

# Personal Statements Guidebook

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**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA**  
**CAREER CENTRE**

## What are personal statements?

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Personal statements are essays written in the first person. A personal statement is usually part of the application process to gain admission to graduate or professional schools. A professional educator may prepare a personal statement to include in his/her portfolio or a person applying for a scholarship may be asked to submit a personal statement as part of his/her request for the award.

Most personal statements are written in response to a prompt, or a question, posed by the organization to the applicant. The writing prompt can be general:

**Applications must include a personal statement of no more than 500 words. It should outline the applicant's experience, reasons for choosing UBC, and career objectives, and should describe their overall interest in the program, and what academic knowledge and experience they bring to the school.**

*From University of British Columbia's application to the Masters of Arts in Children's Literature program.*

**How have your previous experiences and academic choices influenced your decision to apply to law school? Why are you interested in attending UCalgary Law specifically? What would you like to do with your law degree?**

*From the University of Calgary Law School Application.*

**Your statement of intent should be no more than two pages which should include: your specific area of academic interest (research topic you want to work on); how your past education and other experiences have prepared you to be successful in the graduate program; what you hope to achieve in the graduate program; why this particular program at the School of Public Health is the best place for you to pursue your interests.**

*From the School of Public Health, University of Alberta*

**The Letter of Intent which should state your academic or professional area of specialization, specify how completion of the program would support your professional practice, and identify a provisional topic for the final applied research project**

*From the University of Alberta, Faculty of Extension, Master of Arts in Communications and Technology Application Requirements.*

Graduate and professional schools have moved away from ambiguous or creative thinking prompts and focused more on the applicant's self-assessment, description of their skills and education, their knowledge of the program, as well as what the applicant plans to do with their degree. The school may also ask for the applicant to indicate if there is a professor that they would like to work with or area of interest that they would like to focus on. In this last case, the school is not asking you to determine your advisor in advance, but they want to know if you have conducted research on the staff, their publications and research, and specific disciplines represented at the school/department.

Sometimes, a student may use a personal statement as an appeal for clemency if he/she might be placed on academic probation, suspension or if he/she is reapplying to a school where the student was suspended or placed on probation. In these cases, the writer will address the issue that led to the departure from the institution and the positive steps that he/she has taken to ensure future success.

Personal statements are used for a wide variety of academic purposes, from admissions to post-graduate fellowships, and it is important to answer the question the institution has posed. It is, however, only one step in the process and should not consume all of your time.

## Content

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It is your task to answer the question posed by the personal statement in a unique and engaging way. Some questions may have multiple parts and you may not be able to answer each part with equal detail. Your answer should focus on your strengths and be written with sincerity and maturity.

How you write your statement will depend very much on how skilled a writer you are: better writers may decide to take more chances. As one of the admissions officers says in *The Gatekeepers*, “If you’ve got something you want to write, then write it the way you want” (p. 38). If writing isn’t your strength, don’t try to be creative with the statement. You don’t have to try to be “original” since, chances are, someone else may have decided to use the same “original” idea. Try to be unique, as in, yourself, presented logically, edited and proofread.

Many students have little experience injecting personal opinion and stories into their essays, so the personal statement can be difficult to write. Look at a variety of samples, available on the Internet or in books, such as *How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School*, to get an idea about what a personal statement could look like. This booklet also includes examples of several different types of personal statements.

The personal statement may be a narrative with an introduction, a body and a conclusion. This type of statement tells a story, hence *narrative*, which may be easy to write since most stories can be retold in chronological order. The story should be personal—about you not someone you know—and should have logical relevance to the program you are applying for or the prompt that was given.

You may have been given a topic which asks for a reason or an argument, similar to the prompt provided by the University of Calgary Medical School found at the beginning of this booklet. In this case, look at the question carefully and prepare a thesis, a body which supports the thesis and a conclusion. Try not to be overly critical—nothing can be done—or fail to argue at all—the whole experience was perfect, nothing to change—but analyze the problem to the best of your ability without contradicting yourself. A demonstration of critical reasoning and focus are important to these essays.

Here are a few guidelines about what not to do or say in your personal statement:

- Don’t be repetitious.
- Don’t re-write your resume/CV.
- Don’t try to be funny or clever, especially if you are self-denigrating or degrade others.
- Don’t reveal character weaknesses or flaws.
- Don’t use slang, unless it illustrates a point or if there is no other word to describe what you mean.
- Don’t criticize anyone, including former bosses, colleagues or professors.
- Don’t criticize any theory, thought or school.
- Don’t flatter anyone or “name drop” or refer to the influence of famous persons or celebrities in your career choices just for the sake of extra points. However, if your advisor—a person you have a real academic connection to—is a micro-celebrity in the field and he/she has influenced you, you can express how their *real* influence has informed your professional pursuits.
- Don’t make references to popular culture, including movies, television or popular novels as the **primary motivation** for your decision to pursue a career in law or medicine. Avoid references to pseudo-professional or academic heroes such as Robert Langdon (symbolologist, which doesn’t exist), Indiana Jones (archeology), Meredith Grey or Gregory House (doctors), Gil Grissom (forensic science) or Charlie Eppes (mathematics), amongst others.

