



**GRADD**

GRADUATES REACHING A DREAM DEFERRED

**GRAD SCHOOL DECODED:  
THE UNDOCUMENTED WAY**

PUBLISHED BY GRADUATES REACHING A DREAM DEFERRED (GRADD)

This resource guide is published in collaboration with the Dream Resource Center (DRC) at the UCLA Downtown Labor Center.

For more information, please visit [www.dreamresourcecenter.org](http://www.dreamresourcecenter.org) or email us at [gradstudentorganization@gmail.com](mailto:gradstudentorganization@gmail.com).



# GRADUATE SCHOOL DECODED: THE UNDOCUMENTED WAY

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# **1. WELCOME TO GRADD**

## **How GRADD Came About:**

Based in Los Angeles, California, Graduates Reaching A Dream Deferred (GRADD) is an organization that came about organically from the friendship of a pioneering group of undocumented graduate students. This group sensed an increasing urgency to address the needs of undocumented undergraduate students who would approach them seeking guidance through the graduate application process. In an attempt to respond to this issue and the increasing number of undocumented college graduates with no viable pathway to citizenship, GRADD was created.

Upon numerous conversations amongst these friends flourished the idea to establish an organization dedicated to bringing resources and attention to the needs of prospective and current undocumented graduate students. GRADD members envision the fostering of a close-knit undocumented community, which shares information and resources and creates a space in which current and prospective undocumented graduate students can establish lifelong friendships -- friendships that the organization hopes will lead to a more collective approach to graduate education and future academic and professional goals.

## **GRADD Mission Statement:**

Graduates Reaching A Dream Deferred (GRADD) is an organization founded by undocumented graduate students which aims to address the needs of immigrant students interested in pursuing graduate education. GRADD works to establish a national network of students, faculty members and community leaders dedicated to bringing resources and attention to this underserved student population. Through the creation of an inclusive and safe environment, GRADD intends to reassure students that their academic and professional goals are achievable.

## **GRADD Events:**

GRADD hopes to create a community through various informational, educational and social events such as graduate panels, workshops focused on higher education, professional networking and fundraising. Since 2010, GRADD has provided information to hundreds of potential graduate and professional undocumented immigrant students at numerous campuses across California and the U.S.:

- Los Angeles
- UCLA,
- CSU, Fullerton
- CSU, Los Angeles
- UC, Santa Barbara
- Orange County
- Bay Area
- UC Berkeley
- Detroit, Michigan
- Dallas, Texas

**GRADD is us, GRADD is YOU!**

## **So, you want to go to graduate school ...**

**Who?** So, you want to go to graduate school, but you realize it will have implications for you, your family and your loved ones. Think about the sacrifices you and your support system will have to make and the rewards that come with accessing graduate education.

**Why?** Assess why you really want to go to graduate/professional school. Is it for a degree to enhance your knowledge in a topic you are passionate about? Will you be passionate about it for the next 2-7 years? Is it to get a professional degree to improve your future employability? Is a graduate degree needed in the field you eventually want to work in?

**Where?** Think about how you will find housing -- if you choose to look at a school out of state or away from home. Research and network to find "safe" communities in the potential graduate program locations. Locate and contact allies and fellow undocumented immigrant students and groups; do not assume resources are not available. Plan how you will access transportation. These are all important factors when choosing a school.

**How?** Realistically think about how you will afford tuition for 2-7 years. Does the school offer part-time programs so you can work off campus? Can you take extension classes instead of paying tuition for a full semester/quarter? If you are able to get scholarships for a percentage of your education, will you manage to fundraise the rest? Remember, private schools may offer a better financial aid package than a public college or university. This should all be considered before taking this step.

### **When you are ready to take this important step, GRADD will be there for you!**

Congratulations for taking the initiative to pursue your dream of completing an advanced or professional degree! As you approach graduate applications, realize that this process will be lengthy and will require discipline, dedication and courage. The process may require you make adjustments in your personal and professional life in order to accommodate the demands of the application components. It is necessary that you surround yourself with individuals that support and encourage you through this process.

Despite the many additional obstacles and challenges you may face during this process, know that you count on the support of undocumented students and allies who have or are currently completing graduate programs. Know that many of these individuals are willing to hear you out and support you if you voice your needs and concerns. One of the key ways undocumented students have successfully completed graduate programs is by educating others about their status and showing them how they can help them navigate this academic endeavor.

You are an amazing and exemplary individual for working toward your dreams despite the odds. While the process may seem daunting, your unique position as an undocumented student provides you with tools that other applicants will not have, such as: incredible resilience, resourcefulness and an unwavering spirit of achievement. By applying this skill set, you will increase your chance of success. Be confident; you have an immense DREAM extended family behind you!

GRADD is on the path to creating a close-knit undocumented graduate student community that will redefine the journey of undocumented students in graduate school. A definition rooted in hard work, achievement, and optimism -- the values that unite us all toward the right to education for all!

