

Personal Statement Services

UNIVERSITY CAREER CENTER

NUHN, JENNI

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Section I: Career Center Overview

Mission

The Truman State University Career Center's mission is to creatively provide comprehensive internship, career, and graduate/professional school services and resources for students, alumni, employers, and the University community.

Vision

The Truman State University Career Center's vision is to be a premier provider of university career services.

Graduate/Professional School Services

- Career Coaching one-on-one appointments
- Self-assessments
- Graduate/Professional program research
- Graduate/Professional School search and prep strategy presentations
- Personal Statement presentations/workshops
- Resume and curriculum vitae development and critiquing
- Personal Statement development and critiquing
- Letter of reference/recommendation strategy and packet creation
- Mock interviews

Location

Student Union Building (SUB) 1110.

Virtual Walk-ins Zoom Meeting ID: 991 487 5901

Hours

Monday-Friday

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Section II: Personal Statement Services

Career Center Personal Statement Services Overview

Students and alumni engage with personal statement services through three avenues.

1. Career Coaching - schedule an appointment
 - a. Students and alumni may or may not have a developed next destination goal
 - i. Next destination exploration series of appointments
 1. Appreciative inquiry and self-assessments
 2. Graduate school program research
 3. Goal Setting
 4. Discuss resources
 - a. Faculty
 - b. Mentors
 - c. Writing Center
 5. Task completion
 - a. Select programs
 - b. Review application process
 - c. Discuss GRE, LSAT, MCAT, etc.
 - d. Develop and critique resume/curriculum vitae
 - e. Review personal statement guidelines
 - f. Develop and critique personal statement
 - g. Develop letter of reference/recommendation packet
 - i. Identify letter writers
 - ii. Timeline
 - iii. Materials (resume/cv, personal statement, list of programs and deadlines)
 - iv. Discuss professional communication when requesting letters
 - ii. Personal statement development appointments
 1. Goal Setting
 2. Discuss resources
 - a. Faculty
 - b. Mentors
 - c. Writing Center
 3. Task completion
 - a. Review personal statement guidelines
 - b. Develop and critique resume/curriculum vitae
 - c. Develop and critique personal statement
2. Personal Statement Workshops
 - a. Hosted by the Career Center two to five times a semester
 - i. Professional statement development and formatting
 1. Tips for writing a great personal statement
 2. Topics/experiences to include

3. Paragraph context breakdown
 4. Overcoming difficulties
 - ii. Additional print, offices, and people resources
3. Personal Statement Presentations
 - a. Hosted by the Career Center at the request of faculty, academic organization advisors, and student organizations
 - i. Professional statement development and formatting
 1. Tips for writing a great personal statement
 2. Topics/experiences to include
 3. Paragraph context breakdown
 4. Overcoming difficulties
 - ii. Additional print, offices, and people resources

Section III: Letter from Associate Vice President for Career Development

Greetings Faculty,

Thank you so much for your willingness to review our Personal Statement materials. At the Career Center, we firmly believe that a well-functioning Career Center is a community center. In other words, faculty and staff work in tandem to help our students find meaningful next destination opportunities. I wanted to provide a brief overview of my observations from working with personal statement development and career coaching over the last seven years in a letter to those who choose to use these resources.

There is no one right way to create a personal statement. It will probably take 3-4 drafts before the personal statement is ready to be submitted. The final statement is often very different from the first draft. Students need first to understand the audience that will be reviewing their statements. The target audience is graduate school faculty who make up the selection committee tasked to select their incoming cohort. Students should write as if they will be a graduate student. It is essential to provide relevant detail in the personal statement to help distinguish their statement from others. Far too often, students do not make their statements "personal" or detailed enough. It is my hope that student writers can share their academic and career narrative in terms of what their major(s)/minors mean to them, why they chose to be involved in specific research, internships, REUs, classes, conference presentations, student and major-specific organizations, etc. It is important to focus on qualitative analysis rather than quantitative listings. It is more effective to focus on two to three experiences rather than listing them without communicating to the reader what was specifically learned, what the learning meant to the writer, what emotions were evoked. Students should provide observations, insights, or questions they have from their experiences. How does what they have already accomplished align with what they want to do. For example, if the student is looking for a teaching or research assistantship, then provide examples of working with faculty in the classroom, tutoring, grading, lab assistance/set-up, etc.

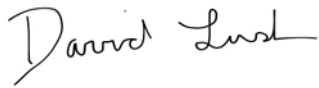
It is surprising to me that students do not strategize in this way. Often, students have the following mindset: "everyone applying has the same GPA, similar classes and research experiences, and recommendation letters in which faculty or mentors say similar things." "Tut-tut," I say. Even if this is true, the student must distinguish himself/herself by providing concrete examples where transferrable skills were learned, such as critical thinking/problem solving, leadership, interpersonal communication, teamwork, resiliency/grit, and attention to detail. Have the student think about what characteristics, qualities, or experiences a selection committee would want in their new cohort members.

