

Averi Hartford

Early in my life, I decided that I wanted to become a physical therapist, I stuck by this and actively made choices to help support my future career. I only looked at schools with undergraduate physical therapy programs and chose a great school I loved. I was able to get experience at an outpatient clinic my sophomore year, it was around this time that I realized I was not 100% sure that physical therapy was my future. I took an internship in the summer between my sophomore and junior year at a different clinic in hopes that it would help make me more confident in the path I was headed down. I spent the whole summer working and my feelings did not change, around this time I started to look at other options. After spending a summer shadowing at a speech-language pathology clinic with someone who specializes in working with children I knew I wanted to go into the profession. I found a way to obtain the credits I needed that were unavailable at Oregon State through a Post-Bacc program at the University of Oregon. This is how I became dual enrolled through both schools my senior year to graduate from OSU with a kinesiology degree while getting specific credits needed for graduate school. I was accepted into UO's graduate school earlier this April and accomplished my first goal.

While volunteering this year with Rocksteady Boxing, a boxing class for people with Parkinson's in Albany, I realized a new goal. I hope to create a program that incorporates different aspects of care for people with Parkinsons in Central Oregon. Having one place for newly diagnosed patients to get support physically and mentally can help alleviate early stress. I want to offer speech rehabilitation services and classes

while also finding others passionate about offering exercise classes and counseling opportunities. These classes are also a great way to socialize and a way for Parkinson's' patients to find a supportive community. Creating a community where doctors can send newly diagnosed patients to find support through different kinds of rehabilitation as well as an opportunity to build their community is beneficial. I saw firsthand how having a place three times a week to go work out holds others accountable and supports their mental health. This diagnosis can be extremely isolating at times, I want to offer a place that is welcoming and educational. During graduate school, I will gain clinical experience in hospitals with people with Parkinson's, and after graduate school, I will work in a specialized outpatient clinic to expand my knowledge while working on my overall goal.