## 2. ADMISSIONS ESSAYS

The “Personal Statement” and the “Statement of Purpose” represent some of the most important documents that make up the graduate application packet. Some schools will ask for both statements, some will ask the statement of purpose only, while other schools may ask you to combine both your personal history and statement of academic plans into a single essay.

Make sure you clarify exactly what is expected of you from the particular graduate program application. Revision is perhaps one of the most important things to remember during this writing process. Make sure you have plenty of professors, advisors, colleagues and friends read over your drafts. Ensure that your statement addresses the questions clearly and contains absolutely no grammatical errors. The writing of these essays should not be taken lightly. Make sure you provide yourself with ample time to write, rewrite and revise.

Below you will find key information on how to write these statements. Some of the information listed below provides tips that are applicable to all graduate applicants while other parts of this section will review information particularly relevant to prospective undocumented graduate students. At the end of the section are sample statements written by current undocumented graduate students.

### **The Personal Statement:**

The personal statement should be taken very seriously. It could be the deciding factor of your acceptance into a graduate program. Transcripts and test scores provide the numbers to prove you meet the basic qualifications, but the personal statement introduces you as a person to the application review board. Show that you are a dynamic and interesting individual who will work well in a new cohort of students and with existing faculty. You also want to make sure those numbers and facts in the application come to life.<sup>1</sup>

### **“Should I disclose my undocumented status in my personal statement?”**

This is one of the most commonly asked questions by prospective undocumented graduate students. It comes down to a personal choice on how comfortable you feel about making this information known to the graduate application committee and whether you are comfortable disclosing this information in general. Many of the current undocumented graduate students have opted to disclose their status in their application because of the great influence their undocumented status has had on their identity and their academic and professional plans.

Furthermore, many students feel that because of their unique life experience, as undocumented residents of the United States, their insights and opinions during debates within academic and professional settings bring a unique insight to the classroom.

It is advisable you get feedback from mentors and allies as you try to decide whether to disclose your status or not. For students interested in certain academic fields, this unique position as an undocumented student may strengthen the application greatly. Familiarize yourself with the website, faculty and students of the program you are considering to get a better sense of whether the school is supportive of undocumented students and seek the advice of previous undocumented graduate applicants as you make this decision.

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<sup>1</sup> The CSU Fullerton McNair Scholars Program Scholar Handbook, revised: 5/29/2007  
*REVISED MARCH 2012*

## **Statement of Purpose:**

Determine your purpose in writing the statement. Usually the purpose is to persuade the admissions committee that you are an applicant they should choose. You may want to show that you have the ability and motivation to succeed in your field, or you may want to show the committee that, on the basis of your experience, you are the kind of candidate who will do well in the field. Whatever the purpose, it must be explicit to give coherence to the whole statement. Pay attention to the purpose throughout the statement so that extraneous material is left out. Pay attention to the audience, in this case the admissions committee, throughout the statement. Remember, your audience is made up of faculty members who are experts in their field. <sup>2</sup>

## **General Things to Keep in Mind**

Remember that your statement has to stand out among countless others, so ensure it reflects your unique experiences and personal values.

Do not tell it, show it! That is, do not just say how dedicated or committed you are -- show it by describing your accomplishments. Use positive language and avoid the passive voice. Be sure that your thoughts flow from one paragraph to the next. If there is an aberration in your record, explain in positive terms, what happened with that particular course or semester. Be sure to have a critical reader look over the statement for you.

Consider discussing:

- Hobbies/Passions
- Projects that you've completed
- Jobs /Volunteer experience and how it relates to your field
- Responsibilities
- Accomplishments in the personal and scholastic arena
- Major life events that have changed you
- Challenges and hurdles you've overcome
- Life events that motivate your education
- Traits, work habits, and attitudes that will insure your success and your goals
- Documented status? Sexual orientation?

Remember to reflect upon your academic record and personal accomplishments. How do the attitudes, values, and personal qualities that you've listed correspond to these experiences? Try to pair them up. For example, your quest for knowledge may have led you to conduct independent research with a professor. Or poverty and lack to medical resources in your childhood may have driven you to pursue a public health degree. If your grades were poor in a particular subject or dropped for a semester or so because of a personal event, explain what happened. Your intent is not to elicit their pity or sympathy, but to show them how this trial made you a stronger person and a better student overall. Consider how each pair of attitudes, personal qualities and experiences show that you're prepared to excel in graduate school. Remember that the information that you chose to present can portray you as a positive and upbeat person or as a tired and discouraged student. Think about the image that you want to portray to the reviewing board.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/gcallaghan/graduate/winningstatement.htm>

## **Admissions Essay Dos and Don'ts**

### **Do:**

- Prepare an outline and create a draft.
- Answer all the questions being asked.
- Make sure your essay has a theme or a thesis.
- Provide evidence to support your claims.
- Make your introduction unique.
- Write clearly and make sure it is easy to read.
- Be honest, confident, be positive and be yourself.
- Clearly state your short and long term goals.
- Use the same font and format throughout. No emoticons.
- Make sure your essay is organized, coherent and concise.
- Write about yourself and use examples from your own life experiences.
- Discuss your future goals.
- Mention any hobbies, past jobs, community service or research experience.
- Speak in the first person.
- Mention weaknesses without making excuses.
- Discuss why you are interested in the school and/or program.
- Show – do not just tell (use examples to demonstrate your abilities).
- Ask for help.
- Proofread and revise your statement at least three times.
- Have others proofread your essay.

