Writing A Personal Statement for Fellowship Applications

Your Personal Statement will usually be one page or less, single spaced. Some fellowships have a word limit, or a character limit, or a space limit. The following questions should be addressed somewhere in your statement:

1. What are your short and long-term professional goals?

- When writing your personal statement, think of three questions: What will I do immediately following my fellowship? What will I do five-ten years after completing my fellowship? What is my ultimate career goal?

- You may not know all the answers to these questions. That’s okay, but you still need to pick one reasonable and realistic professional path for your reader to follow. Provide a specific position that you would want to hold at each step along the way; this type of detail will show your reader that you understand the steps necessary to reach your goals, even if the goals themselves change over time.

- By the end of the first paragraph, your reader should understand your long term goals; consider making such a sentence your statement’s “thesis sentence.” Then dedicate the rest of the statement to explain the motivations, skills, and personality that will help you to achieve this goal.

2. How did these goals develop?

- Did you have a personal challenge that motivated your interest in your field or pushed you to succeed? Do you have other personal history or unique characteristics that explain your interest in your field? Were there specific experiences that contributed to your career goals?

Providing this information to the reader will demonstrate your longstanding interest in your field; it will help the committee believe that you are a reasonable and motivated applicant whose career they can feel confident investing in. This information will also show the committee something about your personality, so remember to keep the tone appropriate and positive, especially if recounting personal challenges.

3. How have you already begun to lay the foundation for these goals?

- Have you been involved in campus or community activities that demonstrate a) your ability to act as a leader b) your commitment to your community (campus, local, or national) c) your interest in acting as a cultural ambassador?

- Foundations and agencies generally want applicants to demonstrate a history of community involvement, leadership, and other skills relative to the specific fellowship, in addition to academic merit.

4. How does this fellowship fit into these goals?

- What skills or knowledge will your fellowship provide that will continue to benefit your professional development?

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