

UIUC Social Work Application Essay

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Reflections from the Author

This is the application essay I submitted to the University of Illinois to study social work. I used my own perception of the world via synesthesia to explain how I have been influenced to go into the social work field. Psychology Today states, “Synesthesia is a neurological condition in which when one sense is activated, another unrelated sense is activated at the same time. This may, for instance, take the form of hearing music and simultaneously sensing the sound as swirls or patterns of color” (2023).

I offer the reader an inside look into how my experiences show up for me in different colors and shades. Therapy and counseling are seen in a beautiful black color that offers hope like stars in a night sky rather than the darkness of the human condition. Learning to be compassionate to the world manifests itself in varying shades of blue. My desire to study social work – ocean blue. Aiding those in need- cerulean. Inequalities in the world- dark blue. Finally, applying the skills learned from the classroom – sapphire. My unique lens of the human condition will aid my work as a counselor in deepening my understanding on different and insightful ways.

Keywords: social work, synesthesia, compassion

About the author: *Kiera Collins is a senior majoring in Social Work. After completing her bachelor’s, Kiera plans on attending UIUC in the MSW program, concentrating in the mental health field. She hopes to work with those who are deaf and/or hard of hearing along with clients who are experiencing disordered eating.*

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My interest in social work is a product of my synesthesia. I view words, ideas, and my whole world in colors. I see the human condition and relationships between people and their environment in varying shades, heavily influenced by my feelings. My unique viewpoint shapes my sense of reality, which is where my desire to study social work emerged. I have a desire to help individuals and make a difference in their lives. I plan to take what I will learn at UIUC and use it to support others by working as a counselor.

I have learned to take this condition and turn it into a benefit that allows me to understand compassion. I have experienced therapy in black. Therapy is often related to the darkness of the human condition, but like the midnight sky, it offers hope as bright stars amid that darkness in the form of rehabilitation. I have learned to be more compassionate toward the world and others because of this beautiful black color. Why is this? Because the color brings out a deeper understanding. The color brings about ideas, theories, trains of thought, a connectedness with others and their experiences.

Learning to be compassionate was a necessary precursor for identifying my passion for social work. My craving for social work is blue - benevolent but powerful, resilient like the rolling tide of the ocean. I see cerulean as kind, energetic, and even commanding of change. I found I want to be cerulean in my efforts, lifting up the impoverished. My experience in Sociology 101 painted social work light blue. My desire to study social work materialized by turning my condition into a tool for understanding the world. My academic experiences opened my eyes to the disparities in the world, which only crystallized my desire to study social work. In sociology, we learned about wealth disparities, marginalized people, and inequalities, all in deep

blue- almost devoid of color, but just enough pigment to inspire hope. I developed a burning desire to help alleviate these inequalities turning dark blue into sapphire. Sapphire is brilliant and sparkles as if promising a bright future. One that enacts change and is a little kinder to those who need it.

My ability to see through a colored lens has led me to seek a career as a counselor. My desire to help others, fueled by a unique understanding of the human condition via color, is why I will be a great counselor. These colors often act as the reasoning or the logical explanation to the world and its shortcomings but also its strengths. Having this kind of insight will allow me to understand and guide my clients by their strengths and empathize where they have come from. UIUC's social work program will provide me with the opportunity to exercise this desire through blood drives, youth programs, and student-focused partnerships. Synesthesia helps me to embrace the principles of being a social worker, ultimately empowering me to create a better world.

References

Sussex Publishers. (2023). *Synesthesia*. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/synesthesia>