New York University: Academic Purpose

Motor development is pivotal to essentially all experiences in early childhood. In the first years of their life, infants gain knowledge incredibly rapidly; this learning, and learning to learn in general, is inherently tied to perceptual-motor experiences. Yet, there is still much we do not know about what may help or hinder early motor learning, or *why* infants engage in the behavior that they do. Currently, my research focuses on the use of modified ride-on cars by children with disabilities as a means of engaging in self-directed mobility. In pursuing doctoral education at New York University, I aim to gain a deeper understanding of infant motor development, with an emphasis on natural locomotion and exploration. My long-term career goal is to serve as an academic researcher at the intersection of child development and motor development, with a focus on how early mobility and exploration experiences influence development of infants and children with and without disabilities

In current pursuit of my career goals, I am presently earning my Master of Science in Kinesiology with an option in Adapted Physical Activity at Oregon State University. In the past year, I have excelled in my coursework and gained conceptual knowledge in child development, motor development, disability research, psychology, research methods, and public health. I have also served as a graduate teaching assistant for three different courses, including an undergraduate motor behavior course. Further, I was awarded a graduate research assistantship and a Schad fellowship, which was instrumental in allowing me to become immediately involved in numerous research projects in the Social Mobility Lab, directed by Dr. Sam Logan. Last year, I co-led an inclusive playgroup research study, where I oversaw a team of undergraduate research assistants in the collection of video-recorded data during playgroup sessions, and subsequent behavioral coding of these videos, data management and analysis. This research was presented at the Society for Research in Child Development and the Oregon Parenting Educators Conference, and also resulted in a multi-author publication in *Physical and Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics*, for which I was a primary contributing author. I am presently leading the development of a second manuscript from this playgroup project aimed at examining real-time associations between displacement and language experiences. Additionally, a major line of research within the Social Mobility Lab involves interventions in collaboration with Go Baby Go, a community-based outreach program that provides modified ride-on cars to children with disabilities for use as a powered mobility device. To this end, I was also a primary contributing author for a publication in *Pediatric Physical Therapy* that examined the effect of a 24-week modified ride-on car intervention on mobility for three young children with disabilities. For this project, I led the initial data analysis and interpretation, as well as the

manuscript preparation. Through this research, my kinesiology training has provided a strong foundation for research in developmental psychology, specifically regarding the impact of early perceptual-motor experiences.

As I continue my graduate education, I aim to deepen my knowledge of child and motor development in infancy and early childhood, improve my research and methodological skills, and refine my academic writing skills for the dissemination of research. Doctoral education at New York University under the mentorship of Dr. Karen Adolph presents itself as an ideal choice due to the strength of the program, opportunities for research, and NYU's overall commitment to cultivating an intellectual and collaborative environment. First, the curriculum would familiarize me with the broad areas of cognition and perception for typical development, while specializing my training in developmental psychology, therefore providing me with the tools and resources necessary to advance my research skills. Furthermore, Dr. Adolph's research has been instrumental in guiding my scientific thinking and research questions. In reference to the modified ride-on cars, I frequently return to research questions related to the flexibility and/or specificity of learning: What experiences or skills learned in the modified ride-on car are transferable, if any, to outside of the car? Do children with disabilities explore their environment in ride-on cars the same way a typically developing crawler or walker would, and does this change as children grow more skilled in using the ride-on car? As such, my research interests align well with many of Dr. Adolph's lines of research, and my research skills would benefit tremendously under her guidance. I am particularly interested in the flexibility of learning in infant skill acquisition and exploring the drivers and constraints of natural locomotion and exploration. I see the focus on research at NYU as a major benefit of the program, and I am excited by the seemingly numerous opportunities, both in Dr. Adolph's lab specifically and within the department as a whole. Through seminars, journal clubs, and workshops, it is clear that New York University values intellectual and professional development, and I see great potential in pursuing doctoral education there.

Graduate school has been incredibly fulfilling, and my experiences at Oregon State have left me with no doubt that academia is the right path for me. In short, I love my own research, but I also love everything about higher education - talking through peers' ideas with them, attending seminars in other fields, and engaging in thoughtful discussion in the classroom, to name a few. I am confident that doctoral education at New York University under the mentorship of Dr. Karen Adolph would afford me with the resources necessary to achieve my aims, helping me to become an interdisciplinary, translational researcher. Thank you in advance for your consideration.