Anna Ivey, the author of *The Ivey Guide to Law School Admissions*, also suggests avoiding several clichéd topics including:

- The monetary benefits you will receive from the degree.
- Your passionate commitment to public service and social justice—especially if your resume does not include any service or if it shows a trifling with volunteer work.
- Travelogues.
- Writing a chronology of your personal accomplishments similar to your resume.

In addition, if you have decided to write about the effect a person has had on your life, make sure the statement is about you and your reactions, not about the other person. You should not write about another person's life experience, whether a personal account or from a story, and imply that knowledge of this experience "changed your life". *The Ivey Guide*, available in the Career Centre Resource Centre, provides samples of good and bad personal statements illustrating these concepts.

Bad writing, clichés or immaturity/inexperience can all be caught by an attentive editor and avoided by a small amount of initial research. For your research, you can read books like *The Ivey Guide*, or ones more suited to medical, law or graduate school, so you can see what others have written. (There is a list of resources at the end of this booklet.) You should interview professionals in the field if you would like to make any conclusions about the type of work you believe you will do. It is also helpful to have a professional in the field act as one of your editors.

On the following pages you will find several different types of personal statements, written by real people who used these statements in their application documents to real programs. The names, programs and places have all been changed.

The booklet also has a list of resources. If you need additional assistance, please contact the Career Centre.

## Disclosing personal information

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A personal statement is also not *too* personal. The personal statement is about your education and your professional goals, but it is not about your personal or family life.

However, there are some topics, both personal and sensitive, that you may wish to refer to in your statement because they are relevant to your application. If any of these topics have affected your studies or professional life, you can **briefly** comment on them in your personal statement because they are highly relevant to your application. For example, the loss of a relative to cancer may not be appropriate in a letter applying to journalism school, but may be acceptable when you are explaining your ambition to become a doctor.

In the following chart, a mention in the "include" section means that you can include this information **at your discretion** and that you should not include more than one or two sentences in your statement. Reference to any of these topics, especially if they are not carefully worded, may alienate members of the admissions committee. You should always consider, before adding any information to your package, how the information increases merit, demonstrates your skills as a scholar and/or professional or contributes to your ability to succeed in the program you are applying to.

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Include If:</i>	<i>Avoid If:</i>
Illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illness was significant motivation for choice of education or profession.</li> <li>• Illness explains significant gap in studies/lower grades.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illness is not relevant as a motivation</li> <li>• Illness has led to <b>several</b> major stops where you failed to resume your education/career path and selected a new career or program each time your health has stabilized.</li> </ul>
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You are applying to a religious school or program and your adherence to those religious beliefs is a significant factor in selection.</li> <li>• Your affiliation in the group has led to significant professional and personal experience that improves your application's merit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school or program is secular and adherence to specific religious beliefs or practices is not necessary for acceptance.</li> </ul>
Political beliefs/ideology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The program's political beliefs or ideology, whether conservative or liberal, is the same as yours</li> <li>• Your affiliation in a political association/group has led to significant professional and personal experience that improves your application's merit. You might also choose to refer to this experience without referring to the political group by name.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Liberal arts" is not a statement of the institution's political ideology.</li> <li>• Adherence to a particular ideology or political belief is not important to the application.</li> <li>• Though you have spent significant time with the organization, you have left the group and feel it has no relevance to your application.</li> <li>• Your political alliance or affiliation is far from the mainstream. Though this should not play a role in determining the merits of your application, it is possible that if you mention or stress your affiliation, that your membership may have a chilling effect on the admissions committee.</li> </ul>
Life events such as marriage, birth or divorce, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change of personal circumstances explains significant gap in studies/lower grades.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change of marital status encourages a career change, especially if the acquisition or loss of a partner led to "free time" or "funds" to pursue additional studies.</li> </ul>
Loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Due to loss, such as a death, divorce or job loss, you experienced a significant break in your studies or a significant drop in your marks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can seem maudlin or sentimental, as if you are asking for pity, not a placement.</li> <li>• Never refer to the loss of a pet as an explanation for a significant gap in studies/lower grades.</li> </ul>

Additionally you may consider disclosing your age, sexual orientation, ethnicity or a disability; however, you should ask: how does the disclosure improve the merit of my application? For example, a mature student may receive special consideration during the initial screening, but does your age have anything to do with your professional capabilities? If it does not then it does not increase your merit and you need not disclose this information at this stage of your application.

## Final Checks

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Your personal statement should be edited for grammatical errors and for logical and rhetorical flow and consistency with the request from the institution. After editing and making changes, you should proofread the document to make sure you haven't missed anything or introduced new errors when editing. It is a good idea to have one or two people look at your statement before you submit it with your application.

## Copying or Buying a Personal Statement

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Never buy or copy any of your application documents, including your personal statement.

Personal statements are creative non-fiction, not always the preferred format for academic writing, so it is helpful to view some samples before writing your own. The Career Centre has several books that you can look at to help you prepare your statement, as well as the samples included in this booklet.