### **Don't:**

- Have any grammar or spelling errors.
- Be wordy or use jargon (don't try to impress the readers by using big words unless you really use them).
- Swear or use slang.
- Digress or be repetitive.
- Generalize.
- Include clichés.
- Be comical (a little humor is okay but remember it can be misconstrued).
- Be defensive or arrogant.
- Complain.
- Preach.
- Have your essay focus too much on other individuals.
- Make lists of accomplishments, awards, skills, or personal qualities (Show, don't tell).
- Write a term paper or an autobiography.

*(Adapted from several sources including About.com)*



## Breaking Down the Personal Statement Prompt:

**Sample:** *"In an essay, discuss how your personal background informs your decision to pursue a graduate degree. Please include any educational, cultural, economic, or social experiences, challenges, or opportunities relevant to your academic journey; how you might contribute to social or cultural diversity within your chosen field; and/or how you might serve educationally underrepresented segments of society with your degree."*<sup>3</sup>

Possible breakdown of prompt for personal statement:

### Part 1: Introduction

Write two sentences or so on how (Sociology, History, Anthropology, Political Science, etc.) first grabbed you. (History Department is particularly fond of lyrical writers.) Stay away from saying the predictable. Use colorful language. Let your personality come through in your writing. And briefly introduce what it is you want to pursue in graduate school.

### Part 2: Academic Biography

What classes have you taken to prepare yourself for graduate school? What classes/mentors were particularly influential in shaping your academic pursuit? What tutorials, research experience, or field work have you done in the field of your interest? What insights and methods did you gain? If there was anything unusual in your academic journey--transfers, hiatus, jobs, etc.--explain in positive terms how that came about and what you gained from it.

### Part 3: Graduate Research Project

Speak about a specific project you want to pursue in graduate school. In some ways everything you've written thus far should lead up to the point you make here. Even if you are not sure, it is important that you choose something concrete to speak of. The committee needs to see how you think through a specific research project. Intellectual clarity and zip--that's what the committee is looking for.

### Part 4: Why this school/program?

Why did you choose this school? With whom would you work and why? What do you like about the department? What is its distinguishing mark? [Don't waste your time with empty accolades in this section.] Ultimately, why would it make a good match for you and your future career goals?

Exude confidence, poise and commitment!<sup>4</sup>

## Example Essays

Remember you should *never* copy anyone else's essay, these are provided as guides only. The application review boards want to hear *your* unique story, use your own voice in an honest and compelling way! You should be aware that some universities may use plagiarism detection programs such as *turnitin* – you do not want to be caught using other people's work. (Example essays on section 6)

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<sup>3</sup> <http://ls.berkeley.edu/soc/diversity/apply/personalstatement1.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://ls.berkeley.edu/soc/diversity/apply/tips.html>

### 3. ENTRANCE EXAMS

Depending on the program you want to apply, schools may require that you take an entrance exam. These exams can be seen as intimidating and very stressful. Our advice is to study hard and take the exam, do your best on it and remember that the exams are only one part of your application. Do not let this stop you from pursuing graduate school and your dreams!

If you feel extremely nervous about the exam we suggest the following: invest in a prep course provided by Kaplan, Princeton Review, etc., review with preparation books, form study groups or join a word of the day email list.

Here are links to websites, please review them. These website are extremely helpful in terms of cost and dates that you can take the exam.

1. GRE (this exam is for most graduate programs, MAs and PhDs) Once you take the exam your score is good for five years. <http://www.ets.org/gre/>
2. LSAT (this exam is for law school) <http://www.lsac.org/>
3. GMAT (this exam is for student students who want a Master in Business Administration) <http://www.mba.com/the-gmat.aspx>
4. MCAT (this exam is for medical school) <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/>

\*Kaplan offers free practice/diagnostic tests. Visit their website to find a date and location near you.

**When taking the GRE, and other entrance exams, the most common question for undocumented students is: What form of identification to use?**

In order to take the exam you need a government issued identification; therefore, you can use a passport. They will not accept Matriculas or non-U.S. identification cards.

\*Note: In California, AB 176, the Equal Opportunity for Standardized Test bill, was signed into law in 2011. This new law ensures that all students are treated equally when taking post-secondary standardized exams such as the GRE, GMAT, MCAT and LSAT. AB 176 will require test sponsors to provide alternative methods to verify a student's identification.<sup>5</sup>

However, when you register for any post-secondary standardized exam, you **MUST** use the *exact* name you have on your passport. This means that you need to register with your full name, including *all* your middle names and last names. This goes for all standardized entrance exams.

