

## **2016: Rebecca Hodge, Emory University, Master of Public Health, Environmental Health and Epidemiology**

Now in its third year, the Dr. Charlena Seymour Scholarship to recognize and reward exceptional women pursuing an advanced degree in Public and/or Environmental Health turned out 27 applicants. They hailed from 8 countries, attending 16 universities in 13 states; 22 pursuing a Master's and 5 seeking a Doctorate. Degree programs were mostly within Public Health, some with concentrations such as Epidemiology, Community Oriented Practice, and Communication & Marketing. Other programs were Medical Sociology, Environmental Health, Occupational & Environmental Health, Urban & Regional Planning/Environment & Land Use, and Social Work/Public Health dual-major. We at the AEHS Foundation and Dr. Seymour herself were again very moved by the incredible level of qualification of the applicants and their determination to be successful in the public and environmental health fields in order to make the world a better place. Each had her own personal story and history of how she arrived at her choice to pursue an advanced degree in the field, some overcoming great adversity in their lives. All applicants had a strong dedication to high standards both academically and professionally, a commitment to helping her fellow human being, a vision of leadership, unique personal circumstances and experiences, and glowing references. Therefore, it was no easy task for our seven-member national committee to come to a decision.

This year, we proudly award the Dr. Charlena Seymour Scholarship to Ms. Rebecca Hodge. Her passion for public health and disease began through her high school's Science Olympiad team as she read material on the subject. In her senior year, she examined possible links between malaria and deforestation in Africa, and has gone on to be involved in several other studies and projects. Ms. Hodge has since made habit of seeking out summer, internship, and study abroad programs to gain experience and enrich her education: going to Haiti in 2012 where she engaged with patients to teach them about diagnosis, treatment, and prevention; the Summer Institute for Training in Biostatistics at Emory; her study abroad to Denmark where she published a paper on breast cancer and mammographic density in Copenhagen; her internship at the Antimicrobial Resistance Unit of the World Health Organization's Regional Office for Europe, which sparked new interest for her in the relationship between water, sanitation, and antibiotic resistant bacteria; her work as a summer ORISE fellow at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia in the Tobacco and Volatiles Branch's molecular microbiology lab; and her time as a research assistant in the Center for Global Safe WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) at Emory, where she wrote a literature review regarding WASH in natural disasters and emergencies. This past May, she went to Peru to work on her thesis, studying how chemical and microbial drinking water quality affects infants' gastrointestinal health. Ms. Hodge plans to work closely with others in her field, both teaching and being taught, and to have a positive impact in her local and global community. She received a Bachelor's in Biology, is currently working on her MSPH, and also intends to complete a doctoral program following her Master's.

Her references were positively glowing, all using words to describe her such as intelligent, hard-working, professional, respectful, confident yet humble, driven, curious, focused, consistently prepared, pleasant to work with, and a natural leader. One even stated that

"[t]he description of the award could have been written with Rebecca specifically in mind." She is said to go above and beyond the vast majority of other students pursuing similar degrees in order to gain experience in the fields she studies.

We have been proud and excited to award an exceptional woman each year to assist her with her studies, and look forward to continuing in the coming years.

Sierra Pelletier, Program Assistant, AEHS Foundation, Inc.

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