However, we strongly caution you NOT TO BUY OR COPY A PERSONAL STATEMENT. Samples of personal statements are found relatively easily online and if you can find them most admissions committees have the sites bookmarked as well. If you decide to buy a personal statement you are not getting a "fresh" statement but a form where schools and names are swapped in and out according to the requirements for the letter.

It is possible that other applicants have purchased the same letter, either when applying to this or a previous round and the admissions committee will recognize the duplication. Cheaters have also been caught when the original writer discovers that his/her letter has been swiped, usually from a website, and the writer can send letters of notification to any schools that might have received the stolen letter.

At the University of Alberta, if you have submitted a purchased or copied personal statement, this is an offense in violation of the Code of Applicant Behaviour, as well as the Code of Student Behaviour and the offence will be investigated. According to the University of Alberta Applicant Code of Behaviour, you could receive a:

- a. *verbal and/or written reprimand; or*
- b. *refusal to consider applications to any program or in any registration status at the University of Alberta for up to five (5) years; or*
- c. *permanent refusal to consider applications to any program or in any registration status at the University of Alberta.*

From <https://www.ualberta.ca/governance/resources/policies-standards-and-codes-of-conduct/code-of-applicant-behaviour>

It is easy for a buyer to find these services on the web, so it is just as easy to track and reveal plagiarism in application documents. There also appears to be no time limit to report a person for application plagiarism: you could be a prominent professional in the field, many years after graduation from the program you applied to, and have your reputation ruined if a plagiarism charge is confirmed.

The sample statements included in this booklet were written by real people actually applying for programs and awards. Should you have any questions about a statement that you have received and the integrity of the statement, please contact the Career Centre to discuss the contributors.

## Personal Statement Applying for a Scholarship 1

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Devin Allein  
8976-1200 NW  
Atlantica, OA 82549  
devin18@uatlantica.oia  
(999) 555-2323

January 31, 20XX

Chervil Grant  
Education Bureau  
2300 Block, Suite 1256  
Beringia, OA 12584

Dear Mr. Grant:

I am writing to express my interest in the international business scholarship and four-month work term offered by Oceania Trade and Investment. I am currently in my third year of a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Atlantica, with a major in East Asian Studies and a minor in Economics. After studying abroad in Hong Kong and learning Cantonese for four years, I have determined that I want to use this knowledge to further cross-cultural understanding and business relations. Within international business, Asia particularly interests me because of the combination of existing economic giants and the explosive growth opportunities of emerging markets.

Becoming a member of International Association (IA) has further confirmed my desire to pursue a career in international business. At this year's IA National Congress, I was delighted to meet Anise Freeman, an alumna of IA. After learning about her experiences as a Trade Agent with Oceania Export, I feel that my future career goals are achievable. Upon graduation, I intend to participate in two IA internships, one in China and one in Bangladesh. I am also interested in pursuing a graduate degree in International Trade and Investment Policy.

In pursuit of these career goals, I am currently the Vice President External Relations for IA Local. Thus far, I have led the initiative to establish a partnership with IA Hong Kong and I served on the committee to establish a travel award for students who would like to pursue international internships in Hong Kong. I am also working with the Faculty of Arts to develop strategies for IA to target Arts students more effectively. Finally, I am co-coordinating a gala event to celebrate the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of IA Oceania. My involvement with IA has allowed me to further develop my negotiation skills and ability to segment target markets, both crucial to a career in international business.

Further evidence of my leadership ability is my experience as a Monitor in Residence at Atlantica University. In this capacity, I have received a great deal of training in group facilitation, conflict mediation, time management, and team building. Living and working with a variety of students has also helped me to broaden my perspective and become more understanding of different backgrounds. I now know that I am capable of coordinating a common home for 45 students as well as planning events, enforcing discipline, and addressing resident concerns while maintaining a full time course load. Through my work with fellow residence leaders, I have also developed my ability to function as a team member while ultimately leading as an individual.

Along with this letter of intent, I have included a copy of my resume, post-secondary transcripts, and letters of reference. I look forward to an opportunity to further discuss my leadership potential and interest in international business. Thank you for your time and consideration of my application.

Sincerely,

Devin Allein

Enclosures

## Personal Statement Applying for a Scholarship 2

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March 10, 20XX

Achievement Foundation  
1200 Block Street  
Laputa, AA 12345

To Awards Committee:

I am a well-rounded individual and a suitable candidate for the Achievement Foundation Scholarship, because not only do I excel in academics, but I have also demonstrated active participation in every aspect of my school and community.

As a student, I am an inquisitive learner with dedication and diligence. While enrolled in some of the most academically rigorous courses offered by my school, including the International Baccalaureate curriculum in Mathematics, Chemistry, and World History, my average academic standing from the first semester is 98%. In the past three years, I have also challenged myself in various national competitions, including the National Mathematics Contest, National Science Challenge and the Excellence in Chemistry Examination. My academic achievements have been recognized by the University of Pacifica Book Award, the University of Atlantica Academic Excellence Scholarship and the Pure Math 30 IB Award.

