

Statement of Intent Ph.D. and Academic Master's Programs

The statement of intent, or statement of purpose, is required of academic masters and doctoral program applicants. The statement serves as your "intellectual autobiography" and should convey the continuum of experiences and events in your academic life which have led you to desire an academic graduate education. The content of the statement can be easily summarized by these phrases, "What you did academically, why and with whom," and "What you want to do academically, where, why and with whom." As you write your statement, ask yourself, "Would I be inclined to admit this person to graduate school?" Before submitting the statement, seek constructive comments and criticism from friends and advisors. The following remarks should help in structuring the statement which will be read by members of a faculty admissions committee.

Opening Paragraph

Begin your statement in a direct manner and without any extended explanation about your personal, extracurricular or family background unless specifically requested to do so. State the program to which you are making application, whether you are seeking a master's or doctorate, and in a general sense, why you are applying to the program.

Your Qualifications and Background

Describe your experiences which have served as a foundation for your future graduate work, how your interest in the field developed and how you planned academically for your goal. Discuss your undergraduate studies, in general, and your major and any specialization within the major, in specific terms.

Draw attention to any academic achievements or accomplishments, and discuss specific learning experiences that demonstrate your motivation and inspiration for continued study and/or research. These might be independent study courses or research with professors, teaching assistantships, undergraduate research conference presentations, published work, laboratory experiences, research internships, seminar courses, honors thesis, relevant education abroad, independent writing, academic honors, and very closely-related work experience.

When discussing your qualifications which relate to your academic goal, do write in some detail about your special academic and research experiences. Explain special projects or research so that it is clear you were able to explore or master certain skills or particular knowledge about your academic field. This discussion should illustrate to the committee that you have the initiative and ability to develop ideas, the capacity to work through problems independently, and the determination to achieve your goals.

Mention special skills you possess which will assist you in graduate study and research, such as, laboratory techniques, computer skills, foreign language proficiency, advanced quantitative and statistical expertise.

The committee may want to know if you are a female or a member of an ethnic group (both of which may be underrepresented within certain academic disciplines, from a low-income background or have a disability. This information may be important for the committee as it makes its admissions decisions.

Your Academic Future

Admissions committees expect you to explain why you wish to attend their particular program. Do not just say the same thing about each graduate program to which you are applying. Committees usually do not appreciate such generalities and this will not favor you in the selection process. Therefore, evidence of your investigation of their program, its faculty and their research, and their departmental resources and facilities is important to present, though it need not be extensive.

Doctoral applicants should indicate how your academic and intellectual interests form a match with the research interests of one or more faculty in the program or department. Reference to your visit to their campus, or your phone or "in person" conversations with faculty, staff and graduate students is appropriate. Explain specifically how the department's graduate curriculum matches your short and long term academic and career goals.

Conclusion

And finally, you should convey to the committee the strong sense that you are qualified and motivated, and that you will be successful in graduate study and research. Summarize briefly why you believe you possess the experience and skills to be admitted to their program.

A Few Words About "Style"

- * Write in a direct and straightforward manner about your qualifications. Avoid appearing contrived or gimmicky in your writing style. Place central points early in your essay. Use active, not passive voice. Avoid qualifiers (e.g., rather, quite, somewhat). Avoid redundancy.
- * Be organized, orderly, specific and concise. Use examples where needed, but keep the statement to one or two typed pages. Edit carefully. Use transitions that tie each paragraph to the next.
- * Be clear and do not assume that the committee will understand everything. Explain course titles and research projects where necessary, especially if the transcript notation is not fully explanatory.
- * Be honest and do not inflate your achievements, but do not underestimate your potential either.
- * Remember that the statement is about you; do not philosophize about the field or write about irrelevant topics unless required to do so.
- * Be positive. Explain any anomalies in your academic record, but do emphasize your strengths.
- * Be accurate. Type the statement and check for grammatical and spelling errors. The committee should "see the content," not the content plus poor preparation.

Graduate school advisors in the Career Services Center are available to critique your statement for content, as well as to advise you about the graduate school application process. Your faculty advisor or a professor in your academic field can also assist you with the statement's content.