

Elizabeth Hernandez

Reflection Paper: Opening

I was born and raised in Los Angeles, CA in the neighborhood of Wilmington—a 9.14 square mile region surrounded by the third largest oil field in the U.S., about 8 refineries, and the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. My hometown community is known for its rich Hispanic Chicano culture, the Arts, and Mr. Phineas Banning considered by many as the “Father of the Port of Los Angeles.” Sadly, my hometown is also known for its high crime rates, ongoing gang violence between the Eastside and Westside, graffiti markings, methamphetamine usage by the youth, and an increase in homelessness. Despite the reputation of Wilmington, it’s my home and it remains a special place for me. My interest in public administration dates to my childhood as a member of the Wilmington Boys & Girls Club. I was a natural learner and youth leader, always curious to know what the director was doing so that I could pick up on leadership characteristics and be like him one day. I was a leader then and I am a leader now. Growing up, I was classified low income with limited resources, yet I was always willing to help my peers in any way I knew how. I wanted everyone to be included and I wanted everyone to *feel* included.

As an adult now, I continue to lead with my heart and be an advocate for my community and disadvantaged students. I want to continue to develop my leadership skills and learn to be a researcher. My reasons for pursuing a DPA are personal—First, although I’ve always love learning, during my high school years, I became distracted with drugs and “so-called” friends. They had a lot of influence over me and by the time my senior year came, I was not eligible to graduate. The decision to dropout was easy and there was little to no emphasis from my parents

to continue my education. I eventually returned to college, and committed myself to earning an education, but I returned as a student-parent. By the time I earned my associate's degree and GED when I was 27 and my children were 4 and 2 years old. I went on to earn my bachelor's degree and my master's degree. I was your non-traditional student, a parent and a first-generation student who was also the first in my family to earn a college education out of my 4 siblings. I'll be the first to admit it, I made some bad decisions, and for many years I felt shame, but I now know that my past does not define me, it was never supposed to. So here I am, pursuing a DPA to acquire the necessary skills to lead the next national model non-profit organization. Through my education, professional experiences, and personal experiences, I want to learn to put practice to theory to research. I want to be an exemplary student, and I want to continue to inspire people who come from similar backgrounds as myself, plus, I am still leading my children Aziza and Gabriel who are now 19 and 16 years old.

Yes, I want to not only become a scholarly practitioner and produce my very own original dissertation, but I want to actively contribute to the field. I'm not sure how or when right now, but I believe that I will be equipped during my training in the DPA program.

Topics of Public Administration that are of interest to me are the following:

- Air Pollution in the Los Angeles region
- Technology & Workforce Development for marginalized youth
- Port of Los Angeles & its contribution to the local Economy, Workforce Development, and Sustainability

- Defining Community Engagement, Access & Equity to members of the community of
Wilmington, CA

I believe my strengths as a prospective scholarly practitioner are my love for learning and my strategic approach with my time, energy, and mental health. I'm also comfortable with asking for assistance when I don't understand something and most importantly, I *do* want to become a scholarly practitioner.

The possible challenge that I foresee is feeling guilty for saying "no" to my husband and my family when they invite me to family events when I need to work on materials for my DPA program, but I fully understand that in order to achieve my academic and professional goals, I have to make temporary sacrifices.