### Sample 1 (893 words)

During the first year of my undergraduate degree, I took a small course entitled “Third World Development” taught by three rather radical and lively professors from Trinidad, Chile, and Lebanon, respectively. This course, despite its passé title, existed to deconstruct our notions of ‘otherness’ by illustrating the deep connectedness of issues, people, and nations. This theme of ‘connectedness’ is threaded through my research and work history under various labels and theories. My undergraduate research was dedicated to understanding the ways and means of political participation for women in remote Northeast India. I became curious about the role of women as informal politicians within their small collectives where survival literally hinges on connectivity. My time in observation of these women opened me to the idea that health and wellness can emerge from places facing serious food insecurity, poor shelter, corruption, and long distances from the center of national power. The extent to which women could draw upon their collective power and roles as givers of care in order to lobby local governments and participate legitimately in the polity was the very definition of their empowerment.

During my graduate work at [x] University, public health approaches to vulnerable populations were of particular interest to me. It became clear, during my fieldwork with care providers for women who sell sex and do high-risk drugs in downtown eastside, that vulnerable populations around the world often have more in common with each other than with the ‘dominant’ or non-excluded populations. My research led to my questions about the role of social capital, defined in this case as a public good comprised of relationships and networks, in leading to better health outcomes amongst highly-marginalized urban women. The mechanisms through which both groups of women, in Northeast India and downtown Vancouver, became able to rely on or reject peers, givers of aid or care, and the social and political systems in which they were enmeshed, are very similar. I have witnessed how health outcomes can be a partial function of connectedness for women on the periphery.

Public health has proven the best venue through which I can search for explicit, concrete evidence that individual and population welfare can be socially determined, by access to and power to make choices regarding housing, education, employment, income, political participation, nutrition, and transportation. I see the centrality of connectedness, to institutions and peers, to the processes that enable an individual to access, choose, and influence. My current work as a policy analyst with the Public Health Agency within the Strategic Initiatives and Innovations Directorate is focused largely on reducing health inequalities by mobilizing action on particular social determinants of health. While this work is important and generally on point, I suspect that the United States and Canada may benefit from exploring the micro-level ‘enablers’ of change with respect to the social determinants of health. These enablers, including social networks as a form of social capital, are sometimes lumped, and incorrectly so, with the more tangible determinants, such as housing and nutrition. I see these enablers as characteristics of favorable environments in which health can be positively affected: in families, neighborhoods, schools, communities, etc.

My proposed dissertation research would fall into the broader goals of studying the social mechanisms by which parental social connections impact the eating behavior of their children as well as the way in which these mechanisms may vary across local neighborhoods. My particular interest is the potentially causal nexus between maternal social networks, neighborhood environments, and the transmission of eating behaviors to children. In effect, my role would be to help operationalize maternal adversity and identify potential moderators on the effects of maternal adversity on obesity and eating behaviors of children.

I am drawn to [x] University School of Kinesiology and Health Studies specifically due to Dr. Spencer Moore’s background in medical anthropology and current work with social network analytic techniques. The application of network theory analytical techniques will be a new endeavor for me, but I am attracted to the study of populations that are not necessarily bound by their geography but by common circumstances, such as maternal adversity, and, potentially, common health effects related to obesity and food behaviors. I want to understand the links between the nature and degree of ties between low-income women and how these ties affect norms related to obesity and food.

The School of Kinesiology and Health Studies is an excellent institution that is well-equipped to support new graduate students interested in innovative ways to explore social challenges. It is here that Dr. Moore is developing an important critical mass surrounding this particular way of examining social networks as enablers of obesity and food behavior outcomes among marginalized women and their young children.

My prior individual research experiences were qualitative in nature, relying on grounded theory and warranted assertion analysis techniques common to sociological research. I have experience as a research assistant on a larger project studying large, linked quantitative databases of provincial health and corrections data in my home state. Also, I have a sufficient course work history in statistics and epidemiology to be able to make the leap to more advanced quantitative techniques, given access to graduate courses on the subject. Social network analysis is a fascinating way of quantifying social capital and social networks and I am very enthusiastic about the opportunity to study these methods and methodologies under Dr. Moore.

