

Statement of Intent: Academic Master's and Ph.D. 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 range of experiences and events in your educational career thus far that have led to your interest in an academic graduate degree. Consider the content of the statement in terms of these questions: "What have I achieved academically," and "What do I want to *do* academically?" If you are a Ph.D. applicant, you should develop these thoughts along more discipline-specific lines, defining yourself as a productive scholar with specific interests and goals in the field. Before submitting the statement, seek constructive comments and criticism from friends and advisors. The following remarks should help in structuring the statement that 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 applying, whether you are seeking a master's or doctorate, and in a specific sense, *why* you are applying to an academic Ph.D. or Master's program. Why have you chosen to develop your interests in this particular way? What specific issues or concepts in the field are of interest or concern to you, and in what way(s) do you want to work through these issues?

YOUR QUALIFICATIONS AND BACKGROUND

Describe your experiences that 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 your major, with specific references to courses that helped you to develop your particular area(s) of interest, as well as any specialization within the major. Such references should establish that you have a unique, individual approach to the field, and that you have developed your own perspective regarding pertinent issues in the field.

Emphasize any academic achievements or accomplishments, and discuss how specific learning experiences have inspired and motivated your desire for continued study and/or research. These may include independent study or seminar courses, research with professors, teaching assistantships, undergraduate research conference presentations, published work, laboratory experiences, research internships, honors thesis, relevant education abroad, academic honors, and very closely-related work experience.

When discussing your qualifications related to your academic goal, do write in some detail about your specific academic and research experiences. Explain special projects or research so that it is clear you were able to explore or master certain skills or knowledge in your academic field. This discussion should demonstrate 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, and/or advanced quantitative and statistical expertise. Explain the relevance and application of these skills to some aspect of the field that you wish to study further.

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 do not appreciate such generalization, and it will not work to your advantage in the selection process. Therefore, it is important to convey evidence of your investigation of their program, its faculty and their research, and their departmental resources and facilities, though this 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. References to your visit to their campus, or your phone or "in person" conversations with faculty, staff and graduate students are appropriate, as is discussion of books and articles that have shaped your interests. 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. Use active, not passive voice. Avoid qualifiers (e.g., rather, quite, somewhat). Avoid redundancy.
- * Organize your main points within specific, concise paragraphs. State a central point at the beginning of each paragraph, then flesh out that central point throughout the paragraph. Use examples where needed, but keep the statement to one or two typed pages.
- * 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. Edit carefully! 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.