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<sup>5</sup> Assembly Member Ricardo Lara Fact Sheet  
REVISED MARCH 2012

## 4. RESUME AND CURRICULUM VITAE (CV)

What is the difference between a Curriculum Vitae (CV) and a resume?

**Answer:** A resume is a summary of your skills, experience and education. While a resume is brief and concise, usually a page or two, a CV tends to be longer, at least two pages. In the United States, the CV is used almost exclusively when one is pursuing an academic job. The CV is a living document, which will reflect the developments in a scholar/teacher's career, and thus should be updated frequently.<sup>6</sup>

### The Rules of Resume Writing

*There are no absolutes in resume writing.* In other words, every rule you have ever heard about resumes can be broken, if you have a compelling reason. *Do not hold back.* This is one of the few times in your life when blowing your own horn is exactly what you are supposed to do. If you are timid, force yourself to think of how your best friend might describe your skills and accomplishments. Lastly, **DO NOT** tell a lie on your resume.

### Tips

*It is absolutely not true that your resume must be one page.* It should be long enough to establish what you have to offer, and short enough to entice the reader to want to know more. It should not be more than two pages without a good reason (and there are many). *Control your reader's eye.* When you want to control the eye of the reader use emphasis out of the expected order. Note the following:

The University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas  
**B.S., Chemistry, 2010**

The reader's eye skips the school and concentrates on the degree and major. Compare with this:

**STANFORD UNIVERSITY**, Stanford, California  
**B.A.**, Art History, 2010

*Do not spend too much time on getting your heading just the way you want it.* Draw a line from margin to margin underneath it. That will **control the reader's eye**, and she/he will not even read it. A name and address by itself never got anyone into school.

### Common Headings for Resumes

Objective  
Education

Skills  
Awards/Honors

Work Experience  
References

### A Word about Resumes

It is probable that as an undocumented student you may not have a lot, or any, paid work experience. This should not deter you from building a resume. In lieu of paid experience you can list any volunteer positions, internships, academic achievements as well as leadership roles within organizations.

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<sup>6</sup> Purdue OWL <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/6/23/>  
REVISED MARCH 2012

## The Rules of CV Writing

One of your main purposes in writing a CV is to create your scholarly identity. It is also important to note that there is no standard format to writing your CV. A good CV will be one that emphasizes the points that are most important in your discipline or your objective. We suggest that you look at many examples of CVs online, from peers and mentors in your field so you get an idea of the different emphases you should make in your CV. Additionally, take note that bullet points are commonly found in resumes whereas in CVs they are not.

### Tips

We highly suggest that you get some feedback from mentors and/or professors on your CV. If you are still in school, make sure to take advantage of the different resources offered on campus and ask for help in reviewing your CV or resume. Although we suggest that you look at samples of other CVs you should *not* use these as your models and copy the formatting in detail. Use those samples as a source of strategies to tailor your CV effectively and formatting it specifically to your situation.

Apply the strategies of *gapping* and *parallelism* when writing your CV, as well as your resume. Gapping is the use of incomplete sentences to present your information clearly and concisely. When using parallelism, which is important to a strong CV and resume, you will want to keep the structure of your phrases consistent throughout the document.<sup>7</sup>

Examples:

I taught composition for four years, during which time I planned classes and activities, graded papers, and constructed exams. I also met with students regularly for conferences.

Instead, use gapping:

Composition instructor (2000-2004). Planned course activities. Graded all assignments. Held regular conferences with students.<sup>8</sup>

Parallelism:

Junior member of a team that investigated structural, chemical, biological, biochemical and electrical accidents in industrial, research, medical and public facilities throughout the United States and Canada.

### Common Headings for CVs

Research Interests  
Sample Research Projects  
Publications  
Academic Conferences  
Committee Appointments  
Major Papers

Thesis  
Consulting  
Education  
Research Experience  
Assistantships  
Teaching and Tutoring

Affiliations  
Languages  
Scholarships & Fellowships  
Honors and Awards  
Lectures & Presentations  
Service & Leadership

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<sup>7</sup> Purdue OWL <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/6/23/>

<sup>8</sup> Purdue OWL <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/6/23/>

## 5. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

The letters of recommendation are a critical part of the application process. In this section we provide some tips on how to approach your letter of recommendations. In addition, we have also provided an example of a guide to provide to letter writers.

### Identify Professors:

When picking who will write your letters of recommendation it is important to select professors who you have a relationship with and who also know the work you are trying to pursue in graduate school. On average, you should approach a *professor two to three months in advance*. Have a dialogue with the professor about the schools you are looking into, the fields of study which interest you and why you want to continue your education. Bring a copy of your CV and/or resume, personal statement, transcripts (they do not need to be official) and a copy of a cheat sheet (we have provided a sample of one below).