Furthermore, I have been extensively involved in a variety of extracurricular activities. At school, I have engaged in the Model United Nations, Peer Ambassador Culture Connection Club, Student Leadership Team, Environment Club, Philosophy Club and the Graduation Committee. With the Peer Ambassador Cultural Connection Club, I have helped organize such events as ESL winterfest, multicultural show, and cultural trivia, in order to promote multiculturalism and eliminate racial discrimination. The Philosophy Club, which I co-founded, has facilitated open and tolerant discussions about potentially controversial issues. My active involvement on the Student Leadership Team has been instrumental in acknowledging the school diversity and creating an integrated and positive learning environment for the school. The contribution of my skills and abilities to extracurricular activities at my school help foster a school environment that is pleasant for everyone within the community. My peers also selected me as Outstanding Student for our graduating class.

Outside of school, I am equally active in community service endeavours. I am currently volunteering at the Pacifica Hospital and Pacifica Youth Foundation, but in the past I have volunteered at the Pacifica Youth Employment Centre, the International Children's Festival, and Cancer Society fundraisers. At the Pacifica Youth Foundation, many of the projects that we have chosen to fund are grass-roots and educational initiatives, which often are directed towards building a more peaceful and stable community. In addition, I have acted in a leadership position in the event planning process for the Circle of Friends Campaign against Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and for the Learning Disabilities Association fundraiser.

After pursuing undergraduate and graduate studies, my long-range career goal is to become a pharmacologist in the pharmaceutical industry, specializing in clinical research on drug therapy for neurological and endocrine disorders. All of my efforts, both in and outside of school, are intended to make a positive impact on my community and to better equip myself for an ever-changing society with the skills and experiences essential for undertaking future initiatives successfully.

Thank you for your interest and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Alex Tsang

## **Autobiographical Statement – Questions to Consider When Writing**

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You must first consider what the school board is asking that you include in your autobiographical statement. The requirements for each school board (e.g. length) can vary and it is important to know these requirements to help guide your writing.

Following is a list of questions to think about when writing your autobiographical statement. These questions are intended to stimulate your thinking about the content of your autobiographical statement. Always bear in mind that each applicant's autobiographical statement should be personal and unique. Think about how to make yours reflect who you are as a person and what you want to be as a teacher.

- Why do you want to be a teacher?
  - When/How did you decide you wanted to become a teacher?
  - Who and/or what influenced your decision? In what way?
  - Are there one or more specific experiences you have had that catalyzed your decision?
  - Are there other occupations that you have considered but abandoned in favour of teaching? If yes, why?
- What aspects of your background strengthened your interest in teaching and provided you with the skills and qualities to be successful as a teacher?
  - Education and training
  - Work experience
  - Volunteer experience
  - Extra-curricular activities
  - Interests
  - Other
- What are your strengths relevant to teaching? How did you develop these strengths?
- What are your interests relevant to teaching (e.g. grade levels, subjects)?
- What is your philosophy of education?
- What do you hope to achieve as a teacher? How will you accomplish it?
- What are your personal and professional career goals? How will you go about reaching your goals?
- Do you have any "unusual" experiences or interests that might differentiate and distinguish you from other applicants?
- Is there anything about yourself that will strengthen your teaching application?

## **Autobiographical Statement, Education**

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At the age of nine, I moved from Bangladesh to Pacifica. I was in the Pacifica Public School Board system from Grades 5 to 12. To adapt to my adopted country, I was able to make friends and excel at English, learning communication skills, as well as flexibility. From this experience, I have come to value multiculturalism and diversity. I appreciate that each individual has his/her own strengths and talents. As an educator, I have a strong belief that all students can learn and each student is unique and possesses different learning needs.

My passion for teaching and my development of teaching skills were demonstrated in my APT. My university facilitator, mentor teacher, and another teacher that I taught with all commented on the improvement in my teaching voice, confidence, and classroom management skills. By the fifth week of my APT, my mentor teacher was impressed with my teaching and had reassured me that I had already passed my course. I was encouraged to continue my learning and try different teaching styles. I developed effective working relationships with my students. I also honed my teamwork and interpersonal skills by cooperating with other teachers in planning our teaching materials according to the Alberta curriculum and by sharing teaching resources.

My commitment and devotion to teaching led me to volunteer an extra week of teaching after my practicum. Outside of the classroom, I participated in the Community Living Skills program (CLS). The CLS experience expanded my knowledge in instruction differentiation for students with different learning abilities and needs, in terms of their disability, family background, and current living circumstances. As a Program Instructor, I had the opportunity to further share my experiences with new immigrant families and teach and assist their children in adapting to the school environment.

I try to create a learning environment with trust and respect, where my students and I feel safe to explore, take risks, and learn. I motivate students to increase their interest, problem solving, and critical thinking skills in science by supplying stimulating activities. With my passion for chemistry, my goal in teaching it is not to just to reiterate information from the textbook. Rather, I include intriguing and captivating stories for my students. The goal in my professional growth plan is to increase my knowledge of curriculum and provide anecdotes and interesting facts to supplement the content in my classes. My mentor teacher assisted me in reaching this goal by giving me a year subscription of the magazine, *Discover: Science, Technology, and the Future*, at the end of my practicum.

