

## **Your Personal Statement – getting started** (Career Development Center – Craig-Lee 054 – 456-8031)

Not all the schools you'll apply to will invite you for an interview. Many will make their decision to admit you based solely on the information gleaned from your application, transcript, and references. The inclusion of a personal statement can take the place of an interview and give the admissions committee the opportunity to "meet" you on paper convincing them you're a great candidate for their institution. So, even if a school doesn't ask for a personal statement, we encourage you to include one anyway.

It can be hard to know what to choose for the topic of your statement. So hard that some students choose not to write an essay or apply to a school asking for one. Don't fall into this trap – you want to apply to the best schools for you and to use every opportunity to sell your candidacy.

Some schools will ask you to answer a specific question or to write on a specific topic. Be sure your essay addresses what they request and in a way that helps them better know you based upon what's important to them. *For some reason, many students submit beautifully written statements that never really answer the question asked!*

Other schools will leave the choice of topic up to you. Either way, think carefully – you want the story you choose to tell to reveal positive qualities about you that give life to the facts and numbers found in your application and transcript. Some common questions/topics include:

- Tell us about a significant event in your life.
- What extracurricular activities have strongly affected you?
- Who is your role model and why?
- Tell us about yourself.
- Why are you applying to our school/program? Why is College X a good choice for you?
- Is there something else we should know about you?
- Send us a sample of your writing.

While these sound different, your strategy for answering them will be pretty much the same.

The mistake people tend to make in these kinds of essays is that they tell the story about their life, the specifics of all their activities, the qualities of their role model, everything the school already knows about itself and end the statement there. Your life and your activities and those of your role model are probably pretty interesting, but that's not enough. In fact, that shouldn't take up the majority of the statement. Think two pages, double-spaced. Keep the description part of your statement to one half page. The remainder of the statement should focus on why this is important to you. What have you learned from the encounter? How have you grown and developed (or how do you anticipate doing so)? How have you applied that lesson successfully? – best if you can you provide a concrete example. This last page and a half is the key to an effective personal statement.

A great way to get started is to brainstorm with people who know you – friends, family, faculty, or a RIC staff member (maybe your advisor). What things about you and/or your life stand out to them? You don't need to have climbed Mt. Everest or have won the Nobel Prize to be able to sell yourself. Once you've selected your topic and generated a rough draft, have the experts in the Writing Center give you some feedback. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling are as important as a well developed topic. You're not only using a story to introduce yourself, you're also providing a sample of your writing.

Your aim with the personal statement is to catch the attention of the admissions committee in a way that they have a better impression about what you'll bring to their institution as a student, as a classmate, and/or as a future alumnus. Reiterate your accomplishments so they might envision how their campus will be better because you're a student there.