Concerning a more recent issue students face when writing their statements, internships were interrupted or canceled due to COVID-19. It is acceptable to discuss the internship and what they had hoped to learn and experience. However, I find what is most compelling for the selection committee is

to discuss what they did in place of the internship to continue their academic journey and show their academic curiosity and intrinsic motivation toward their area of study.

We appreciate our partnership with faculty to provide a holistic support system to our students pursuing graduate studies. Please contact our office for further resources or assistance. My assistant director, Jenni Nuhn, has put this packet and its resources together for your reference. I would like to thank Jenni for her vision, comprehensiveness, and effort on this packet. I would also like to thank Dr. Janet Gooch for her willingness to share our materials with the academy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Lusk". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Dave Lusk, Ph.D.

Associate Vice President for Career Development

Section IV: Writing the Personal Statement

How to Prepare

- Identify and commit to a realistic timeline
- Carefully read the prompt(s) you are required to answer
- Identify the page or word count limits
- Identify your audience
- Research the program and faculty
- Reflect on 2 to 3 meaningful experiences that supports your goal
 - Review resume/curriculum vitae
- Identify faculty, mentors, peers to provide feedback
 - Don't wait until you have a final draft
 - Use these relationships for brainstorming and multiple draft reviews

Begin the Writing Process

- Select a method that meets your writing and idea generation styles
 - Outline
 - Provide examples to demonstrate your skills, abilities, and drive
 - Introduce, develop, and close your personal statement
 - Meet the prompt requirements
 - Freewriting
 - Don't focus on page or word count limitations
 - Review for common themes
 - Prioritize information
- Be yourself!
- Begin writing the middle paragraphs first; then the first and last paragraphs will be more focused
- Allow for time to take a step back from your writing to come back with fresh eyes and a rested mind

Before Submission

- Have a diverse group of reviewers read your personal statement
- Preview and print the essay
 - Verify formatting is correct
 - Save the file based on the application directions
 - PDF file format is ideal to ensure formatting is maintained

Developing Context

Tips for Writing a Great Personal Statement

Follow a past – present – future format

- Avoid excessive use of "I"
- Use graduate-level language, including keywords and terms that are important to the field
- Everything you write should answer the questions the graduate program will be asking:
 - "Why should we select this individual?"
 - "What does this individual offer that others may not?"
 - "Does this individual have the academic/research background to succeed in our program?"
 - "Is this individual sufficiently motivated to complete our program?"

Opening Paragraph:

- It needs to be attention-grabbing so the reader will want to continue reading
- If appropriate, speak about your epiphany – the event, or series of events, that led up to your decision to pursue this field (not everyone has an epiphany)
- Show passion and intrinsic motivation

Middle Paragraphs:

- This should be the "meat" of your document
- Present a compelling case for your ability to succeed in and complete this graduate program
- Provide evidence of success:
 - Research projects
 - Rigor of coursework
 - Other academic/co-curricular accomplishments
- Share lingering questions
 - For instance, "through this work I learned _____...but began to notice _____...which lead me to wonder _____."
- Show your knowledge of the graduate school environment
 - Mention 1-2 faculty that caught your attention and why (is it a class or classes, is it research, or maybe a specific article or book they have authored)
 - Mention clinics or rotations that you are interested in
 - This is a much more important paragraph than people realize
 - The hope is that through your narrative, the student makes it a "slam dunk" in the reviewer's mind for inclusion in the new cohort

Closing Paragraph:

- To the degree possible, express your future career goals
- Show fit & match with each program to which you are applying
 - Specific professors
 - Unique aspects of the curriculum
 - Geography

- Your last sentence should leave the reader with a strongly positive impression

Things to Mention, if Applicable:

- Proficiency in a foreign language
- Relevant internship/work/volunteer/observation experience
- Participation in professional associations
- Relevant lab/computer skills
- Specialized knowledge, skills, or abilities
- Anything unusual about you
- Applicable things you will be doing between the time you apply & the time you would begin a graduate program (i.e., research, presentations, internship)

Overcoming Difficulties:

- If your GPA, test scores, or other application materials are not as strong as you'd like them to be, the personal statement is most likely the place to address these issues.
- Counter your weakness by referring the reader to another aspect of your application that is stronger (i.e., if your test scores are below average, indicate that your GPA is a much better indicator of your ability to succeed in graduate school)
- It is o.k. to re-calculate your GPA in these ways:
 - Minus the freshman year
 - Minus one semester
 - Major courses only
 - Last four semesters, only
- The appropriate place for any explanations is about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way into the document

Section V: Resources

Handouts

- [University Career Center Personal Statement How-to Guide](#)

Presentations

- [University Career Center Personal Statement PowerPoint](#)

Career Center Resource Library (Available for check out)

- Asher, D. (2012). Graduate admissions essays: Write your way into the graduate school of your choice. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press.

