

Obinna Akano, MPH

Student in the DrPH Program

Concentration: Epidemiology

Approaching Public Health Education from a Global Perspective

What brought you to the field of Public Health?

While a graduate student in Optometry, I had the pleasure of working for the Non- Governmental Organization, Humanitarian Exchange Liaison Project (HELP). With them, I implemented a community health outreach and vision-screening program in the southeastern part of Nigeria. Many of the people we served lived in remote rural areas with low socioeconomic status, and almost no access to healthcare services. This was an eye opener for me. I was struck by the extraordinarily detrimental effects of poverty on the wellbeing, nutrition, and lifestyle of rural-dwelling Nigerians. What I saw in the field inspired me to seek funding so that I could distribute educational materials on nutrition and Vitamin A capsules. Sight and Life in Switzerland, an international humanitarian nutrition initiative, provided this support, and made my fieldwork in Nigeria a life changing experience. While I went on to work as an Eye Care Practitioner in Brooklyn for a couple of years, the seed of love for international Public Health was sown in me.



What made you choose SUNY Downstate for Public Health?

The choice of SUNY Downstate was an easy one to make. I became interested in health disparities work as an MPH student at Mt. Sinai, and I knew that SUNY Downstate would be ideal for my doctoral studies since it is at the forefront of research and education aimed at reducing health disparities among minorities. SUNY Downstate is central to a large and diverse immigrant population, and it attracts a diverse faculty and student body with different experiences and backgrounds. The reasonable cost of education at SUNY Downstate has also been a great benefit. The low student/faculty ratio makes learning more personalized, and the faculty encourages proactivity both in the classroom and the field. It has been a great decision for me.

What kind of work do you hope to do after completing your Public Health degree at Downstate?

Studying at SUNY Downstate SPH has prepared me with quantitative and qualitative research tools that can be used to narrowing the gap in health disparities, especially in underserved and minority communities. Most developing countries are in high need of Public Health practitioners and that is where I intend to offer my services. I plan to be an educator, and to conduct research on rising problem of chronic diseases in developing countries. My ultimate goal is to develop cost effective prevention programs to improve health and quality of life of underserved populations in developing nations.