In addition to my studies at university, I sought out various experiences to improve my teaching skills. My interest with special needs children initiated when I started to work as a Relief Care Worker. I have worked with a family since 20XX. Through the eyes of the family, I am able to recognize their strength in managing my client's diverse needs and demands. The most rewarding aspects of my work with my client are her smiles, giggles, and blinks whenever she has learned something new. Although my client has low capacities in communication and physical activities, her family and I still hold high hopes and expectations for her to continue to learn.

In the spring of 20XX, I volunteered at the Student Help Line at the university. I completed 50 hours of training and learned to be a good listener, empathetic, resourceful, and nonjudgmental. What motivated me to join the Student Help Line is my belief that the counseling skills I have learned can be directly applied in a school setting when my students need support. As my interest in counseling increased, I took two educational psychology courses: Introduction to Counseling and Working with Exceptional Children.

Throughout my various work experiences, I have always enjoyed teaching and learning from others. As I enter the teaching profession, I am inspired to be a teacher who is a life-long learner, and who teaches students according to their needs. I welcome forthcoming challenges and continue to empower and encourage students to identify their own learning needs and develop to their full potential.

## Law school personal statement

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I came to Pacifica in September 20XX as an international student to pursue graduate studies. Immersing myself into a society where “ethnicity” and “nationality” were concrete, living concepts, I felt naturally drawn to the exploration of so-called “ethnic art” and ethnic/national identity. Completing a graduate degree and writing a thesis on the subject taught me to manage and synthesize large volumes of information, to recognize multi-faceted perspectives on issues, and to build balanced arguments.

While engaged in the very demanding reality of graduate courses, deadlines, teaching, and writing, I also sought out different ways to enlarge my perspective beyond campus, as my long-term intention was to make this country my home and become its citizen. For example, I taught English as a Second Language to immigrants and volunteered in various orientation services for newly-arrived international students. These experiences gave me the opportunity to bring my ever-growing understanding and appreciation of life in this society to others eager to learn about their new country and looking for practical advice.

My graduate studies led to a research project on ethnicity and allowed me to pursue further my long-standing interest in qualitative research, life-experience interviewing, and exploration of identity and cultural integration. My in-depth research in the literature and other related resources enabled me to develop and field-test research methods and tools, identify suitable technical-equipment and support for fieldwork, and to train the research team on the methodology for gathering accounts of personal experience of pioneer life on the prairies. My curiosity and interviewing style enabled me to elicit vivid stories of life that were rich in detail and insight. The collected interviews and copies of historic photographs have been indexed, digitized, and archived at the Folklore Archives. Most of the project’s data is currently available in-house to researchers, and work is underway to make parts of it accessible to public in the future.

Attracted to research and primary sources of information, I also conducted a large-scale employer survey with the career centre, in which I developed research methodology that achieved a 95% response rate. The findings about employers’ recruitment practices were included as proprietary reference material into the centre’s educational resources and services. The success and usefulness of this project set a precedent for the centre to continue with similar employer surveys regularly utilizing the methodology from the original study.

As a volunteer, I joined the Newcomer Centre which allowed me to combine my long-standing interest in immigration and career development in practical settings. I volunteered to assist with the Centre’s research on economic and social integration of immigrants, teach employment-preparation and life-skills courses, and counsel immigrant clients on an individual basis. My enthusiasm, knowledge, and skills were noted and resulted in the offer of a full-time job as a career counselor with the centre. I proposed and worked on several research initiatives, developed guidelines and ‘tip sheets’ for fellow career advisors and clients, enhanced in-house training curricula, and led a very successful fund-raising campaign while surpassing the amount raised in the previous year by 40% and increasing the staff participation rate by 150%. The centre’s clients often acknowledged my extensive knowledge of job-search and educational resources, and my abilities to facilitate goal-setting and motivate them for informed decision-making.

My current job with the Professional Training Centre (PTC) has culminated in a fortunate blend of my passion for research, competence in the subjects of immigration and access to regulated professions, commitment to public advocacy. My initiatives include developing and coordinating training activities geared towards rigorous licensure examinations and lobbying for funds to acquire exam-preparation resources and to contract subject-matter educators. I often act as a client liaison for licensing and regulatory authorities, training-providers, and employers as well as interpret various requirements, policies, and regulations to my clients. This work has resulted in expanding the client base from 50 IEs when I joined PTC, to over 300 professionals currently accessing our services. The success of this program and its evident promise has enhanced my motivation and confidence to engage in the study of law.

A legal education will provide me further with powerful tools and resources to pursue my ambitions with much greater effectiveness and impact. My experience to date has inspired and shaped my career interests in law, especially with regard to the areas of immigration, and employment. I would like to present myself as a fitting candidate for the law program and as someone very capable to set and achieve goals.

## **Applying to medical school**

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My family background has greatly influenced my desire to become a physician. My father died suddenly of a heart attack when I was 14 years old. Losing my father so young has taught me that life is precious, and also that we need to take good care of our bodies to enjoy life as much as possible. Thus, health promotion and maintenance are my key areas of interest.