Websites

- Purdue Writing Lab. (n.d.). Purdue OWL // Purdue Writing Lab. Retrieved January 05, 2021, from https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html
- Schall, J. (n.d.). Welcome to Writing Personal Statements Online. Retrieved January 05, 2021, from <https://www.e-education.psu.edu/writingpersonalstatementsonline/>
- Tips for Applying to Graduate School. (2020, August 14). Retrieved January 05, 2021, from <https://career.truman.edu/career-center-services/tips-for-applying-to-grad-school/>
- Wwww.gradschools.com. (n.d.). Retrieved January 05, 2021, from <https://www.gradschools.com/>



UNIVERSITY CAREER CENTER

PERSONAL STATEMENTS

How-To Guide

TIPS FOR WRITING A GREAT PERSONAL STATEMENT

- Follow a past – present – future format
- Avoid excessive use of “I”
- Use graduate-level language, including keywords and terms that are important to the field
- Everything you write should answer the questions the graduate program will be asking:
 - Why should we select this individual?”
 - What does this individual offer that others may not?”
 - Does this individual have the academic/research background to succeed in our program?”
 - Is this individual sufficiently motivated to complete our program?”

THINGS TO INCLUDE, IF APPLICABLE:

- Proficiency in a foreign language
- Relevant internship/work/volunteer/observation experience
- Participation in professional associations
- Relevant lab/computer skills
- Specialized knowledge, skills, or abilities
- Anything unusual about you
- Applicable things you will be doing between the time you apply & the time you would begin a graduate program (i.e. research, presentations, internship)

SOURCES FOR ASSISTANCE

- *Career Center*
- *Faculty*
- *Administrators*
- *Mentors*
- *Writing Center*

PHOTO CREDIT:
TIM BARCUS, CAMPUS PHOTOGRAPHER
PICKLER MEMORIAL LIBRARY ATRIUM

PERSONAL STATEMENT

How-To Guide

PARAGRAPH CONTEXT:

Opening Paragraph:

- Needs to be attention-grabbing
- If appropriate, speak about your epiphany
 - the event, or series of events, that led up to your decision to pursue this field (not everyone has an epiphany)

Middle Paragraphs:

- This should be the “meat” of your document
- Present a compelling case for your ability to succeed in and complete this graduate program
- Provide evidence of success:
 - Research projects
 - Rigor of coursework
 - Other academic/co-curricular accomplishments

Closing Paragraph:

- Express your future career goals
- Show fit & match with each program to which you are applying
 - Specific professors
 - Unique aspects of the curriculum
 - Geography
- Your last sentence should leave the reader with a strong positive impression

OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES:

- If your GPA, test scores, or other application materials are not as strong as you'd like them to be, the personal statement is most likely the place to address these issues
 - Counter your weakness by referring reader to another aspect of your application that is stronger (i.e., if your test scores are below average, indicate that your GPA is a much better indicator of your ability to succeed in graduate school)
 - It is o.k. to re-calculate your GPA in these ways:
 - Subtract the freshman year
 - Subtract one semester
 - Major courses only
 - Last four semesters, only
- The appropriate place for any explanations is about ¼ of the way into the document

Personal Statements

Truman State University Career Center

Items to consider...

Look

- Headers & Titles
- Fonts & Spacing

Writing Level

- Graduate level language
- Key words

Content

- Tailored to program
- Provides evidence of success

Each statement should answer...



Opening Paragraph



Attention Grabbing

- Maintain reader interest

Share Epiphany

- Describe series of events that led to decision to pursue field

Middle Paragraph

The "meat" of the personal statement

Make
your case

- Demonstrate ability to succeed
- Ability to complete graduate program

Provide
proof

- Research projects
- Rigor of coursework
- Academic/co-curricular accomplishments

Second to Last & Closing Paragraph

3 F's

Future

- Specify desired degree
- Any future career goals

Fit

- Specific professors you wish to work with
- Unique aspects of curriculum
- Geographic location suits you

Finish

- Final sentence should leave readers with a positive impression of you

It's worth mentioning...

Relevant internship, work, volunteerism, observation experience

Proficiency in a foreign language

Specialized knowledge, skills, or abilities

Relevant lab, computer skills

Participation in professional associations

Damage Control

Appropriate place for explanation is $\frac{3}{4}$ down in the document



"Blotches" in your academic history

- Address weaknesses in professional statement
- Canceled or shortened internship/research opportunities
 - Funding issues
 - Unavoidable personal circumstances



Imperfect transcript

- Emphasize higher numbers
- 3.7 GPA better reflection of ability to succeed in grad school than GRE score...



Recalculate GPA...

- Minus freshman year
- Minus one semester
- Major courses only
- Last four semesters only

- **Faculty/Mentors**
- **Career Center**
- **Writing Center**

Additional Sources for Assistance

University Career Center
Student Union Building (SUB) 1110
Monday - Friday
8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
Zoom Meeting ID: [991 487 5901](#)
career.truman.edu
[#HireTruman](#)

**Walk-ins Welcome
In-person and Virtually**