

Grant Writing Academy



*centering joy and belonging
in grant writing and beyond*

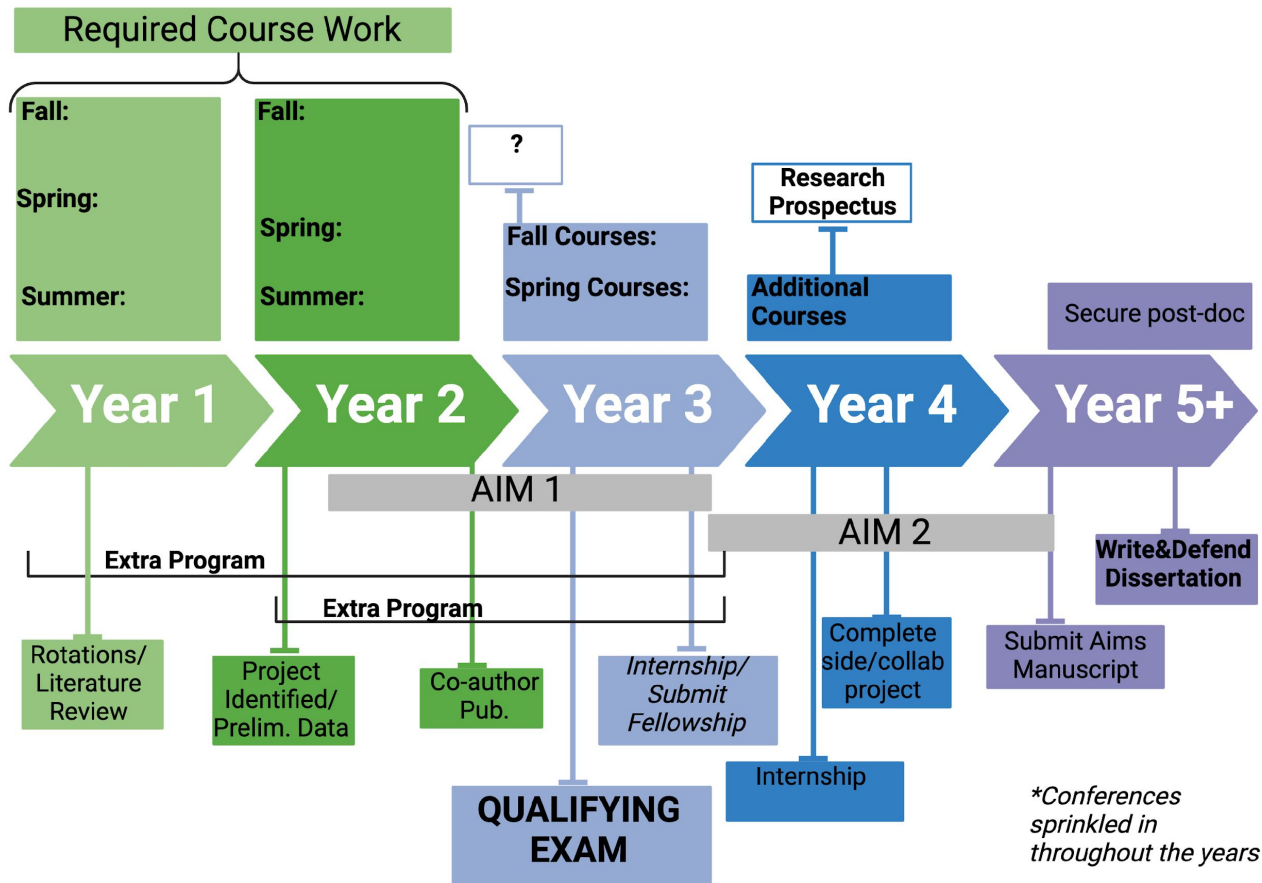
Stanford

Today's REACH Mini Lecture

- General Flow of Graduate School/PhD Pathway
- Crafting an Effective Personal Statement though Exercise Prompts
- Research Alignments
- Diversity Statements



What is the typical timeline for a PhD program?