### Sample 2 (993 words)

As a child of Bangladeshi refugees who fled from war, famine, death, and other horrors I myself have never had to face, I was always attracted to the hidden facts behind the grand narratives of history; the little stories of small people who didn’t leave an impact on major world events but lived, breathed, and worshipped just the same. My parents left everything behind in Bangladesh – their papers, property, lands, family, and friends. It was an erasure of not only their personal history but the history of generations who came before them. As I grew up, I became passionately interested in the history of my ancestors, perhaps as a way of making sense of my own experiences as a second-generation immigrant. I remember how once in grade school, we had to prepare a “family tree” project with the names and photos of our parents, grandparents, and so on. My mother started crying when I asked her for these details and photos; it was a traumatic reminder of all she had lost. I consider this genealogical tree my first history project, as I combed through the internet using the meagre information my mother gave me to supplement my bare project board with a few details. The internet wasn’t very helpful and, needless to say, I proved unsuccessful in finding any information. But it fueled a passion in me for finding out all about where I had come from, and from there, I developed my interest in the social, cultural, military, and economic history of south-east Asia.

I pursued this interest all the way to college, majoring in history with a minor in anthropology, and it was in my undergrad years that my general interest in the history of south-east Asia crystallized into an interest in the politics of historical interpretation, especially in regard to women in pre-modern south-east Asia. The history of women’s spaces, especially under patriarchal regimes, fascinates me; how oral traditions develop to combat lack of literacy, how their social roles shift and change in response to military and economic developments, and finally, how these historical changes constitute the present. Specifically, I am deeply interested in how women’s spaces evolved as a result of colonial influences in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. I credit a wide range of authors, thinkers, and historians with molding my interests and refining my analysis. The latest papers by BW Anandya, Wazir Jahan Karim, and N Choi about the pathways to religious and political power for women in southeast Asia, profoundly opened up my mind to the possibilities for what we can learn from primary resources about these “lost” populations of history. On the other hand, the philosophical and sociological theories of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakrovorti Spivak, and Homi Bhabha provide the philosophical framework for how I approach my writing.

I have always followed my intellectual curiosity to take on challenging coursework and build a solid academic foundation for my intended pursuit of historical research. Apart from completing the most intensive coursework pertaining to Asian history studies in my department, I also took courses in British History, Postcolonialism, Anthropology, Philosophy, and Women’s Studies, so as to round out my understanding of the key topics related to my area of interest. My professor also allowed me to complete independent studies and research projects in selected areas of my interest such as African American history in Canada and History of Hebrew Scriptures. The study of such diverse historical topics helped to provide greater context to my primary area of interest; I found many interesting parallels between the experiences of oppressed populations in different parts of the world. Three of my papers were published in our university’s academic magazine, and I presented my paper on “Development of Oral Traditions in Women’s Spaces” at the Annual National History Symposium in X year.

In my junior year, I got the chance to write an independent research paper about the historical figure of Savitri Bai Phule, analyzing her community ties from 1920 to 1935, within the framework of Spivak’s concept of “strategic essentialism” and cross-cultural solidarity. This was a major milestone for me as I got the chance to work on my main area of interest while using primary resources on loan from University of Mumbai, including Savitri Bai Phule’s journals, historical Times of India newspapers, and more.

I would love to continue my research into these and other unexplored histories of women in south-east Asia as part of the master’s program at your university. With my personal background, academic proficiency, and focused historical interests, I think I represent an ideal candidate for ABC University. I look forward to working in an environment that encourages diversity, forward-thinking research, and cutting-edge investigative techniques. Your rigorous curriculum will help me refine my understanding of historical investigation methods and expand my consciousness of the cross-cultural socio-economic influences in pre-modern women’s spaces. As an aspiring PhD candidate, I would love to get the chance to tap into ABC University’s extensive network of primary resources, subject matter experts, and trailbreakers. In particular, I am very excited to work with Dr. Nina Gupta from the History of Southeast Asia department. I am in communication with her about her findings on historical distortion and its intersection with political agendas in colonial Southeast Asia, as it directly impacts the research I’d like to do. In fact, her encouragement and support motivated me to apply to your master’s program!

My next big goal is to pursue a PhD, also from your university, under Nina Gupta’s supervision. Through my master’s education, I plan to work towards developing my expertise in Southeast Asian women’s studies and making myself an asset for your PhD program. One day, I hope I can become a professor at a top university such as yours, so that I can continue my research into the rich and untapped veins of history just waiting to be investigated, and pass on my love for the subject to interested young minds.