### Content of Letter:

Each letter should express your strengths as a student, it should also mention why you are a great candidate for the program you are applying to. Remember that each letter needs to be tailored to each school/program that you are applying to. Some schools require the letter to be on their application form, and some include a rating system for the recommender to fill out. Explain all of this information to the person you are asking to write the letter of recommendation. Professors write numerous letters of recommendation and your task is to make sure you present them with all the necessary tools to write you a strong letter of recommendation and that they follow all instructions in the application. You do not want the professor to write you a weak letter of recommendation and not follow the instructions in the application – this will affect your application to a graduate or professional program.

### Keeping track of your letters:

It is your responsibility to make sure that your letters are sent in on time. In order to make sure that this is done successfully, remind the professor of the deadlines. Remember professors are busy and a friendly reminder is always helpful. Also keep in mind that a popular, or well-respected professor, receives several requests to write personal recommendations. If it is a month until your deadline and your professor is not being responsive, or is hard to get a hold of, it might be time to try someone else. The most important thing is to get a **strong** letter of recommendation. Do not be afraid to ask by saying “Would you feel comfortable writing a strong letter of recommendation for me?” Or “Do you feel that you are familiar enough with my background to write me a very strong letter of recommendation?”

Make sure to use the various tools we provide in this resource guide. We cannot emphasize enough that it is your responsibility to get your letters sent in on time. It is also your responsibility to create a folder with copies of your personal statement, transcripts and CV or resume and present yourself as a strong candidate for the program and school you will be applying to.

## **6. ORGANIZATIONAL TOOLS**

In this last section we provide you with different tools and resources to help you navigate the graduate application process. The process itself can be isolating, frustrating and difficult, but always keep focused on your goal. Also, keep in mind that many undocumented students have gone through this process and are currently in graduate programs or have already finished their post-graduate degrees. These tools have been created and used by undocumented students who want to share their knowledge and information.

### **TIMELINE FOR APPLICATIONS**

#### **Summer/September**

- Start looking at the school(s) where you want to apply. Take note of the fees for application, the number of transcripts and letters of recommendation each program requires, testing fees -- these fees add up! Some schools will provide application fee waivers. Do not be scared to ask for fee waivers, even if you are undocumented, you never know when a school or program may agree to waive your application fees!
- If you have not done so already, take the necessary standardized tests for admissions. You will either take the GRE, MCAT, GMAT, LSAT or DAT, depending on what your program requires. Some tests require you to know the schools at the time of testing in order to send the results directly.
- Keep in contact with professors from previous semesters/quarters if you might want them to write you a recommendation letter in a few months.

#### **September/October**

- Carefully examine each of the program applications. Note any questions or essay topics that will require your attention.
- Write a draft of your personal statement or statement of purpose.
- Ask a faculty member or the career/grad admissions counselor at your school to read your essays and provide feedback. Take their advice!
- Ask faculty for letters of recommendation (see earlier section for more details).
  - Provide faculty with a copy of your transcript, each program's recommendation form and your personal statement. Make it as easy as possible for the professor, but also as applicable as possible. It is not worth getting a generic recommendation letter. Ask him or her if there is anything else that you can provide to help them.
  - You want these in a month before you are sending in your application. You also want to provide the professor more than a month to write the letter. Plan this accordingly.
- Apply for fellowships and other sources of financial aid, as applicable.

#### **November/December**

- Arrange for your official transcript to be sent to each program to which you apply.
  - Visit the Registrar's Office to request your transcript. Request that the Registrar hold your transcript until the Fall semester grades are in (if you are still in school). This is a time-consuming and costly process depending on the number of colleges (sometimes even high school) you need transcripts from and the number of schools you are applying to.
- Finalize your essays and statement of purpose. Do not forget to seek input from others.
- Apply for fellowships and other sources of financial aid, as applicable.

- Check and record the due date for each application. DOCUMENT EVERYTHING.

### December/January

- Complete the application forms for each program. Reread your essays and statement of purpose. Spell check!
- Send in your applications ON TIME! Remember, some schools will provide waivers for the application fee. Some schools have an earlier deadline to be considered for funding.
- Make sure your test scores (GRE, MCAT, LSAT, etc) have been sent to the schools. Also, make sure that your specific department and Graduate division have received them.
- Most schools send confirmation upon receipt of each application. Keep track of these. If you do not receive a postcard or email, contact the admissions office by email or phone to ensure that your application has been received before the deadline.

