

PERSONAL STATEMENT RESOURCE PACKET

CAS CAREER SERVICES



CAREER SERVICES
College of Arts and Sciences

MAKE APPOINTMENTS AT:
[CAS.OKSTATE.EDU/CAREERS](https://cas.okstate.edu/careers)



Who are You?

- Who/what are the most influential people/events in your life? How have they influenced you?
- How have you changed over time?
- What are your core values? Why are they important to you? How do they relate to medicine/law/research/academia?
- How are you different from other applicants?
- How do you demonstrate: work ethic, interpersonal skills, time management, leadership qualities, strengths, personality, communication, etc.?
- How have you been involved in your community and/or campus?
- Of these attributes, which do you possess and how have you demonstrated these in the past?

How have you prepared for the profession of your interest?

- How did you decide to become a doctor/lawyer/researcher/professor/etc.?
- How have you demonstrated passion for the profession?
- How have you worked with people (e.g., patients, clients, researchers) in your field?
- How has your experience and education prepared you?
- Do you intend to serve an underserved population or community? If so, how?
- What have you learned from a health care professional or health environment?
- What are your professional goals and why?

How do you explain difficulties in your application?

- If you are reapplying, what have you done since your last application?
- Why are there gaps (e.g., multiple withdraws, poor grades) in your academic and work records?
- Why have there been changes in your academic performance or work history?
- Why are there inconsistencies between your academic record and test scores?

Adding Reflection

- What impact did the person/situation have on you (short and/or long term)?
- What did you learn or think about for the first time after the experience?
- How did the experience change you, help you grow, or make you think differently?
- How did the experience help you evaluate your fit with a certain professional field?
- How would working in this profession make you contribute to society?
- What do you hope to contribute?

EVALUATING YOUR CONTENT

Content

- Are you answering the actual question given in the prompt?
- Is your essay within the word/character/page limit?
- How will your reader find the essay interesting?
- How does your introduction grab the reader's attention?
- Will your essay help you stand out and let the reader get to know you well?

Structure

- Do your paragraphs flow smoothly?
- Have you written insightful transitions and reflections that highlight your key themes?
- Have you varied your sentence structures?
- Are your stories well integrated into your essay?

BASIC PERSONAL STATEMENT STRUCTURE

1. **Motivation for studying.** This section serves as your opening and addresses why you chose to pursue a degree in this field and what motivates you.
2. **Qualities/Experiences.** What experiences or abilities do you already possess that helped prepare you for graduate school? How have you *demonstrated* this?
3. **Future Plans.** This section outlines your future goals and what you hope to accomplish *after* graduate school. These don't need to be set in stone yet!
4. **School Choice.** Finally, indicate why you chose this program specifically? What makes it a better fit for you than all of the other options.

BEST PRACTICES

- **Most Important Rule** -- say nothing in your personal statement that isn't directly relevant to helping an admissions committee make a decision about your merit as a graduate student. This especially includes quoting other people (why should they care what Einstein or Maya Angelou or Luke/Mark/ John or anyone else has ever said? What does it have to do with your ability to succeed?),
- **Be truthful.** You can manage vocabulary choice (and you should), but you may not say something that isn't true. If you want to address any concerns (e.g., poor academic performance), explain what happened and how you grew from that experience.
- **Keep it positive.** Do not write negatively about yourself or your profession or anyone else! If you need to explain a dip in grades, do so briefly and objectively; do not belabor whatever trauma/situation caused the problem. Always find the "positive" (meaning not negative, not meaning ridiculously idealistic) way of communicating the same information.
- **Details sell.** Lists do not. Do not rehash your resume. Instead, choose a few experiences that were particularly meaningful and/or can illustrate qualities that you want the admissions committee to know. To succeed as illustrative examples, experiences must have the following 3 parts (you can't expect the readers to fill in missing parts -- they have too many essays to read to spend time performing literary interpretation):
 - What did you do? What happened?
 - Why did you do it, and what did you gain from it?
 - How will it contribute to your success in graduate school and a career?

