UC Personal Statement Workshop

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Today’s Presentation

Today, we will cover the following topics:

- Purpose of the UC Personal Statement
- Where your Personal Statement fits in your application package
- What does UC look for in personal statements?
- Presentation from Toby Bielawski, Reading and Writing (RAW) Center
- Individual personal statement reviews available
Introducing the UC Personal Statement

- VIDEO - Personal Statement - University of California (2:35)

- Includes perspectives of UC Admissions Officers and UC students.
Purpose of the Personal Statement

- “Enriches and completes your application” (UC Berkeley)
- “Lets us get to know who you are as a person” (UCLA)
- Opportunity to demonstrate uniqueness of applicant and set oneself apart
- Accessible to UC throughout your time on campus (may be reviewed for scholarships, on-campus employment, etc.)
IMPORTANT NOTE

Only some UC campuses use the personal statement for transfer admission.
Which UC Campuses review the Personal Statement for Admission?

- UC Berkeley, UCLA
  - Review ALL personal statements for transfer admission

- UC Irvine, UC Merced, UC San Diego
  - MAY review personal statement for transfer admission

- UC Davis, UC Riverside, UC Santa Barbara, UC Santa Cruz
  - Do not currently use personal statement for transfer admission
Which UC Campuses review the Personal Statement for Admission?

“While campuses vary in their use of the personal statement, all use it to evaluate gaps in applicants’ educational history or in the evaluation of applicants for certain scholarships.” (2015 Quick Reference for Counselors, p. 36)
Personal Statement Information

- Two prompts (1000 words total max)
  - Total words are allocated across two prompts
  - Recommend no less than 250 words for either prompt

- Additional Comments Box (550 words max)
  - NOT a third prompt – optional section
  - Convey additional information not covered elsewhere (lack of major prep courses, Veteran status are examples)
  - Elaborate on application responses if necessary
Relationship with Application

- Application – typically objective information

- Personal Statement – Opportunity for applicants individual voice to come through

- Should NOT be used to rehash information already on application (e.g., list of awards)

- SHOULD be used to present information not covered elsewhere, as well as to make meaning of application information
Before You Begin…

- Research the UC campus to which you are applying
  - Visit web site, browse catalog, visit the campus, talk to people
  - Look for mission, vision, values of campus, college, major department
- Complete the rest of the UC application
  - Determine what important information is NOT covered in your application that a reviewer may question
“Transfer applicants: What is your intended major? Discuss how your interest in the subject developed and describe any experience you have had in the field – such as volunteer work, internships and employment, participation in student organizations and activities – and what you have gained from your involvement.”
UC Prompt #2

“Tell us about a personal quality, talent accomplishment, contribution, or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?”
Additional Comments Section

- Optional, but important in some circumstances (for example, missing major prep; hardship not explained elsewhere)

- For students unable to get all major prep courses, discuss the following:
  - If not available at LPC, take at another local community college;
  - If not available at another community college, indicated how you tried to find them, what specific schools you looked, what steps you took to try to get them
Special Instructions for Veterans

- Describe how your military service has been instrumental in developing your educational plans.
- Indicate if you are entitled to educational benefits as a result of your own military service to the service connected death or disability of a parent or spouse.
- Indicate if you are affiliated with the military such as, but not limited to, the spouse of dependent of someone who is on active duty or a current participant in an ROTC-type program.
What does UC Berkeley look for?

- “Demonstration of intellectual curiosity and interest in their intended major”
- “Evidence of a student’s ability to think and write analytically”
- “Personal qualities such as maturity, perseverance, tenacity, leadership, and/or service to others”
- “Not just what a student has done, but the choices he/she has made and what he/she gained as a result of those choices”
What does UC Berkeley look for?

- Be “specific enough to appeal to Berkeley… while also being broad enough to appeal to other UCs”

- Accomplishments in light of life experiences and opportunities

- Information provided viewed as positive or neutral, but not negative
Advice from UCLA

- Personal statement is “an interview with us on paper”

- Ask yourself, “Is this how I would answer this question in a personal interview?”

- Not a creative writing sample

- “One piece of the puzzle for us to get to know you.”
Advice from UC Merced

UC Merced: **5 Tips for Writing your Personal Statement**
UC Santa Barbara tips

- Answer the question.
- Use detailed examples.
- Give yourself time to edit.
- Stick to one topic per response.
UC Santa Barbara tips

- Brainstorm Topics.
- Stay focused.
- Be you.
AVOID the following:

- Inappropriate use of humor.
- Creative writing (poems, scene setting, or clichés).
- Quotations – UC wants to know your thoughts and words, not someone else’s.
- Generalities – Stick to facts and specifics you want UC to know about yourself.
- Repetition – Do not talk about the same topic in each response. Provide new information we cannot find in other sections of the application.
AVOID the following (cont.):

- Lists of accomplishments or activities.

- Philosophy – Do describe your world in facts and examples. Don’t ask questions without answers.

- Do not manufacture hardship.

