How to Write a Successful Personal Statement; The 5 Ws and 1H

Presented by
Patti Ordóñez, PhD & Frances Carter-Johnson, PhD
With slides borrowed from W. Winchester, PhD, A. Q. Gates, PhD and CAHSI Graduate Research Fellowship Operations Center

Workshop Outcomes

- **What** is a personal statement and...
- **Why** do you need it?
- **Who** does this apply to?
- **When** do you start?
- **How** do you start?
- **Where** do you go from here?

The Personal Statement

- **What** is it and **Why** do you need it?
A personal statement is about who you are, what has influenced your career path, your professional interests, and your plans.

- Essential points
  - What makes you unique?
  - Why you are interested in particular opportunity?
  - Why you are interested in the organization to which you are applying?

Who?

- Who? It’s about YOU!!!
- Your story....

When Do You Start?

NOW!!!
How do you start?

- Decide what and where are applying to
  - Graduate school
  - Fellowship
  - Scholarship
  - Internship
  - Job
- Find out specific review criteria for the application…

Example Criteria

- Content
  - Alignment of applicant’s goals with opportunity
  - Distinguishing characteristics of applicant
  - Concrete experiences/examples that support skills and capabilities
  - Compelling reason why the applicant is seeking the opportunity
  - All required elements of the application addressed
- Mechanics
  - Clarity
  - Organization
  - Grammar
  - Appropriateness of detail

Constructing a Successful Application

Personal Statement (limit: 3 Pages)

- Describe personal, professional or educational experiences that have contributed to your preparation and desire to pursue graduate study
- Describe your leadership potential, and how you see yourself now or in the future contributing to research, education, and innovations in science and engineering
- Discuss your career aspirations and some goals you hope to achieve
Find a partner to help you develop YOUR STORY

Personal, Relevant Background, and Future Goals Statement (3 Pages)

- Fascination with research area
- Examples of leadership and unique characteristics brought to chosen field
- Personal experiences and individual strengths
- How receiving the award contributes to career goals
- Incorporate Relevant Previous Research Experience
- Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts criteria

5 minutes to fill in worksheet + 5 minute pair discussion

Where do we go from here?

- Before you write,
  - Decide what key points you really want to get across
  - What relevant unique personal experiences do you have?
  - Why is this opportunity for you?
  - How is the opportunity important to your overall goals?
  - Create a checklist of all required elements of the application

Where do we go from here?

- WRITE, WRITE, WRITE
- Review, review, review
- REWRITE, REWRITE, REWRITE

- Find advisors, mentors, family members, friends, anyone you trust to give you good feedback on your writing.
Reflection

- With what you know now, how are you better prepared to create a successful personal statement?
- With what you know now, how are you better prepared to fund your graduate education?