### March/April

- Check websites like <http://thegradcafe.com> to see when acceptances/rejection letters go out and to talk to other students waiting to hear their admissions decision.
- Prepare a letter in case you are waitlisted. In a very professional manner, this letter should let the admissions committee that you are still interested in the program and remind them of why you are a great candidate and will be a great asset to the graduate program.
- If you get waitlisted, send in your waitlist letter.
- Visit schools to which you have been accepted.
- Discuss acceptances and rejections with a faculty member or the career/graduate admissions counselor at your school.
- Notify the program of your acceptance. Notify programs that you are declining.
- Give thank you cards to the professors who wrote you letters, to the people who read your essays for you, to anyone (counselors, employers) who helped you out. You want to maintain key, supportive relationships and showing your appreciation for their time is important.<sup>9</sup>

## SAMPLE PERSONAL STATEMENTS/STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

### Sample Personal Statement

School: UCLA

Program: School of Law

Did Student Disclose Status? Yes

In 1990 my mother made a life changing decision. When I was only two years old she decided that we would leave [REDACTED] and come to the United States. My mother knew that raising a child as a single parent at the age of 47 without the prospects of job opportunities and under the dictatorship of [REDACTED] would be nearly impossible there. Thus, my mother and I packed our belongings into a single suit case and migrated to the United States. Due to the language barrier my mother could not use her former secretary training and instead became a housekeeper. Despite being a low income family, we felt blessed to have food, shelter, good quality second hand goods and the opportunity for an education.

Throughout my elementary and high school education, I worked diligently to maintain good grades and to take advanced courses. I participated in extracurricular activities where I learned to

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<sup>9</sup> (Adapted from several sources including About.com)

embrace my identity as a Latina and to cultivate my leadership abilities. I was convinced that I was college-bound.

However, I was unaware of a particular aspect of my identity, one that would challenge my ability to achieve higher education. During my senior year of high school I learned that I was an undocumented immigrant. My counselor told me that as an undocumented student I would have to pay higher fees and would not have access to financial aid. Considering our financial circumstances, enrolling in a four year institution was not an option. Thinking that my merits and qualifications were shadowed by my immigration status, I felt hopeless.

Despite the challenges that I faced as an undocumented low income student, I was still determined to attend college. Consequently, I enrolled at [REDACTED] where my counselors fortunately understood the state AB540 law which allows undocumented students in the state of California to pay in-state tuition. Student organizations furthered my knowledge of the struggles of immigrants like me. I assisted in organizing teach-ins and conferences to bring awareness and gather support for various social issues. My participation in activities on campus and throughout the Los Angeles community taught me that despite my personal struggles, I could still be an active participant in a social movement and help create change.

After two years at [REDACTED], I transferred to UCLA. I immediately joined Improving Dreams, Equality, Access & Success, an organization that supports and advocates for undocumented students. There I had the privilege of meeting students who shared my experience and realized that through collective efforts we could make a difference in our lives and the lives of others. Thus my identity as an "AB540 undocumented student" no longer invoked a sense of inferiority, but instead it gave me a sense of empowerment. Through our organizing efforts both locally and nationwide we have been able to lobby for immigration reform and plan events for the public to become informed of this issue. Through our community service component, we have been able to reach out and educate other undocumented students of their opportunities for higher education. I also became involved in the labor community, particularly working with unions. Through the research conducted with the Institute for Democracy, Education & Access we found key factors that would help Service Employees International Union 1877 members to become actively involved in their children's education. After analyzing our data, we compiled a curriculum which we implemented during the summer Building Skills Partnership program. I led workshops for members of SEIU local 1877 on how their children could navigate the educational system. I also partook in the CLEAN carwash campaign, an effort to unionize carwash workers who overwhelmingly fell victims to exploitation and abuse. As a legal intern for CLEAN, I worked on the Department of Labor Standards Enforcement & National Labor Relations Board filed cases.

My participation in various social movements led me to advocate for social justice; it also gave birth to a genuine interest in pursuing a legal career in the public interest field. I have dedicated myself entirely to these causes to the point that if I am not working for a greater cause I feel unfulfilled as a person. Although I have been able to volunteer my time to these organizations, I can best serve them by obtaining a legal education. For example, by making presentations to the community, people began to see me as a source of information. At times the advice I can provide is limited because it deals with specific legal matters, such as immigration laws. Working in collaboration with lawyers from the Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund, the UCLA Downtown Labor Center and National Immigration Law Center, I have seen the influence lawyers have on improving people's lives. I want to continue serving the underprivileged and underrepresented members of our society, a goal that I can pursue by obtaining a legal education. On a more personal level, the opportunity for a legal education will help my family leave poverty and provide my mother—who is now 68 and still working as a housecleaner—a chance to retire and have a life of economic stability.

I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to achieve higher education and to now enjoy the guarantee of being a legal resident in the upcoming months. Persevering despite all the challenges I have faced has made me the strong person I am today. Continuing with my education and going on to law school will allow me to assist others overcome their challenges.



## **Sample Statement of Purpose**

School: San Francisco State University

Program: M.A. Biomedical Science with a concentration in Stem Cell Science

Did Student Disclose Status? No

The high impact of health related diseases in the Latino community became more apparent to me when my family was deeply affected by my grandparents passing due to heart failure. This is one of the many factors that drive my ambition towards the study of biomedical sciences. I am a first-generation Latina college student pursuing the endless possibilities of working with stem cells to develop functional structures to improve human life. This has motivated me to pursue a Professional Science Master's Degree in Biomedical Science with a concentration in Stem Cell Science at San Francisco State University (SFSU).

