

CENTER FOR EDUCATION IN HEALTH SCIENCES

STUDENT PROFILE



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- KATARINA DOBINDA

NAME:	Katarina Dobinda
PROGRAM:	Master of Science in Biostatistics
START DATE:	June 2022

Where is your hometown?

I grew up in Moldova, a small country in Europe. My mom got a US work visa, and I've been living in Florida since middle school. It was quite the transition from tropical Florida to Chicago, but I do like the winter.

What is your background in public health/global health?

I actually don't have a rigorous background in public health. I was always interested in biology, my bachelor's degree is in biological sciences, and I have a lot of research experience working in a wet lab, running DNA tests and so on. When graduation came up, I became more interested in public health and population, people-oriented fields. Coming from a more biological research-oriented background into what I'm doing now has been a really rewarding process.

Why did you choose the MS in Biostatistics program?

I started out as a pre-med student, but I realized I didn't have a strong drive to go to medical school and pursue that path. I've always known I wanted to pursue higher education beyond a bachelor's degree and obtain either a master's or PhD. As I was researching programs, biostatistics and other public health programs sounded really interesting and felt like they would be a good fit for my interests and goals.

Why did you choose Northwestern over other programs?

Northwestern has a renowned biostatistics program and was my top choice. My professors are leaders in their field and really great at what they do. My mom actually did a one-year program at Kellogg; going to Northwestern was always a dream of mine.

What is your area of study and focus?

My area of study is MS in Biostatistics, and my degree concentration is Statistical Methods & Practice. I wanted a strong foundational statistical basis, and I think the curriculum offers the most overarching view of biostatistics.

The quarter system is definitely really fast, but the amount of learning that you can get in such a short timeframe is amazing. I had a math minor and a solid mathematical background, and now I think I have a pretty strong statistical background – and it's only been 6 months.

What excites you most about this discipline?

A lot of these classes, for a field like statistics, focus on probability theory, statistical inference, and pure math topics like summations, algebra, and calculus. You're doing all of this and at one point it's kind of hard to imagine how any of this could be applicable in the biology field, in the medical field, or in a research paper. Then in the next class, they start to tell you all about the applications. They tell you like *this* is when I used this and this is *how* you use this, and *this is this* test.

The thing that excites me the most is definitely seeing how everything gets applied and then getting to make your own decisions from everything that you're taking from the data, being able to run your own tests and tell someone at the end of the day: your data was significant or that it wasn't. Helping out with that is really cool.

What has been your most memorable education experience in the program so far?

The biggest thing for me is the professors. The professors love what they do so much, they're so great in their fields, and you can tell how deep their knowledge runs. This isn't just something they randomly decided to do, this is something they're passionate about. I think

something that's so memorable is the fact that these professors are so personable, so nice, so humble, and always ready to answer any questions. I think everyone [in my cohort] is pretty tight knit with the professors, they hold a lot of meetings with program leaders to talk to our cohort and they're very personable and always willing to give their time and help us. I think that's something that a lot of people need to experience in their education, so I think it's really amazing.

What do you do in your free time?

I think I'm a bad person to ask this question. I live on the Evanston campus in the Engelhart Hall apartments. So, it is a bit of commuting [to the Chicago campus], but I really love Evanston. As a grad student, I don't have a lot of free time. But when I do, I'm one of two types of people – the first one, the homebody, I love staying home and watching movies.

One of my recent interests has been watching a lot of international movies and shows. I find it really cool that the cinema industry is different in each country. Seeing different cultures and ways of life from different countries is interesting. I've been watching a lot of K-dramas, Swedish shows, and Norwegian shows. I just like different types of cultures. The other thing I really like is coffee. In Evanston I love to explore new coffee shops and try different flavors and types of lattes. I'm still exploring, I really liked Philz when I first tried it, there was not a Philz in Florida. Philz has a really fun way of doing coffee. I also like Coffee Lab; I love a good syrup selection.

What do you hope to do with your degree in the future?

I really just hope to become a biostatistician. I think something that's interesting about the job, and just the career field in general, is getting to work on a lot of different research projects. You get to apply your knowledge to help someone out with their research that could potentially lead to something. I think that's really cool and definitely what I hope to do in the future. I hope to work on a lot of different research projects and work with a lot of different people and keep learning throughout my field—I think that would be really fun.

What advice do you have for students interested in applying to the program?

Good question. First of all, especially when you're applying to graduate school, make sure to research where you're applying. Go through that program's website, read through the expectations, and read through the requirements. If you don't fit a requirement but you really like the program, contact someone in the program for guidance. Once you go through that process and now, you're thinking "I really want to do Northwestern Biostatistics," then work on your statement of purpose and make sure it has something personable and says something about you. Definitely brush up on your calculus and mathematics knowledge -- you're going to need it.

One of the biggest things, regardless of graduate program, is the sense of feeling like a fish out of water or imposter syndrome. My advice is to keep trying. Get ready to learn a lot and keep asking lots of questions, and one day it will click. From talking with my peers, it's common to feel like things are going too fast or way more in-depth than you thought but it's something you can get past. You can keep trying, keep asking questions, and keep learning. That's my overall advice.