Commonalities between PhD Applications

- Personal Statement (background/personal information)
- Research Involvement Statement (past research, conferences, publications, key skills, etc)
- Diversity Statement/Outreach/Extracurricular (school dependent)

Sometime the research involvement goes with the personal statement (prompt specific)

The key to a successful statement

- **READ READ READ THE PROMPT**
- **ANALYZE THE PROMPT**
- **BREAK THE PROMPT DOWN INTO SECTIONS**
- **CREATE A STORY**



Common mistakes when writing the personal statements



- Not following the prompt (creating tangential story line)
- Writing generic statements
- Lacks specificity (school name, department name, etc)
- Doesn't include goals and isn't insightful for the applicant's future
- Not maximizing word/page limits

Exercise 1: Analyze the prompt of what to include for the story line

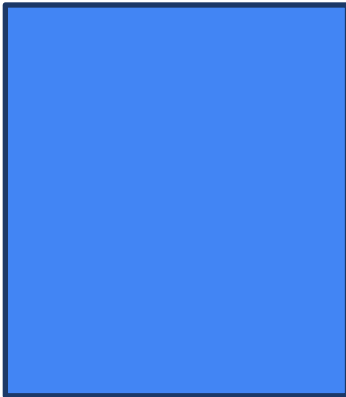
● Upload an essay below addressing each of these three topics: Research experiences shape an interest in the biomedical PhD and a career in science. Please describe your current or previous research experiences, including any role in designing, performing, or reporting a study. What did you learn about yourself in completing this experience? (250-500 words)

Entire Essay

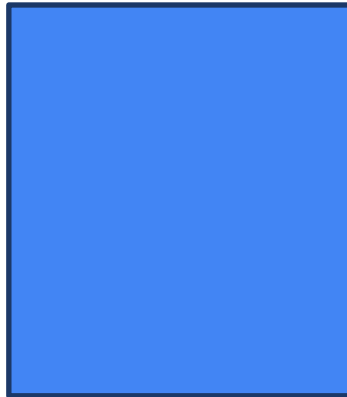
Theme: Science experiences that are shaping your career in science

What should
the theme of
this essay be?


1. Research Experience



2. Role Study/Project



3. Self-Learning



Exercise 1: Cellas Response

Entire Essay

Theme: Science experiences that are shaping your career in science

1. Research Experience

1. Started in neuropharmacology laboratory under Dr. Nicole Ashpole in 2016 as original lab member
2. Laboratory goal was to understand how neuroendocrine modulation (IGF-1) influenced age related outcomes including cognition (preclinical models)

Started because I was a first-gen student and needed a work study job

2. Role Study/Project

1. Project: Understanding how hippocampal neuronal IGF-1 reductions altered cognition in mouse models
2. Managed transgenic rodent colony
3. Stereotaxic AAV injection
4. Rodent cognitive behavior (radial arm water maze, novel object relocation)
5. Osmotic pump implantation
6. Ex vivo analysis (protein quantification; immunohistochemistry; golgi cox stain)
7. In vitro neuronal morphology
8. ^^ data analysis

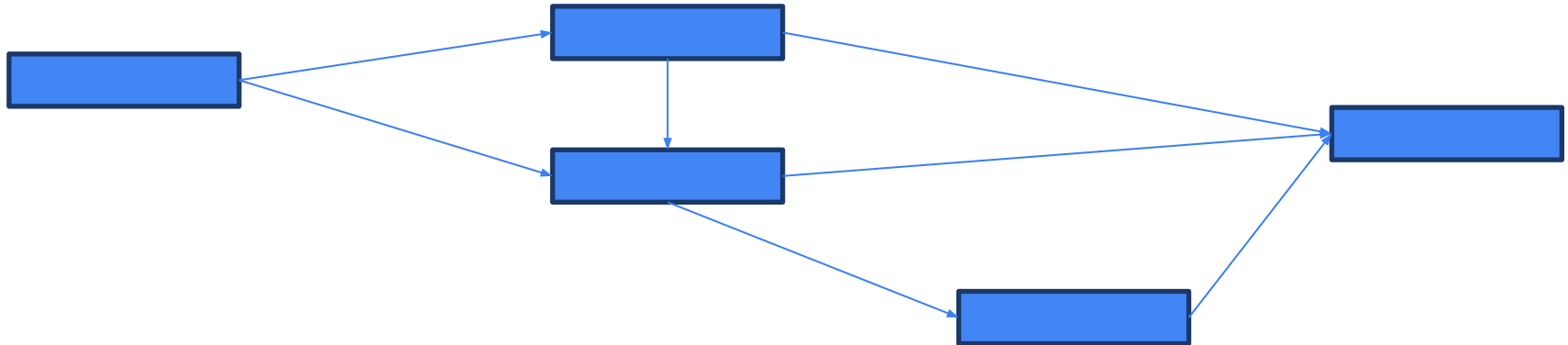
3. Self-Learning

1. Presented research for the first time at local conference and won 2nd place for oral and 5th for poster
2. Invited for an oral talk at ABCMS 2018. Presented in over 200 people
3. Learned confidence; new career opportunity that I didn't know existed; that I was extremely interested in science; that I enjoyed networking with other scientists
4. Learned about disparities in race/ethnicity for STEM careers and motivated me more to pursue this

