WRITING A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE (SOP) FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

WHAT IS A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE?

The Statement of Purpose (SOP) is one of the essays required in almost every graduate school application. As its name suggests, this essay should focus on your future intentions. It should clearly communicate your goals, explain how and why pursuing a graduate degree would help you achieve these goals, and convince the admission committee that you are a good candidate.

PLANNING AND BRAINSTORMING IDEAS:

Think about your research experiences and accomplishments. Ask yourself:

- What are the research projects that I have worked on?
- What did I learn during my work?
- What was my own contribution to these projects?
- What was the outcome of these projects?
- Did they get published?
- Did they provide an important advancement to my research field?

Think about any other experiences, such as work or teaching experience, as long as they are relevant to the program to which you are applying.

Identify potential professors with whom you would like to work by looking at their websites, connecting with them through LinkedIn or email, or even reaching out to current graduate students in the same department.

Identify any resources available at the university (to which you are applying) that might help you achieve your main goal by looking at the university website.

WRITING YOUR FIRST DRAFT:

Examine some SOP samples in your discipline to get an idea on how to organize your essay and understand the conventions of your field. A typical organization of the SOP could be as follows:

An introduction that briefly introduces your background and research interests and maybe mentions to which department/program you are applying.

A section highlighting your experience and accomplishments. For each project:

- Explain your role
- Describe what you have learned
- Highlight, and possibly quantify, the outcomes
- Show the implications in real world scenarios by giving concrete examples

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A section discussing your objective at the university to which you are applying.

- Specify the area of research that interests you
- Mention any research labs that you would like to join
- State what you would like to study and explore
- List the professors of interest that you identified and show how your interests and experiences that you discussed in the earlier section align with their interests
- List any identified university resources that can help you achieve your goals
- Explain how you are going to positively contribute to the university community and your research field

A conclusion where you emphasize why you believe that you are a good candidate, state your future career goals, and maybe thank the committee for their time.

REVISING, EDITING, AND PROOFREADING:

Revise your essay to make any necessary edits, improve its readability, and correct any grammatical mistakes. Here are some important aspects to consider:

- **Be concise.** Convey your ideas in the most simple and concise way.
- **Use strong verbs,** such as "I implemented an algorithm" and "I developed a questionnaire for our survey research", instead of weak verbs, such as "I was part of this research lab" and "I participated in this research project".
- **Write clear and well-focused paragraphs.** The ideas that you develop in each paragraph should be related to one topic to increase the readability of your SOP.
- **Proofread for typos and grammatical mistakes** to avoid giving a bad impression.

SOME PITFALLS TO AVOID:

- **Avoid listing experiences unrelated to your intended program.** They will not help you show that you are a good fit for this program.
- **Avoid including just a mere list of your projects and publications** without mentioning specific details.
- **Avoid focusing just on how you want to benefit from the program** to achieve your purpose without also showing how you want to contribute to the community.
- **Avoid exceeding the page or word limit.** Look for this limit in the prompt or on the program's website, and if nothing is mentioned, try to limit your SOP to 1-2 pages.

REMEMBER TO:

- **Check the given SOP prompt** because it might be different from one university to another, and even from one department to another.
- **Customize your SOP** for every university and program to which you are applying.
- **Visit the HUB writing center** to brainstorm your ideas or get some feedback on your draft!

For more details, please check this blog post:
https://thehubwrites.weebly.com/home/writing-a-statement-of-purpose-sop-for-graduate-school