I somehow knew from the time I was 11 that I wanted to be a doctor, but the reasons why have changed over the years. I am a different person than I was at nineteen, blindly negotiating the challenges of university life, caught in an endless stream of students running the same academic rat race trying to become doctors. Now that I have worked as a Registered Nurse for over 2 years, I feel strongly that studying medicine is not simply my desire, but my calling. While nursing involves a lot of direct patient contact, and I do enjoy getting to know my patients well, I often feel limited in my role. My fascination with how the body works is why I want to develop an even greater understanding of human anatomy and physiology. Using this knowledge, I want to be able to diagnose diseases and investigate possible treatment options, which is beyond my scope of practice as an RN. I want to live up to my full potential by serving patients as their doctor and working to provide them with the best quality of care.

I have been fortunate enough to have traveled overseas as a health practitioner. I volunteered for 3 months in Ukraine and my experiences working at an orphanage and rehabilitation school for children with cerebral palsy were enlightening and deeply moving. I have a passion for learning about other cultures and supporting communities in their efforts to develop and grow. As a result, I look forward to spending some time practicing medicine overseas, continuing to expand my knowledge about other ways of life and trying to meet the health care needs of people in different countries.

Working as an RN in a northern urban community has taught me a great deal about the challenges faced by remote and rural areas in meeting health care needs. I have learned the importance of being creative and innovative in caring for patients when health care resources are limited. For example, my city is often lacking in adequate community supports for patients with mental health issues. As a result, my colleagues and I try to develop new ways of supporting these patients in hospital so that they can develop life skills to cope with the stresses of living in the community. I enjoy the variety of patients I see, and have grown fond of the simplicity of the North. I hope to practice medicine in a similar community.

As a full-time RN for over a year, I have learned the importance of living a balanced life. My philosophy is that one should work so that they can truly live, and not simply live to work. I believe that this experience has prepared me to return to university, so that I can remain healthy and happy despite the demanding nature of a degree in medicine. Combined with my strong work ethic, I am enthusiastic about pursuing my goal of becoming a doctor and contributing to the medical profession.

## **Personal statement applying to the Speech Language Pathology program**

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He could not get his shoes on. Screams rang out in the classroom, down the halls, and in the principal's office. The Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) and I had tried almost everything to get him to communicate: American Sign Language, a Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), and providing him with verbal prompts. Sadly, nothing seemed to be working. He was not able to say "help" in a socially acceptable form of communication.

I asked myself "What would it be like if I could not use words or pick up a picture to communicate?" I would feel trapped. Did he feel trapped? The situation appeared hopeless, but we eventually got our answer. With play dough he decided to make a telephone and he picked up his receiver and said "hello". I picked up my receiver and said "hello" back. After that, the SLP and I used his play dough telephone to teach him communication skills with the hope that they would generalize to other areas. Eventually they did: he began asking for help at lunch to open his granola bar packages. I was inspired by the intelligence, creativity, and enthusiasm required by the therapist to help this child experience the gift of communication in a meaningful way. This little boy helped me understand that the SLP profession is challenging, but with dedication and patience there will be both small and large successes. Watching this child progress through his communication journey confirmed that I want to become a SLP.

The aforementioned experience occurred in the classroom I shared with an SLP. For two years, I worked as a teacher in an Early Education classroom with students from different populations including children with speech and/or language delays. In the classroom, I closely observed the day-to-day successes and struggles of an SLP. To help me make an informed decision to apply to return to school, I talked to several SLPs about the various aspects concerning the profession. I learned about the variety of opportunities SLPs have in medical, educational and community settings as well as opportunities to work with individuals at various phases in their lives from preschool age to adulthood.

After one year of full time employment with Pacifica Public Schools, I was awarded a permanent teaching contract. Following the receipt of my permanent status, I taught full time and began to take prerequisite SLP courses at Pacifica University. I was also enrolled in four university courses and earned an average of 3.8.

There is a significant irregularity in my academic record particularly during the years I was not working towards my education degree. During my first years at Pacifica University, I did not set clear goals for myself and experienced great turmoil over deciding which path to take. Once accepted into the Education Faculty, I felt more focused and goal-driven and began to achieve good grades, graduating with distinction.

In preparation for this application, I have taken a number of courses after my degree and have achieved grades between an A minus and an A plus. My academic journey has allowed me to grow and to understand the benefits of hard work and commitment to my studies. Typically, poor grades are not viewed as a positive experience, but for me this experience was necessary in order to realize what I wanted to do and who I wanted to become as a student, a professional, and especially as a person.

I have chosen Atlantica University because of the extensive course offerings and the reputation of the program. Through my research, I see that the program offers exceptionally qualified faculty as well as excellent facilities. I would embrace the privilege to participate in your program and look forward to making my contribution to the profession through research based work and practical applications of Speech-Language Pathology.

