Personal Statement Workshop
for Pre-Health Students

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Workshop Agenda

1. Purpose of the personal statement
2. Use in professional school admissions
3. Writing your statement
4. Discussion of sample essay(s)
5. Getting started
What is the purpose of the personal statement?

- It’s used by professional schools to supplement the information in the rest of the application.
- It’s the qualitative, descriptive section of your application (as opposed to quantitative).
What is the purpose of the personal statement?

• It gives the committee members a chance to “get to know you” in a different manner
• It helps the committee learn why the applicant is interested in professional school and a career in health care
What is the purpose of the personal statement?

- It helps determine...
  - The candidate’s level of commitment to the profession
  - The degree to which the candidate understands the profession (on a deep level)
  - How well the candidate’s interests fit with the program
What is the purpose of the personal statement?

• To determine if the candidate is a good writer
• Finally, it’s used to differentiate between candidates in the middle range. It answers the question:

What about the candidate is special, unique, distinctive, and impressive?
Application Essays for Health Professions

**Primary or Central Application**
- General personal statement
- About your passion for the profession
- Do not mention specific schools

**Secondary or Supplemental**
- Questions vary by school
- About why you are a good fit for this program
- Show your knowledge of the program
Writing Your Personal Statement
Some Questions to Get You Started

• What details of your life—personal or family problems, history, or events—have shaped you?

• When did you become interested in the field? What’s the story behind your passion for the profession?
Some Questions to Get You Started

• How have you learned about the field? On-the-job experiences? Classes? Conversations with professionals?
• If you’ve held a job or other position during college, what are the transferrable skills that you’ve acquired?
Making “The Case”

• What are your career goals? How do they fit with the program?

• How can you document the characteristics you possess that make you a better candidate than other applicants?
Is your statement too personal?

- Don’t bore your readers, but don’t reveal too much
- Don’t reveal information that’s not relevant to your ability to succeed in the program
Is your statement too personal?

- Do the personal details you provide demonstrate your maturity, adaptability, and motivation?
- Do the personal details paint a convincing portrait of your ability to succeed?
General Advice

• Answer the questions that you’re asked
• Show! Don’t tell. Be specific.
• Don’t speak in abstracts: “I have a good work ethic”
• Be detailed. A successful statement will convince the reader that your being admitted to the program is the logical next step in your career
General Advice

• Tell what you know
• In the middle section, detail your interest and experience in the profession
• Use the language of the profession
• You want to sound like an insider
• Remember, the committee members work hard themselves, so they'll respect that in others
General Advice

• Confront weaknesses in your academic record directly
• Provide a brief explanation
• If possible, turn your weaknesses into strengths. What did you learn from the experience?
General Advice

• Do your homework
• Research everything you can about the program before you begin writing
• Write well and correctly
• Avoid clichés like the plague
  – “I’ve always wanted to be . . “
  – “I really want to help people”
General Advice

- Avoid understatements
- Avoid sounding like a braggart by instead focusing on accomplishments
- Accomplishments are only meaningful if you give them meaning
- What have you learned from your accomplishments?
Things to Avoid

- “I’ve always wanted to be....”
- The catalogue of achievements
- Lecturing the reader: the committee isn’t trying to learn about the field from the candidate
- Telling the reader why admission is good for you
Sample Personal Statements
Discussion
How Do I Begin?

• Brainstorming
  – Make a list of every unique fact or experience
  – Mind mapping
  – Stuck? Ask family & friends for their thoughts

• Look for patterns and themes

• Consider “deep” questions
  – Why do I truly want to be a __________?
  – What motivates me?
Drafts & Feedback

• Expect to write *multiple* drafts
• Get feedback on your personal statement early and often
• Potential feedback sources
  – The Writing Center
  – Your advisor
  – Health care professional or other mentor
Technical Tips

- Write in plain text format using a text-only word processing program (MS Notepad, Mac TextEdit)
- Do not copy/paste from MS Word
- Run your essay through spell check
- Plagiarism detection
Comments and Questions?

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