YOUR NEXT STEP BEGINS HERE

Graduate School

wayne.edu/gradschool
The Personal Statement and Letters of Recommendation
Personal Statement

• This is a chance to *showcase* yourself:
  – Why you are the ideal candidate for the program
  – How prepared you are for the program
  – What unique skills and experiences you bring
  – How you will make the program proud
5 Parts to the Statement

• Personal introduction
• Scholarly pursuits
• Context of your achievements
• Relevance of your recent activities
• Academic interests and goals
Personal Introduction

• “I always wanted to be...”
• “Since I was a kindergartener, I’ve been interested in...”
• “It was not until xxxx that I developed a love of xxxx...”

Be honest even if it’s not the most exciting tale

• Because of this interest, explain that you want to study XXXX in graduate school
Scholarly Pursuits

• What have you done to prepare yourself for this direction?
  – Work in labs, scholarly pursuits, course of study?
  – Pursuing Honors program or research experiences?
  – Internships or other experiences to build knowledge and skills necessary for the degree?

• What did you learn from these experiences?
Context

• Are there circumstances that explain your academic/professional trajectory or “blips” in your record?
  – Economic, health, social, or educational disadvantages, including first-generation college student status

• Use these experiences to illustrate your persistence, stick-to-it-iveness, and “Can do” attitude
Context

- Can you contribute a unique perspective or approach based on obstacles or opportunities?
  - Ability to articulate barriers facing people from marginalized groups
  - Participation in higher education pipeline programs such as BUILD, IMSD, McNair Scholars, or summer research and internship programs;
  - Military service
  - Service in Peace Corps, Teach for America, AmeriCorps, City Year,
  - Service in campus life organizations and groups
  - Varsity Athletics
  - Significant travel experiences including Study Abroad

- Explain how you can contribute a unique perspective or approach based on both obstacles and opportunities
Relevance of Recent Activities

• If you graduated and worked prior to returning to graduate school, indicate what you’ve been doing
  – For-profit or non-profit, your work/design team, responsibilities, what you learned
  – You can also indicate how this helped you focus your interest in graduate studies
Academic Interests and Goals

• Why do you want to:
  – Pursue this field of study,
  – At this particular school,
  – With this particular faculty member(s)?

• What do you already know about the university/program/faculty that makes this an appealing place?

• What will you do with this degree and why is this a good fit for them and you?
Final Tips

• Write in an active, not a passive voice
  – e.g., Active: “I have taken the initiative” vs. Passive: “Initiative was taken”

• Demonstrate everything by example;
  – Don’t just say that you’re a persistent or motivated person. Provide evidence.

• Use a positive tone
  – If something important happened to you to affect your progress, show your perseverance despite obstacles

• Unless the specific program says otherwise, be concise
  – 500 to 1000 well-selected words (1-2 single spaced pages, 12 pt. font)
Letters of Recommendation

• Admissions committee can learn from colleagues:
  – Is the applicant prepared for the rigors of the graduate program?
  – Is the applicant truly interested in the program?
  – What’s it like to work with the applicant?
  – Are there any trusted explanations for underperformance or gaps in study?
Letters of Recommendation

• Who can answer these questions in a detailed and convincing way?
  – Professors with whom you’ve taken classes *IF* you have met with them and participated in class
  – Faculty with whom you’ve worked on research or scholarly projects
  – Supervisors of volunteer or work experiences
  – Generally, for Ph.D. programs, it’s best if at least 2 recommenders are faculty members
Letters of Recommendation

Develop a good professional relationship with your professors!

– Contribute to class discussions
– Visit office hours to ask questions of the professor
– Volunteer in labs that provide meaningful training experiences (beyond data entry)
– Spend at least a year in volunteer or research activities before adding another or moving on to a different one
Requesting Letters

October 15, 2017

Dear Dr. Garcia,

I am writing to ask if you would be interested and able to write me a strong letter of recommendation for Ph.D. programs in Clinical Psychology. I have really enjoyed being a research assistant in your lab these last 8 months and believe this experience has confirmed my interest in the field.

If you agree to write letters for me, I can send you my personal statement, CV, or any other materials that would be helpful to you. I can meet with you in person if that would be useful. Most of my deadlines are December 1.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Annmarie Cano
CONTACT US

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