



Programs | Graduate

Astronomy Graduate Program



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Graduate Overview

The UC Berkeley Department of Astronomy has a long history of excellence in the field of Astronomy; with our award-winning, renown faculty and access to numerous state-of-the-art **observing and research facilities**, our department consistently produces graduates who are positioned to become leaders and pioneers in their chosen fields. As one of the most **consistently top-ranked** graduate and PhD programs in the nation, we seek to maintain our reputation and continue our tradition of providing high-quality education by investing in our students and providing numerous opportunities for success.



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Program and Teaching

Our graduate program offers numerous **specialized courses** that examine topics that include interstellar matter, high-performance computing, Astrophysical fluid dynamics, and extragalactic cosmology and astronomy, in addition to access to numerous **weekly lectures** hosted by our in-house research units. Graduate students work alongside **faculty and researchers** oversee work across a wealth of Astronomy-related topics. In addition to extensive research experience, our students take on instructor positions to obtain valuable teaching experience by working with aspiring undergraduates.

UNDERGRADUATE

GRADUATE

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Research and Facilities

Research is a large component of the program and our students find themselves at the forefront of ongoing projects by obtaining research positions and conducting work to explore topics that include star, planet, and galaxy formation, supernovas, protoplanetary disks, galaxy clusters, and reionization history of the universe as a whole. Students have made significant scientific contributions that have garnered world-wide attention, including **discovering entire new solar-systems**, **locating the largest black holes to date**, **storms on other planets**, and **finding habitable planets**.

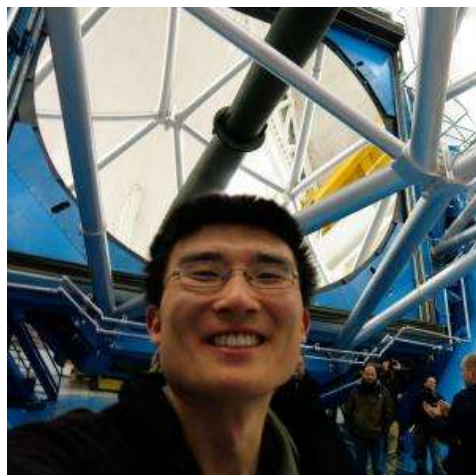


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Student Outreach and Collaborations

Outreach is a large part of student life; between science fairs, field trips, managing websites, summer courses, and other department-hosted events, students are able to share their love and knowledge of Astronomy with all generations of space enthusiasts. UC Berkeley also offers a number of student groups that allow for collaborations and networking opportunities.

Graduate Perspectives



Jason Wang, Fifth Year

"I really enjoy the balance and flexibility of the grad program; I was able to go observing in Chile twice while taking classes in my first two years!"



Tom Zick, Third Year

"I really enjoy the 'open door' environment at Berkeley Astrophysics. Collaboration among different professors, postdocs and graduate students is engrained in the department, which gives me the support to push my research in creative new directions."



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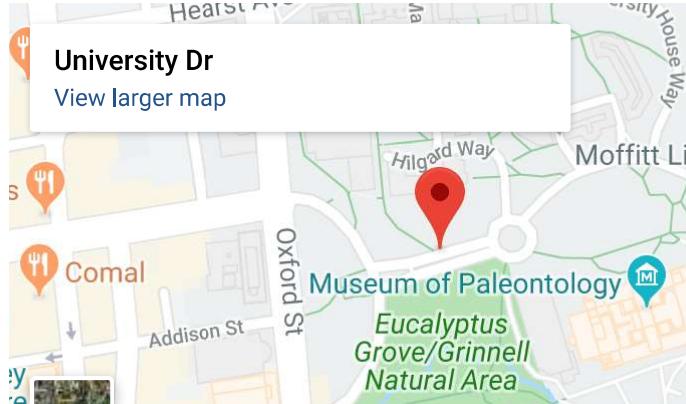
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Writing the Personal Statement

Helpful tips and advice for drafting a compelling personal statement when applying for graduate admission

What does this statement need to accomplish?

The personal statement should give concrete evidence of your promise as a member of the academic community, giving the committee an image of you as a person.

This is also where you represent your potential to bring to your academic career a critical perspective rooted in a non-traditional educational background, or your understanding of the experiences of groups historically under-represented in higher education and your commitment to increase participation by a diverse population in higher education.


