

## **Overview of the Statement of Purpose and Letters of Recommendation**

There are two parts of your application that truly differ from everyone else's – the statement of purpose and the letters of recommendation. Therefore, it is critical to the success of your application that you spend extra time developing your statement of purpose and to provide the people writing your recommendations information that will improve your letters.

### **Statement of Purpose**

Know the Award Program. Before you start writing your statement of purpose, make sure you thoroughly understand the award program you are applying for. Specifically, know the purpose and goals of the program. The closer your purpose for applying for the award is to the purpose of the award program, the better your application will be. The same holds true for the goals. Also, make sure that you follow all of the guidelines for the application. Failure to adhere to the guidelines can result in the rejection of your application before it receives a full review.

Organization. Is it not always what you say, but how you say it. Make sure your statement of purpose is properly organized. Poor organization will detract from your statement of purpose. A very helpful strategy for checking the organization of a paper is to outline it. You can either outline your statement of purpose before you write it or you can outline your statement of purpose after you write it. The key is that you check the organization. Another useful strategy is to have one or more people proofread your statement. Remember it is perhaps the most important part of the application. Write and re-write your statement several times if necessary.

Make it Personal. Use the statement of purpose as an opportunity to let the reviewers know a little more about you. Share your visions and your goals as they related to the program. Let them know how you plan to use the experience provided by the program after the program has ended. When possible, be specific. Being specific will help show that you have carefully thought through the program, its benefits, and how you can apply the experience in a meaningful way.

Keys: (1) follow the guidelines, (2) make sure you write to the purpose and goals of the program, (3) organization is vital, (4) make it personal, (5) be specific whenever possible

### **Letters of Recommendation**

Good letters of recommendations will be those that specifically address your background, ability, and potential as they relate to the program. Therefore, choose your recommendation writers wisely. In order to assist the people in writing your letters of recommendation, it would be helpful to give those people a one page summary of the following information:

1. The name of the program you are applying for, its purpose and goals, and let them know what you will be awarded if selected.
2. Let them know why you are applying for the program. Provide a three to five sentence description of why the program is important to you and what you want to benefit from it.
3. Remind them of the classes you have had with them.
4. List any additional experiences you have had related to the program (e.g, research, relevant job experience)
5. Whether or not you work or carry additional responsibilities beyond your academic work.
6. Finally, list any qualities you think you possess that are important for the program.

This information can be incorporated into your letters of recommendation. Not only will it assist the people writing the letters, but it will help make the letters more focused on the program and more personal about you. This will show the people reviewing the applications that your letters of recommendation were written by people who really know you and are aware how you fit the particular award program.