

Guidelines for Writing the Statement of Objectives

The admission essay ("the statement of objectives") is a vital piece of information. It provides the Admissions Committee with information not available elsewhere in the application. Here are three critical questions that the written statement answers:

1. is this candidate capable of effective written communication;
2. does the candidate convey a sense of thoughtfulness and maturity about the chosen area of study; and
3. what is the applicant's anticipated career plan? This third piece of information is, in most cases, the most important for two reasons.
 - First, it allows the Committee to determine whether a good fit exists between what the applicant plans to do, and what the department is capable of providing.
 - Second, it indicates to the Committee that the applicant has the necessary intellectual and personal maturity to pursue graduate study.

1. Read the instructions for the written statement carefully and follow them.

Do not exceed the 2-page limit: do not shrink the font size to fit the 2-page limit. Eleven or twelve-point font and two pages is sufficient for meeting the requirements of the essay.

2. Specify the degree program and track of research interest from the offerings of the department.

We offer the PhD and ScD doctoral degrees, the MHS and ScM masters' degrees, certificates and non-degree post-doctoral fellowship training. Please select from the following Research Tracks: Epidemiology of Aging, Cancer Epidemiology, Cardiovascular and Clinical Epidemiology, Clinical Trials and Evidence Synthesis, Environmental Epidemiology, General Epidemiology and Methods, Genetic Epidemiology, and Infectious Disease Epidemiology. The Certificates in Clinical Trials, Healthcare Epidemiology, Pharmacoepidemiology, and Epidemiology for Public Health Professionals are also accepting applications.

3. Avoid extraneous personal or biographical information that does not inform the committee about future career plans.

A high percentage of applicants begin their essay with a personal anecdote about a personal health event, a trip abroad, or an account of illness in the family. While this does allow the committee some idea of the applicant's motivation, it should not be the whole essay. Please keep the anecdote to 1/3 or less of the full essay. One paragraph is usually sufficient to communicate one's motivation.

4. Emphasize what you will do, not what you have done.

Most of the relevant information about what an applicant has accomplished is easily and rapidly accessible to the committee through a review of the CV and other application materials. Many applicants use 90% of the space in the statement to restate and embellish those items. Additionally, in the final paragraph, most applicants will give passing attention to the main objective of the statement (to articulate a clear and concise plan for progressing toward a career in a given field). As a general guideline, more than half of the essay should be spent explaining what the applicant intends to do during and after graduate study.

5. Provide evidence that you as an applicant are well matched to the interests of the department.

Some applicants engage in "name dropping" subsequent to a review of catalogues and web sites. However, faculty members do change schools or areas of research. A well-written statement explains how particular faculty, research programs, or course work is particularly well-suited to meeting the training objectives of the applicant. Additionally, if the only faculty member doing the research discussed leaves the program, the Department cannot in good conscience grant admission to the program.

6. Be as concrete and specific as possible about your interests and proposed course of study.

An applicant's failure to articulate a clear and detailed training plan leaves the Committee with the impression that the applicant has not thought through the nature and meaning of graduate training, and may not be ready for admission. These are the questions to address: (in Epidemiology for instance) **How** will the applicant help rid the world of disease? **To what end** will skills and knowledge be directed? What **specific aspect** of a broad domain of work holds the applicant's interest?

And finally, the statement of objectives is not a binding document. Students, once they matriculate, often shift and refine their focus of study. No one is obligated to remain faithful to the plan they articulate. However, the statement of objectives is designed to provide the department a strong understanding of the applicant's motivation and commitment to the field and a clear indication of the applicant's writing ability.

Admissions Deadlines:

Doctoral (PhD, ScD, DrPH): December 1

Masters (MHS & ScM): January 15

Certificates: September 1

non-degree post-doctoral fellowship: minimum of 90 days prior to the start of training