Exercise 2: Analyze the prompt of what to include for the story line

- In an essay of 250 – 500 words, state your purpose in undertaking graduate study in your chosen field. Include your academic objectives, research interests, and career plans. Also discuss your related qualifications, including collegiate, professional, and community activities, and any other substantial accomplishments not already mentioned on the application.

Exercise directions: create a path diagram using all of the key terms in the prompt to guide your essay



Exercise 2: Brief plan

- academic objectives

- Qualifications (collegiate, professional, and community activities)

- research interests

- **TIE** to the research in the department/program and PIs (can even name them)
- Where does the interest come from?

- accomplishments

- Research awards; research presentations; publications; mentoring other students; honor's thesis

- career plans

- Graduate plan (receive noteworthy fellowship)
- Secure a postdoc
- Long term goal of _____.

Exercise 3: Pre-application cycle and common prompt

- Please identify three faculty trainers and describe your interest in their research programs. (up to 250 words).

For each:

- Name & department
- Laboratory objective/research goal
- Recent publication
- Methods used in laboratory
- What skills do you have that align with the above to be an active contributor to the lab AND makes them want to choose you? If no skills, EMPHASIZE the interest!

Exercise 4: Diversity statement

The XYZ is committed to building and supporting a diverse and inclusive scholarly community. This commitment is grounded in a belief that diverse perspectives and experiences are critical for innovation, insight, and progress. The purpose of this statement (500 words, maximum) is to provide you with a space to explain how your experiences and/or commitment to diversity and inclusion may influence your decision to pursue a graduate degree; help you bring a unique or underrepresented perspective to your field; contribute to the social, intellectual, or cultural diversity of XYZ's scholarly community; or demonstrate your efforts to build mutual respect and scholarly connections across barriers of heritage, culture, identity, and difference.

Exercise 4 Alternative: Diversity statement

Write a statement that addresses the following prompt (500 words max): The Graduate School values diverse backgrounds, approaches, and perspectives, understanding them as essential ingredients for true academic excellence. As a XYZ graduate student, how could you contribute to an intellectual community that prioritizes equity, inclusion, belonging, and cultural humility? Your answer may draw upon past or present experiences, whether in academic work, extracurricular or community activities, or everyday life.

Exercise 5: How to craft a comprehensive statement from a broad-specific prompt?

- Write a statement that answers the following questions (1,000 words max): What are your academic interests, and why do you wish to pursue graduate studies in this specific program? How has your academic and professional background prepared you for graduate study? (Please include any research, training, or educational experiences that align with the program you are applying to.) How will our program help you achieve your intellectual and professional goals? (For research-focused programs) Please make sure to address any scholarly questions you wish to explore in the program and name any specific faculty members in this program whose research interests align with your own.

Who should proofread your application?

- Each other
- Current graduate students
- Postdocs
- Previous PIs
- Faculty letter writers (all your LOR writers should read your statements/responses and even provide feedback ahead of the deadline)

Key aspects that will strengthen your letter

- Personal information that has shaped your research/career trajectory
- Use metaphors/themes to link the ideas between the paragraphs
- Free write and use outlines similar as the exercises
- Spin any negative into a learned opportunity that has taught you a life lesson and how that lesson makes you better prepared for graduate school
- Include faculty names and their research and how that aligns with your interest
- Minimize acronym use
- Specificity is key
- Diversify sentence structure when editing
- Give yourself plenty of time (create a timeline of all of the schools and when they open and close; give reviewers at least a week to read over your statement for edits)

Resources

- <https://www.cientificolatino.com/post/personalstatement> Cientifico Latino
- <https://graduate.rice.edu/news/current-news/writing-killer-statement-purpose>
- <https://www.careereducation.columbia.edu/resources/how-write-personal-statement-phd-program-application>
- <https://grad.berkeley.edu/admissions/steps-to-apply/requirements/statement-purpose/>
- <https://ocs.yale.edu/blog/2021/02/06/writing-personal-statements-for-graduate-school/>