I was an undergraduate at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Neuroscience when I was first introduced to the advances of stem cell technology at Dr. Marie-Francoise Chesselet's Parkinson's and Huntington's Disease Laboratory. The area of discipline that interested me the most was the aspect of regeneration, specifically developing synthetic tissue from stem cells. The ability to utilize stem cells to design sustainable and effective biomaterials instantly became my academic pursuit. As a result, I began volunteering at Dr. Tatiana Segura's Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering Laboratory at UCLA to expand my knowledge in the field of stem cell science and better prepare myself for graduate school.

I have emerged from my lab research experiences with a deep-seeded passion for scientific research that stems from the hands-on skills that it gives me. I have a profound desire to attain the skills, techniques, and training in the stem cell field and to achieve my ambitions of creating sustainable organs to better those lives that face organ failure. My research and education from both Dr. Chesselet's and Dr. Segura's laboratories along with a master's degree from San Francisco State University will help fulfill this aspiration. After completing my master's degree I plan to work in the biotechnology industry, hoping to further my education by obtaining a doctorate degree and continue working in the research field. Furthermore, I will contribute to the developing advances of stem cell technology in the hope of synthesizing functional organs compatible with the human body to aid those with damaged or degenerating organs.

My first research experience began at Dr. Marie-Francoise Chesselet's Parkinson's and Huntington's Disease Laboratory at UCLA, as part of my undergraduate studies. I analyzed the morphology of Golgi stained-medium sized spiny neurons (MSSNs) in the striatum of aged wild-type and CAG 140 knock-in mouse models. My results demonstrated that the morphology of MSSNs in these aged mice were similar to the morphology of MSSNs in late stage Huntington's disease patient's striata. Accordingly, we discovered that therapeutics must be administered at early disease stages in order to prevent this profound neuropathology in our mouse model

Throughout my 22-months at Dr. Chesselet's lab my commitment and enthusiasm for my project continuously strengthened, that upon graduating from UCLA I began volunteering at Dr. Chesselet's laboratory, in order to expand my knowledge and research experience. As a result we are now editing and refining the publication of our research. During my research experience at UCLA, I demonstrated the ability to pick up new methods at a fast pace, interact with laboratory members; ask questions within and outside my own research in weekly laboratory meetings and undergraduate forums. I had the opportunity to present my poster at numerous science conferences, where I received overwhelmingly positive feedback. Presenting my research improved my abilities to communicate and gave me a greater confidence in understanding and explaining my research. Additionally, these interactions provided me with information on various faculty members' research. More importantly, it was here that I was introduced to the

sector of stem cell science. Eventually, I learned of Dr. Tatiana Segura's Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering Laboratory at UCLA and quickly familiarized myself with her research by reading articles published by her lab and was intrigued by the unlimited possibilities that stem cells present.

After learning of Dr. Segura's research, I began reflecting on the effects of degeneration due to Huntington's disease, the decline that it imposes on the body, and saw a promise in stem cells. Culturing, differentiation, and proliferation grabbed my attention because these new advances could one day possibly cure degenerative diseases and recreate functional tissues and organs; further propelling my desire to immerse myself into this field. Since my Huntington's disease research was near completion, last year I contacted Dr. Segura whereupon an interview, she accepted my offer to volunteer at her laboratory until the beginning of my graduate education. At Dr. Segura's Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering Laboratory at UCLA, I conduct research with the culturing of mice mesenchymal stem cells (mMSC) in 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional hyaluronic acid (HA) hydrogels and learning new techniques: cell passage, cell staining, cell counting using the hemocytometer, making 2-D and 3-D hydrogels, extracting RNA from cells, gel, and using Ellman's reagent to test the activity of crosslinkers.

Since I did not major in a scientific branch that closely dealt with biomedical science, I was eager to expand my knowledge and research experience in this field by volunteering at Dr. Segura's laboratory. The experiences here along with my dedication and passion for the sciences will equip me with the preparatory abilities and techniques that will be necessary for my graduate studies. In addition to volunteering at Dr.

Segura's laboratory, I will also be enrolled in Linear Algebra and C++ Programming at Antelope Valley College (AVC) during the spring semester and will continue working as a private tutor.

A Professional Science Master's Degree in Biomedical Science with a concentration in Stem Cell Science at San Francisco State University will be immensely beneficial to my academic and professional endeavors. SFSU will expand my perspective and provide me with a life full of new experiences, opportunities and resources with breakthrough training in science, research or industry internships while simultaneously gaining knowledge of business skills all of which will help me prepare for my future. The education and experiences provided by internships and business courses is unique to SFSU thus, making me extremely confident that SFSU will be the most ideal university to continue my academic passions and ambitions.

As a Latina woman in the field of biomedical science I offer a unique perspective seeing first hand the health problems in my community and ability to provide a diverse viewpoint from my collaborations with Dr. Chesselet and Dr. Segura. San Francisco State University will provide me with the knowledge and tools that are necessary to strengthen my dedication to the sciences, specifically in making valuable contributions to the future of biomedical sciences. My personal background, degree in neuroscience, exceptional understanding in mathematics, research experience in a Huntington's Disease Laboratory, and in a Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering Laboratory provide me with the desirable qualities to succeed at SFSU as a mentor, student, and researcher.