## **Application to a graduate school with religious affiliation**

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As a student at Pacifica College for the last three years, I have learned an invaluable lesson: the relationships we form with people reflect the people we are. I have formed many great relationships with my family, friends and co-workers, and they have shaped my personality. Through these relationships, I have discovered that the family psychology graduate program at Stars University is the right career path for me.

During my research, I began to understand the importance of developing relationships at many stages of the research process and with different groups of people. While at school, I learned the importance of being a community leader in a field that I am passionate about. Through my work at the Help Centre and numerous volunteer experiences, I have gained an in-depth perspective on client interaction in various counseling environments. My immense interest in psychology and the affirmation I have received from my family and friends have strengthened my passion for this field. Ultimately, my faith as a Christian forms an intricate part of who I am. I believe it is extremely important to integrate my faith with my helping profession in an inviting atmosphere like that of Stars University.

My experience at university has shown me that I should be open to exploring all of my options. My current research with Dr. Smarts focuses on keeping children safe while using the Internet and understanding whether they can be taught potentially life saving skills when faced with predators online. Through collaborative efforts with my fellow researcher and supervisor, we have developed questionnaires and surveys which will further our research. The cooperation of our research partners has strengthened my insight into the importance of relationships.

One of my unique experiences this year has been working at the Help Centre (HC). At HC, I have been given the opportunity to interact closely with psychologists, clients and their children. My role as in-bound coordinator and liaison between psychologists and their clients has given me a broader understanding of the dynamics between these important relationships. One of my responsibilities is to complete intake packages with clients. These packages include giving outcome questionnaires, obtaining general background information, and reviewing issues surrounding confidentiality and fee assessments with the clients. While settling client fees, I am taken into the complexity of their problems. I find myself often complimenting their courage and unrelenting positive attitude in attempting to overcome their problems. I have discovered that many clients do not give themselves enough credit for wanting to help themselves and their families. Ultimately, I am very touched by their stories and I have a desire to do more than just listen and book them in with one of our counselors. I want to be that counselor. I would like to learn counseling techniques and guide clients to find solutions and empower them to help themselves.

Two of my colleagues at HC are current distance students at Stars University. While discussing your program with my colleagues, I found out that the program requires students to meet with a counselor and explore their own life while in school. I thought this is extremely interesting as I am a firm believer that in order to help others you need to conquer fears and struggles in your own life. Another student told me that the school really helped him improve his skills as a counselor as well as find appropriate techniques when tackling family issues. He said that this program is very much focused on helping their students achieve their goals as well as giving people a chance to prove themselves both as students and leaders. Their advocacy of your program has reinforced my desire to continue my education.

I have discovered other opportunities within the HC which included shadowing psychologists and their clients during regular counseling sessions and volunteering for their Restart program. This program offers assistance and support to grieving families who have experienced a death, divorce or other losses. This single opportunity has enabled me to use some of the techniques that I have learned from both my psychology classes and other volunteer training. I recognize that building rapport with clients especially in difficult situations is a core component in any successful therapy.

My faith as a Christian has helped me to become a well rounded individual and enabled me to balance my social, extracurricular and school activities. As a result, my belief in God and myself has strengthened. I have attended weekly church services, become a youth group leader and participated in church activities all my life. I have lived a lifestyle free of tobacco, alcohol and drugs and I feel that my lifestyle is consistent with my Christian principles. In my last year as an undergraduate, I discovered that my desire to pursue a Masters degree in Counseling required that I become more focused in my studies. What I had been searching for was finally found. I knew I had found my ambition and drive to succeed this year. I told myself my marks could be and needed to be higher and I placed myself in a leadership role that required a lot of patience and tenacity. I am proud to say that this year my marks are better than they have ever been. Through my work ethic and perseverance, I was able to reach my scholastic and extra curricular goals. I realized that I had a clear vision of my career and life path and I was determined to work hard to achieve this goal.

I am a firm believer that a person in the field of counseling psychology should be a dedicated, persevering and understanding individual. A psychologist is a person who will not give up on challenging situations and clients; will uphold consistency, and demonstrate compassion. He or she should also demonstrate a non-judgmental and non-threatening approach to solving problems, a willingness to learn and be guided by principles. I believe that I possess these characteristics as well as an intuitive and trustworthy nature, an honest person and a positive attitude.

Being a strong believer in Jesus Christ and having a desire to learn from His example, it is essential for me to incorporate my faith into my career path. By integrating my faith into my career path, I have gained a deeper understanding of myself and how I will relate to others as a counselor. My family, faith and university are such an intricate part of what makes me who I am. As a result I hope to continuously learn from the experiences in both my own life and from the lives of others, which will in turn, further my growth as an individual. At Stars University I look forward to an amazing experience of living in the Christian environment and learning under the dedicated Christian professors.

## **Applying for a medical residency**

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I came to Atlantica from Dardania to start my pediatric residency at the Atlantica Centre of Medical Studies (ACMS). When I began my pediatric program, I had very broad clinical interests with a focus on teaching and prevention, but I was still searching for a fulfilling sub-specialty. While working in pediatrics, I discovered that allergy and immunology is one of the few sub-specialties that permit continuity of care from infancy to adulthood. My pediatric background will allow me to remain a credible advocate for children, while teaching and prevention can play a key role in the management of both children and adults. I also learned that the discipline of allergy and immunology is remarkably challenging and diverse as it extends to several fields, including dermatology, pulmonology and rheumatology. Since this field combines so many of my professional and educational interests I believe that this area will become my lifelong passion.