- Don’t be campus specific. You’re talking to all the UC campuses in your response.
And finally…

UC Berkeley:

“And, finally, after we read your personal statement, we will ask the question, ‘What do we know about this individual?’ If we have learned very little about you, your personal statement is not successful.”
Writing the UC Personal Statement

From Brainstorming to Final Draft

Thanks to Dr. Karin Spirn and Richard Dry
6 Steps

1. Brainstorm
2. Organize
3. Write a Draft
4. Proofread + Revise
5. Get Help
6. Polish
1. Brainstorm about the Question

- Be sure to review the question as you’re answering to stay on topic
- Think of any special circumstances that make you **stand out**—significant challenges, initiative you’ve taken, contributions you have made
- List and/or freewrite all the thoughts that come to mind about the question
- *Narrow your focus* to the most interesting or important items that you haven’t already covered in your application -- what makes you special or different?
- Brainstorm about one question right now
2. Organize Your Ideas (Topic Sentences Outline)

• Before you start the first draft create a topic sentence outline so you can stay on topic in each paragraph.
• Be sure to address the question early on and use the rest of the essay to present the supporting details and reflection.
• Topic sentences help you tell your reader where you’re going instead of jumping right into a story.
• Make sure to wrap up the essay, but don’t repeat yourself—often the last part of the question provides a way to wrap up your ideas: i.e. “What have you gained from your involvement [in your major or field of interest]?”
Topic Sentence Outline Example

1. I intend to major in Biochemistry to help contribute to a cure to ovarian cancer.
   a. Inspired by the death of my mother, aunt, and grandmother who all died of ovarian cancer.
   b. I’ve dedicated myself to understanding this field with a realistic passion (set up for the rest of the essay)

2. I have followed the exciting developments in cancer research and volunteered in a cancer research facility for real world experience.
   a. XYZ development that I learned about by reading
   b. Anecdote about volunteering in the cancer research lab at Kaiser (taken initiative)

3. My research and experience have given me a realistic understanding of the effort and dedication it takes to make a difference. (what you learned)
   a. Coursework and specific professors at this university
   b. Post-graduate work and hopefully, one day, a cure that might help my own daughter’s generation. (consider the future implications or contributions you might make)
Topic sentences help you avoid jumping into a story without telling your reader where you’re going first:

**AVOID:** When I first started at Las Positas College, I wanted to be a business major. [Doesn’t answer the question here—what major do you want?] Most of my family members work in business-related fields, and I wanted to follow in their footsteps. However, I soon found that I was not as interested in my business classes as in some of my other classes. I decided to search for a new major. I thought that theater would be a good choice, because I love to read plays, but I realized that I don’t like acting or working on plays. Finally, I realized that what I truly loved was the study of literature. I enrolled in my first English class, and I have been in love with this major ever since. I am so glad that it took me a while to find my major, because I feel I appreciate my area of study more than those students who have only ever focused on one field.
My path to becoming an English major took some time, but this journey allowed me to discover more about my interests and strengths as a student. [This topic sentence answers the question directly and tells us what will happen in the paragraph] When I first started at Las Positas College, I wanted to be a business major. Most of my family members work in business-related fields, and I wanted to follow in their footsteps. However, I soon found that I was not as interested in my business classes as in some of my other classes. I decided to search for a new major. I thought that theater would be a good choice, because I love to read plays, but I realized that I don’t like acting or working on plays. Finally, I realized that what I truly loved was the study of literature. I enrolled in my first English class, and I have been in love with this major ever since. I am so glad that it took me a while to find my major, because I feel I appreciate my area of study more than those students who have only ever focused on one field. [This ending sentence explains the point of the story]
3. Write the Essay

- Use topic sentences with specific support that’s interesting.
- Be personal—let your curiosity, passion, and personal vulnerability come through.
- Don’t be “cute” with your wording or joke with the reader: “If you only had a chance to meet me, I know you’d love me cause I’m a real ladies’ man.”
- Don’t suck up to the school. It’s too obvious and too general: “I’d be honored to be at UC Berkeley, the greatest University on the planet.”
- Turn obstacles and hardships into learning experiences that were useful or positive—don’t stay negative.
- Stay on topic within your essay and paragraphs
- Don’t list awards and activities (the application has that); instead go into detail about a story about an achievement that can stick with the reader.
A well-developed example rather than a list of achievements:

While I have had many opportunities to express my creativity through painting and dance, perhaps my most valued experience was the two summers I spent at the New College’s Talented Youth Camp. There I participated in a number of classes that taught me new techniques for painting and dancing. I was able to meet other creative young people and learn from my peers. I even managed to combine my two passions when I choreographed a dance piece inspired by modern paintings, adding my own paintings and those of the other dancers to the set as backdrops. This experience taught me that there are no boundaries between different creative practices and that all creativity should be celebrated.
4, 5, 6: Proofread, Get Help, Polish

• Read your work out loud to yourself
• Look up writing weaknesses (see online resource page); common grammar errors include fragments, run-ons (including comma splices), verb tense shifting, subject verb agreement errors.
• Trust your internal alarm: if something sounds a bit rough or awkward, it probably is and needs to be revised.
• Show it to someone else and have them read it to you.
• Get expert help: RAW and Tutorial Centers: 2401
• Revise based on the expert suggestions
Online Resources

- RAW Center Online Resources
- Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)
- ChompChomp.com
- UC Personal Statement Help from UC
- Tips from CaliforniaColleges.edu