BE AWARE OF CHARACTER COUNTS

- Some programs may use a centralized application system and have count characters:
 - 4500: AACOMAS, AADSAS, PharmCAS, OptomCAS, AACPMAS, PTCAS, ATCAS
 - 5000: VMCAS, CASPA, TMDSAS
 - 5300: AMCAS
 - 7500: OTCAS

Intro Topic(s):

- A.
- B.
- C.

Thesis Statement (i.e. statement of Goals)

Body Topic I:

- A.
 - 1.
 - 2.
- B.
 - 1.
 - 2.
- C.
 - 1,
 - 2.

Body Topic II:

- A.
 - 1.
 - 2.
- B.
 - 1.
 - 2.
- C.
 - 1,
 - 2.

PERSONAL STATEMENT OUTLINE



Body Topic III:

A.

- 1.
- 2.

B.

- 1.
- 2.

C.

- 1,
- 2.

Conclusion/Restatement of Topic(s)

A.

B.

Closing Statement (i.e. restatement of goals)

Notes:

I am applying to school counseling masters program at Oklahoma State University-Stillwater (OSU). School counselors can see first hand the positive impact that they can have on another person. Throughout my life, I have desired to work in a profession that seeks to interact with a diversity of individuals with varying types of obstacles, backgrounds, and future goals. I desire to become a school counselor because I want to help individuals discover themselves through finding their own future passions and goals. My passion about having a role in helping adolescents through their social, academic, and personal development fuels my career goals. The adolescent years are crucial to individual growth, and I hope to promote positive development. A profession such as school counseling would allow me to see another individual grow by using the resources and tools I give them to help in both individual and community settings. With a sincere passion, I want to improve the dynamic relationship between school counselors and students in Oklahoma by building a positive and effective support system. Through this support system I want to help ensure a safe and inclusive environment that advocates for multiculturalism throughout the community.

I have had the privilege of acquiring multiple job experiences that have allowed me to work with adolescents. Working for both daycares and children camps have given me the opportunity to interact and communicate with children ranging in ages from infants to middle school-aged students. In high school I mentored underclassmen about their struggles with the changes that high school brought including academics and social affairs. This experience gave me the opportunity to learn more about how to communicate with individuals who are having adversity in their personal lives.

Through my undergraduate as a research assistant, I have had the opportunity to work with individuals who are attending college. While working as a research assistant I have learned how to handle saliva samples, videotape sessions with subjects using a camera, record data using Microsoft Excel, and help clients debrief after the study. This experience will be beneficial to my future profession because I will be able to work with others in diverse settings including a stressful environment. As a research assistant, I have been able to explore my interests in research, as well as gain knowledge about research outside of the classroom setting.

Currently as an intern at the Mike Gundy Mental Health facility, this position has given me experience with handling paperwork, interacting with clients, and observing sessions. I have learned how to fill out intake forms, file insurance forms, and use the fax machine. I have gained knowledge about ethical codes that are required for working in confidential settings. These administrative duties gave me the opportunity to learn about all the varying tasks that are performed when working as a counselor. An additional opportunity that this internship has given me is the experience of observing therapy sessions through one-way mirrors. Through observing sessions, I have witnessed the techniques and skills that therapists use for individual, family, and couple counseling. Observing sessions has given me the practice of how to conceptualize treatment and learn different types of therapies that are used with clients. This opportunity of being an intern at a mental health facility has allowed myself to become aware of the daily tasks that are required for counseling and has enabled me to envision my life working in this field. These different activities that I have been involved in have allowed me to reflect on my passions and goals that I want to accomplish in my future profession.