### **Sample Personal Statement**

School: University of California, Los Angeles

Program: Master in Social Welfare

Did Student Disclose Status? Yes

Immigration has become one of the most controversial issues in this country today. What has been portrayed as the immigration crisis in the media and in the political arena has dehumanized and discriminated against the undocumented immigrant community. As part of the undocumented community, I have struggled with several challenges we face for almost ten years. This circumstance is the most significant in my life, and it has influenced me greatly to become the person that I am today. In the next pages I will develop on the personal experiences that have influenced me to pursue my Master's degree on Social Welfare at UCLA.

*REVISED MARCH 2012*

I live with my parents and younger sister, and have an older brother in Mexico who was deported in 2003. The separation of our family affected me emotionally which then affected my relationships and academics. I then realized that the immigration issue is a real condition and that I had to act on it to bring forth change in my situation. The emotional support from different people lit the desire of helping others in similar circumstances. Keeping in mind that the Chinese symbol for "crisis" also means "opportunity", I chose self-determination and challenged myself every time adversity came along. The sudden deportation of my brother has taught me that time is invaluable, which is why I have done my best in being involved in different organizations and projects in order to educate others but also create institutional change.

Through my commitment to social justice and equal access to education, I have been active on my university campus and community. On campus, I co-founded a student organization that advocates for undocumented immigrant students as well as encourages others to persist with their educational dreams. Through this effort, we have put together forums for faculty, staff to inform them about students' struggles and our need for inclusive immigration and educational policies. I also had the opportunity to present these concerns to the president of California State University, Fullerton and was able to enlist his support for undocumented students on campus. In the community, I have taken the initiative to organize know-your-rights workshops as well as outreach campaigns to the immigrant community. I have also conducted workshops for high school students on their rights to in-state tuition under California's Assembly Bill 540. I have been proud to serve as a role model for a younger generation of students, demonstrating that it is possible to obtain a degree even when undocumented. Even though I feel proud, I have also seen the need that the undocumented immigrant youth has for social services.

In my involvement with the community, I became aware of the importance to work in collaboration with other groups and organizations in the community for the betterment of my client population. When providing services to the community, it is of vital importance to be sensitive of the diverse groups that live there. By attending the Master's of Social Welfare at UCLA, I will be imbued by a diverse group of students and faculty that will help me become more culturally sensitive and further develop my understanding of the community as a social system. When contacting Dr. Hasenfeld via email, I expressed my interest in working with him, knowing that his research interests are in the relations between the policies, the organizations and the clients. I would place my focus on the undocumented immigrant population by looking at different methods of services and influencing policies that will be beneficial for the population.

Living through the deportation of my brother and seeing the lack of professionals and services for the undocumented immigrant population has influenced me to make a career in the helping professions focusing on this population. With self-determination I have overcome financial and educational barriers, and that proves to myself that I am ready for the next step in my educational career. I am confident that by being part of the Master's of Social Welfare program at UCLA and working closely with the faculty and in the field, I will excel and achieve my career goals.

## **SAMPLE CHEAT SHEET**

This is the sample of a cheat sheet to give to prospective professor during office hours at least two months before you need a recommendation letter.

YOUR NAME HERE  
RECOMMENDATION LETTER PACKET- (PROFESSOR NAME)  
DATE OF REQUEST & DATE YOU WOULD LIKE THE LETTER BY

University GPA:

Major GPA:

AA degrees: If this applies to you

BA degree: Department and expected date of graduation

### **AWARDS/SELECTIONS:**

- Highlight school, community and/or employment based recognition, scholarships and/or awards

### **EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES REFLECTED IN TRANSCRIPTS:**

- My GPA dropped from a 4.0 to a 3.23 my last semester BECAUSE...
- Keep it simple, they may not want to address it at all in the letter

### **WEAKNESS IN MY APPLICATION:**

- My GRE score was not outstanding, but I think my GPA and extracurricular activities should weigh more heavily than a standardized test.
- I have not taken one public policy or social welfare course, which may weaken my application to those programs. Though I do not have in-class experience with these topics, my work experience should make up for it..... SHOW do not just TELL

### **THINGS YOU MAY LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT:**

- First generation college student
- Currently taking an accelerated course load in order to graduate in three semesters
- Member of any honor societies

### **WHAT I DID IN YOUR CLASS:**

- **IMPORTANT TO DO THIS PART!** Ex: I completed an 11-page research paper on how the parenting styles one encountered as a child affects that same child's level of self-esteem as an adult. I received an A on the paper, an A on the final and an A- in your class.

### **PERSONAL STATEMENT OR STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

Remember:

Attach transcripts, resume, paper(s) from his/her class and personal statement.

List the schools and programs you are applying to.

Give the professor one date for the letter to be completed by.

Make sure your email and phone number are also in the packet.