

## *Personal Statement of Purpose*

- Use a unique and attention grabbing opening line.
- Don't write "I have always wanted to be a..." (Astronaut, doctor, or whatever). First, you haven't always been in existence (it's picky, I know). If you have always wanted to be a... write down the first time you realized you wanted to be a....
- Use graduate level language to describe undergraduate projects (For example, don't write, "I was a lab assistant working in the biology lab for a work study program"- Questions will arise such as "You 'were' and therefore had to do it and are no longer interested?" "You only did it to get paid?"")
- Use working titles such as "Dr."
- Use three names of faculty that are at your targeted institute. This shows an interest in the university. Corresponding with them is best. This can come about through the reading of their papers and writing questions to them about it.
- Show that you will be a good fit in the college. For example, "In reading the writings of Dr.s Smith, Jones, and Blah, I have come to discover that my academic interests and yours perfectly align."
- Talk about all the things you are GOING TO DO. Not just what you have done. Examples include research projects, travel.
- When writing about your experience at college, do not write, "I did..." but say "Under the supervision of..." This shows you are willing to assist as a Graduate Assistant and as a team member.
- Don't be afraid to include the names of major theorists or thinkers in your field to indicate you are familiar with their work.
- Write with confidence, assuming you'll be admitted.
- Write a prediction of your own success. Write as if you're going to succeed in life, even if you're not accepted.
- The Admission's Board is looking for the unusual, thoughtful, and mature. Don't try to be funny as it hardly ever works.
- When preparing, make a list of how you are unusual. Include one of these aspects in your paper. This will make you more memorable. The presenter stated that one girl got into medical school just because she was in a plane crash! BUT stand out; don't stick out.
- If somebody in your targeted field recommended that you pursue law school, med. school etc. include this fact and their name
- Get a faculty member to proof read and give advice on your statement.
- If your advisor's name will be recognized, include it.
- If you have connections to the university, mention them.
- Don't be arrogant. Instead of saying that you'll be their best student, say, "I would love to think..." or "I would love to be one of your best students..."
- Finish big with an outcome of your endeavor. "I predict that..." "I look forward to original research and participation in educating future generations..." etc.

\*\*\*The three most important things to include in your statement:\*\*\*

1. How the curriculum is a match for your interests. Very Important
2. Geography – Why you want to study in that geographical location. E.g. I love the heat, city, flat plains, humid weather, lots of people etc. Even though this was mentioned at the presentation, the subject never cropped up in any of my interviews or communications. I was told this fact at a presentation, but I'd only include it if the school you're applying to is somewhere extreme (ie middle of Alaska, or the desert). My school didn't need to know this.
3. Faculty's approach (get to know them and drop names). You can find out about their work on personal web pages and by looking at their resumes. Pick three faculty members and discuss why your path of study would make you a good match for them - especially if they have won grants; studying faculty is just as important as studying the program.

Some of the most prestigious activities that you can participate in as an undergraduate are:

- extended independent research projects
- research assistant to undergrad faculty—Corban doesn't really have these
- becoming published (even as an "et. al"). As I write this I'm in a graduate program that expects its grad students to be publishing at least one article a year. Even they don't expect undergrads to be published, so don't worry if you're not.
- It helps if you can get some teaching experience. The top grad schools are expecting their graduates to move on to a PhD program and then teach in large research / teaching universities. Even if you are not planning on staying in academia, teaching experience will allow you to apply for a teaching assistantship. In the universities I looked at, this equated to free tuition, free healthcare, and a stipend ranging from \$10,000 to \$15,000.

What faculty is looking for in your application essay:

1. They want to see that you will be a good fit in the program.
2. They want to see that you have an interest in academia.
3. Your chances may increase if you mention that you want to continue onto PhD studies
4. The admissions board may be more willing to accept you if you have some other source of funding (scholarships, Fellowships etc). This means that they don't have to fully fund you.

Other stuff

- Help them see why you should be admitted.
- Don't call, phone or contact any faculty member at your targeted institution unless you have read their work (it shows that you don't cut corners in life)

- How to get a ‘sneak interview’- Ask the institute if you can meet with alum from the department you are interested in. If the interview goes well, ask them to write a letter of recommendation to the institute
- If you are a ‘middle of the road’ candidate, ask for an interview if you believe you will come across well. Most institutes don’t ask for interviews.
- Previous problems can be overcome if they’re in the past, resolved and sympathetic.
- It looks good if you’ve been a research assistant or if you gave admissions tours (*no, I don’t know why either*)
- Acceptances and refusals will come out about April 16<sup>th</sup>. If you’re accepted, you’ll hear sooner. If you haven’t heard by April 1<sup>st</sup>, write a letter to remind them you’re still focused on getting in. Better still; get a faculty member to phone on April 6<sup>th</sup> to ask if you were successful. Feel free to write a “continued interest” letter sometime between your application and acceptance date to let them know what you’re doing. Also send mid-semester transcripts.
- Apply to at least 6 grad schools, ranging from the safe to those just in your reach. You should always have a back-up plan in case you’re not accepted to your first choice.
- The GRE is not necessary in certain situations, such as those with an exceptional IQ. Don Asher told me that Foreign Nationals are not required to take the GRE, but he was wrong. Check with the grad school first
- Applicants with a 4.0 GPA hardly get accepted as they tend to be arrogant and they fail to answer, “Why here?”
- Even students with low GPAs can get in if they are unique (example given was 2.8 GPA). Students who initially had bad grades may be accepted if they have shown that they have since improved.
- Email students on the graduate council for advice.

#### Personal statement tips

- Can only I write this?
- What about my personality is attractive or interesting?
- Evaluate in terms of who you are now.
- What makes you tick?
- Where I was and how you overcame
- Discussing disadvantaged background, interests, past activities
- 2 or 3 scenarios of where you want to go
- Discuss how school is strong in particular area, why important to your goals and interests
- Mention faculty
- How experience affected you
- Languages