Through the school counseling profession, I hope to have a productive career that ranges with helping individuals in my community reach their fullest potential through individual development and social relationships. The masters program at Oklahoma State University will help give guidance in learning about the varying roles that school counselors have and how to manage these roles in a positive way. My undergraduate Bachelor of Science degree with a major of Psychology and a minor in Educational Psychology has allowed myself to become familiar with the Stillwater campus. With the help of this program, I hope to obtain skills that will help me learn how to strengthen the bonds between school counselors and students. In this program, I want to learn how to assist adolescents during the critical times of development. I wish to become a school counselor in the hopes of learning how to assist students with their social, personal, and educational issues that arise throughout their time in the school system. With this role I understand I will be continuously challenged to respond to various needs of my clients, and I believe this program will help me adapt as needed.

The last thing I remember is falling asleep during a late night rerun of the Twilight Zone. So when it happened, it was especially eerie, like I had stepped into a lost episode, but Rod Sterling was nowhere in sight; for moment, neither was anybody else. At 4:31 AM a merciless shove pushed me off my bed. I crawled on the floor, trying to escape the cruel, uncontrollable shaking, but it followed me. It followed me down the stairs and underneath the dining room table where my family joined me. Little did I realize that before the morning sun rose again, I would see everything differently.

My world changed. The 6.7 earthquake which crippled the Northridge area on January 17, 1994 rattled and ripped apart the fibers of security in our neighborhood. Our home was ruined; smashed glass, crumbled walls, and the lack of electricity, gas, and water made it uninhabitable. Without basic utilities, we slept and "lived" in our car for nine days while guarding our home from looters.

The damage was everywhere. A personal landmark, the Granada Hills Kaiser Permanente Medical Center, collapsed. The site where I had volunteered as a teen advisor — lobbying for and improving the quality of the teen health clinic while working one-on-one with underprivileged, problem teenagers — no longer existed. Only an empty lot and the memory of a valuable and productive medical and psychological outreach program for troubled youth remained.

As much as Northridge and its surrounding regions changed externally, so did the lives of the victims internally. Following this traumatic experience, I developed a keen awareness of the fragility of life and a newly restored appreciating for the simplest of my old comforts. As vulnerable and edgy as I was with every aftershock that rolled through the area, I consoled myself with reminders of how we were spared.

With a profound sense of gratitude for our relative good fortune, within weeks of the initial quake I volunteered at the American Red Cross Earthquake Relief Center. As my family and I rebuilt our home and our lives, I translated for Iranian earthquake victims and performed various clerical tasks. Yet, my most valuable contribution to the earthquake relief team stemmed from the moral support I was "qualified" to provide. With my earthquake experience, I was able to comfort the teary-eyed victims who approached us for help. I gave them the hope and understanding they sought from a primarily out-of-state staff. I benefited too: My work for the Red Cross aroused my curiosity in public interest law.

I had the opportunity to explore this new interest in the summer when I interned in Washington D.C. for Congressman Howard P. ("Buck") Smith of California. That summer I was responsible for attending meetings and informing the Congressman's staff of the issues discussed. One of the issues I followed dealt with a proposed guideline to prohibit religious expression in the workplace due to its allegedly offensive nature. Defining such acts as wearing a Star of David or praying silently before a meal as "religious harassment," the bill attempted to equate these acts with verbal or sexual harassment.

Still the most fulfilling experience of my internship was serving the Mr. Smith's constituents when they wrote, called, or visited our Washington office. Their concerns covered many issues, including city maintenance and the enforcement of FCC regulations on local radio stations; yet, most cries for help grew out of the January 17 disaster.

My experience in the earthquake proved to be useful in my internship. After all, I was working with Mr. Earthquake himself. As the only intern from Northridge, I was assigned to the Earthquake Project. I acted as a liaison between constituents and the Small Business Administration, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and other governmental agencies that handled quake reconstruction monies. Because of my experience, I was again able to empathize with victims in a way that neither the staff nor the other interns could. As a result of my work, I gained a more profound grasp of the legal process and how it was able to help Northridge residents with their post earthquake problems.

The January 17 earthquake dramatically changed my world — both inside and out. In the Red Cross shelter and in Congressman Smith's office, my career ambitions took shape: Public interest law grabbed me. Now I want to help those who cannot purchase legal services, not only by providing the empathy gained during my own trying experiences, but also by using the skills and knowledge I will acquire at the ABC Law School. With this preparation, I look forward to helping others escape their legal or bureaucratic "twilight zones."

