do anything in my own power to achieve the goals I have set for myself. After being given the opportunity to graduate two years early I set my next goal to finish the courses needed to become a child's life specialist and then apply to graduate school. I continue to set myself up with the right resources to better myself to achieve my goals. For example, for my RHS internship I decided to choose an agency that was a little bit more challenging for myself. I decided to work at a pediatric therapy and childcare center where I was an early childhood educator for a group of 2 year olds where many of the young children were in foster care. Day in and day out I gotta watch my little students receive their rehabilitation and therapy needed to better themselves and help them understand why they may be acting the way they were. Many of the children at such a young age had behavior problems and with the help of the therapists at the facility the children slowly learned how to deal with their actions and behavior. Their therapists were great in providing helpful tips and recommendations that the teachers, including myself, got to use in the classroom to help out the students. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to get to experience this. I also have the opportunity to observe childhood development everyday at my current job where I hold the position of a teacher aide at a child care center in the infant room. I get to watch everyday as the children reach new milestones and grow. These experiences have taught me about development in children both physically and mentally, but also with the help of others as well through observation of therapy and the practice of implementing it myself in my classroom.

Another resource that has been super helpful for me in achieving these goals is my new journey with Dance Marathon at the University of North Dakota. This year I have decided to take on the position on the executive board as hospital relations. I get to work directly with children and their families at the children's hospital to advocate for them. This journey is giving me more experience in a field I want to go into as well giving me an opportunity to give back to such an important cause. Through this leadership position I have been able to observe the work of certified Child Life Specialists as I get to work directly with them as I act as a liaison for the families involved with our organization and our local children's hospital. I have been given the opportunity to get to ask questions to Child's Life Specialist, tour the local children's hospital, and even get to meet some of the kids and hear how Child's Life has impacted them. This has allowed me to be more informed about this field and has ultimately has made me more excited about my future in Child Life.

I want to help others. I want to make a difference. The plan that has fallen into place for myself might not have been the plan I originally thought but it is proving to be the right plan for myself. I am looking forward to hearing the status of my application as my next goal for myself is getting into the graduate program in Applied Child and Adolescent Development. I can see myself in the near future working at a children's hospital as a Child Life Specialist getting to serve others and grow relationships with my patients and their support systems. I am excited to learn and grow in this field to be able to give back in such a meaningful way. The journey ahead of me is an exciting one, I can't wait to see what goal of mine I can tackle next.