Even though I was born and raised in Dardania and attended medical school there, some of the most influential moments of my career occurred in Pacifica. Halfway through my intern year, I met a three-month-old girl who inspired me to consider allergy and immunology as a future career. She had just moved to Pacifica with her family, and presented to our pediatric clinic with fatigue, persistent vomiting and diarrhea and a delay in developmental milestones. She had been diagnosed with a milk and soy allergy soon after birth, and in the last two weeks she had been irritable and only able to tolerate Pedialyte. The little girl was admitted to the pediatric floor, where she was found to have protein malnutrition with iron deficiency anemia and elevated IgE levels. After 2 days of total parenteral nutrition she returned to her alert and playful self. Upon discharge, we started her on iron supplements and a formula free of milk and soy proteins. We also educated the parents on an age appropriate diet and on expectations regarding their daughter's allergies. This little girl, who is now my patient, has grown into a thriving one-year-old. I have learned that young patients like her often lose their sensitivities to most of the common allergic food such as milk and soy. Helping this patient made me realize how food allergies can significantly reduce a child's quality of life. A careful diagnosis, professional guidance, and dietary changes allow patients to lead much happier and healthier existence.

As my curiosity about allergy and immunology intensified, I began to appreciate the frequency of cases in the general clinic. To learn more, I volunteered this past summer as a staff physician at a camp for children who have asthma. I enjoyed training campers in asthma self-management techniques and watching a dramatic reduction in symptoms despite plenty of triggers such as horses or camp fires. In August, I rotated at the Department of Allergy and Immunology at the Ebtekar Centre in the Misericordia Hospital of Atlantica. I saw an overwhelming variety of disease processes, including hospitalized patients needing desensitization to medication, obscure rashes, teens with severe persistent asthma, children with rare immunodeficiencies, and young people coping with HIV. My fascination led to a research project at the Misericordia. This study will examine if allergic symptoms manifest first in the nasal mucosa even before skin testing is positive in young children between the ages of one and five years.

Ultimately, I hope to improve the quality of life for both pediatric and adult allergy and immunology patients. I am prepared to deal with tougher cases of immune deficiency, recognizing that our understanding of these complex diseases is rapidly advancing. Over the next ten years, I hope to be part of an academic setting involved in teaching and clinical research. It is essential for me to be a part of a balanced fellowship program with a busy clinic and rich learning environment. I look forward to the challenges and rewards of an engaging fellowship.

## Personal statement to support an appeal

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Jordan River  
#12, 1348 Missisicabi Avenue  
Eastmain OO 6T4 G6H

Dear Academic Advisor:

Last year, I was placed on academic suspension because I was unable to meet the terms for academic probation. Since my suspension, I have taken several positive steps to return to university.

While on suspension, I worked full-time at a Java Express coffee shop, part of a national chain of restaurants. At Java Express, there is a program to train front-line service personnel for management positions and I have begun taking these courses while working full-time. Though these courses are not the same as university courses, through this experience I have regained some of my confidence as a student, by handing in assignments on time and by fulfilling course requirements. I have attached a letter from my regional manager who can attest to my perfect attendance and I can provide a transcript for the submission of online assignments to Java Express' online corporate training modules.

I have also taken two supplementary courses from the Student Centre at a local community college. These courses are also not university-level courses but they have provided me with essential study and time management skills that I did not possess when I was originally attending university. I am also currently enrolled in an academic writing class and I can provide some of my preliminary marks in this course to show that I am improving my skills.

Through my work at Java Express and my own attempts to make up for mistakes that led to my academic suspension, I have realized several things about myself: I lacked study skills and I did not know where to turn to get help. I also realize that I cannot progress as far as I would like without completing my university education. Though the suspension was an enormous setback, I have made several positive steps to return to my studies and succeed in completing my program.

Please consider this letter as well as the required reference letters as an application to return to my degree program after my academic suspension. I feel that I have met the requirements to return to school and that I would be a motivated and successful student if you allowed me to return.

Sincerely,

Jordan River

## **Bibliography and Additional Resources**

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\* Available at the U of A Library.

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For additional job search advice and career-related topics, the U of A Career Centre offers Guidebooks for *Career Information Interviewing*, *Job Shadowing*, *Personal Statements*, and *Reference Letters*. These [publications](#) are available for download on our website, as well as in print format in our Career Centres on the U of A Campus.

The Job Search Guidebook was originally developed as part of the [Transition to Career](#) (T2C) elearning modules. For more information on T2C, visit the U of A Career Centre website

Are you a U of A student returning to school in the following Fall/Winter semester? Are you interested in working as a Career Peer Educator (CPE)? Find more information about the position and how and when to apply on the CPE program webpage <https://www.ualberta.ca/career-centre/about-us/cpe>