The judges called my name. I walked up to the front of the room with my palms sweating profusely and heart racing as I began my speech. At this 4-H speech contest, I presented a talk on “Why you Laugh and Cry,” where I memorized the complicated names of the brain for a nine-year old, such as the Amygdala and Hypothalamus. After explaining the nerve pathways and triggers, I was perplexed that all of the processes occurred for just one tear. This moment was a major catalyst for my interest in the human body and medicine.

When I was very young, I remember spending multiple hours in the office with Dr. Gundy, our family physician, as my sister sat on the examination table. With a gentle heart and a thick white beard that reminded me of Santa Clause, I remember he would spend hours researching the cause of my sister’s illness. With a firm faith in God, his altruistic way of medicine focused on healing the body as God healed the soul. Through these encounters I learned that the medical field is not a day job, since he would open his office for my family at the odd hours of the night. Not only was his dedication to restoring the body apparent, but he acted with a sense of genuineness with all of those he came into contact with. His calm demeanor flowed throughout his clinic, creating a family atmosphere not only with his patients, but also with his office staff and fellow doctors. Through our almost daily encounters during some months with Dr. Gundy, my family learned not only more about the importance of health and well-being, but also how to truly utilize one’s innate qualities within their career.

With an intrinsic exposure to medicine, my fascination and passion for medicine only increased as I furthered my academic career, especially during my high school senior year biology class. With only six students in total, Mrs. Hargis displayed the same degree of genuineness and dedication to each of us as Dr. Gundy did towards his patients. Not only did I know the names of the parts of the brain, but now I was introduced to how the nerves sent signals and realized it was much more complex. Through this challenging and rigorous class, she adequately prepared us for the similar classes we would encounter during college.

As a first generation college student, I felt very fortunate for the opportunity to attend a university and pursue a degree where no one in my family had considered. During my freshman year, Dr. Sanders, my chemistry professor, displayed a passion for science, encouraging everyone to succeed. Many times after students felt the daunting defeat after exams, she would remind us that if we did not cry at least once in our college career, we did not truly care about our academic success. Sure enough, these tears came in various classes; however, I knew that these tears as explained in my very first 4-H speech would serve as rungs to the ultimate goal of pursuing a vocation in medicine.

In addition to academics and experiences with Dr. Gundy, my employment has also greatly contributed to my development as an individual. Through my experience of working as a camp counselor at church youth camp for three consecutive summers, I learned how to harness my innate qualities and exploit them through social interactions. As an introvert, I worked in conjunction with my co-counselors, many of them extroverts to create a balanced environment for the campers. Amidst the three consecutive summers as a counselor I encountered my most challenging yet rewarding experience when Bullet, who had Asperger’s syndrome, was placed in my cabin. Since she had started attending camp, her previous counselors struggled to get her to participate and eat any other food besides corn dogs. However, through constant encouragement throughout the week, she participated in the talent show singing a song from the movie “Frozen” with so much passion that brought many of us to tears.

This past semester as a TA for an Introductory Biology class, I was able to instill the same amount of passion for science those had previously done for me as I conducted my own lab. While working with each of the lab groups, I incorporated my previous experiences from similar science courses and assisted them in their experiments and scientific manuscripts. While some students were pursuing a non-science major, I truly enjoyed exposing them to the process of an experimental design and key scientific concepts such as cellular respiration and thermoregulation.

My passion for science is not just a spur of the moment desire but a gradual accumulation of events and interactions with individuals. The investment of time from Dr. Gundy, Mrs. Hargis, and Dr. Sanders, has not only contributed to my passion for science but my desire to provide a long term positive impact on individuals just as these mentors have done. While these events have inspired me academically and individually, I would like to move from “why you laugh and why you cry” to being able to guide those in the examination from discomfort to joy.