What kinds of content belongs here?

Anything that can give reviewers a sense of you as a person belongs here; you can repeat information about your experiences in your research statement, but any experiences that show your promise, initiative, and ability to persevere despite obstacles belongs here. This is also a good place to display your communication skills and discuss your ability to maximize effective collaboration with a diverse cross-section of the academic community. If you have faced any obstacles or barriers in your education, sharing those experiences serves both for the selection process, and for your nomination for fellowships. If one part of your academic record is not ideal, due to challenges you faced in that particular area, this is where you can explain that, and direct reviewers' attention to the evidence of your promise for higher education.

The basic message: your academic achievement despite

challenges

It is especially helpful for admissions committees considering nominating you for fellowships for diversity if you discuss any or all of the following:

- Demonstrated significant academic achievement by overcoming barriers such as economic, social, or educational disadvantage;
- Potential to contribute to higher education through understanding the barriers facing women, domestic minorities, students with disabilities, and other members of groups underrepresented in higher education careers, as evidenced by life experiences and educational background. For example,,
 - attendance at a minority serving institution;
 - ability to articulate the barriers facing women and minorities in science and engineering fields;
 - participation in higher education pipeline programs such as, UC Leads, or McNair Scholars;
- Academic service advancing equitable access to higher education for women and racial minorities in fields where they are underrepresented; 
- Leadership experience among students from groups that have been historically underrepresented in higher education;
- Research interests focusing on underserved populations and understanding issues of racial or gender inequalities. For example,
 - research that addresses issues such as race, gender, diversity, and inclusion;
 - research that addresses health disparities, educational access and achievement, political engagement, economic justice, social mobility, civil and human rights, and other questions of interest to historically underrepresented groups;
 - artistic expression and cultural production that reflects culturally diverse communities or voices not well represented in the arts and humanities.

Graduate Admissions

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Writing the Statement of Purpose

The statement of purpose should convince readers– the faculty on the selection committee– that you have solid achievements behind you that show promise for your success in graduate study. Think of the statement of purpose as a composition with four different parts.

Part 1: Introduce yourself, your interests and motivations

Tell them what you're interested in, and perhaps, what sparked your desire for graduate study. This should be short and to the point; don't spend a great deal of time on autobiography.

Part 2: Summarize your undergraduate and previous graduate career

a) Research you conducted. Indicate with whom, the title of the project, what your responsibilities were, and the outcome. Write technically, or in the style of your discipline. Professors are the people who read these statements.

b) Important paper or thesis project you completed, as well as anything scholarly beyond your curricular requirements.

c) Work experience, especially if you had any kind of responsibility for testing, designing, researching or interning in an area similar to what you wish to study in graduate school.

Part 3: Discuss the relevance of your recent and current activities

If you graduated and worked prior to returning to grad school, indicate what you've been doing: company or non-profit, your work/design team, responsibilities, what you learned. You can also indicate here how this helped you focus your graduate studies.

Part 4: Elaborate on your academic interests

Here you indicate what you would like to study in graduate school in enough detail to convince the faculty that you understand the scope of research in their discipline, and are engaged with current research themes.

a) Indicate the area of your interests. Ideally, pose a question, define a problem, or indicate a theme that you would like to address, and questions that arise from contemporary research. This should be an ample paragraph!

b) Look on the web for information about departments you're interested in, including professors and their research. Are there professors whose research interests parallel yours? If so, indicate this. Check the specific program; many may require you to name a professor or professors with whom you might work.



c) End your statement in a positive manner, indicating your excitement and readiness for the challenges ahead of you.

Essential Tips

1. What the admissions committee will read between the lines: self-motivation, competence, potential as a graduate student.
2. Emphasize everything from a positive perspective and write in an active, not a passive voice.
3. Demonstrate everything by example; don't say directly that you're a persistent person, show it.
4. If there is something important that happened to you that affected your grades, such as poverty, illness, or excessive work, state it. Write it affirmatively, showing your perseverance despite obstacles. You can elaborate more in your personal statement.
5. Make sure everything is linked with continuity and focus.
6. Unless the specific program says otherwise, be concise; an ideal essay should say everything it needs to with brevity. Approximately 500 to 1000 well-selected words (1-2 single space pages in 12 point font) is better than more words with less clarity and poor organization.



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