

The Applicant Statement

Posted on September 22, 2009 by Pam Harvey-Jacobs, Director of Admissions UW Green Bay.

I once heard a story (I have no idea if it's true) about a man who asked President Abraham Lincoln how long a man's legs should be. (Apparently the President had long legs and a gangly build.) President Lincoln allegedly answered, "Long enough to reach the ground."

Which leads to one of the first questions I usually hear regarding the applicant statement: "**How long should the applicant statement be?**" Well...long enough to say what needs to be said. For one person it might be 100 words; for another it might be 1000. It's a bit of a balancing act, crafting a statement that is complete but not overly wordy. I think most Admissions people would agree that a good applicant statement can be extremely influential in the application process. However, I think most would also agree that we don't really want to read three or four pages – unless the candidate has truly extraordinary circumstances that require extensive explanation. So, write as much as it takes to say what needs to be said, and then be done.

"**What should I write about?**" is the next most common question. Well, first, if the instructions tell you what to write about, it's a good idea to write about that. For instance, the UW System application asks for applicants to write about which activity is most important to them and why. There's a reason for that question, and to over-coach a student undermines the value of that question. When a student answers that question honestly, it tells us something about that student as a *person* – what s/he values, what is important to him/her. And that's what we want to know about – who is this person applying to our school? What can we learn about him/her that we cannot learn from the numbers (rank, GPA, test scores)?

As for the more open-ended questions, again I have to defer to the individual circumstances of the student. Certainly, if there are extenuating circumstances that need to be explained, then by all means write about that. However, some students claim that nothing interesting or unusual has ever happened to them (their parents are healthy, living, and still married; they've never been poor or disadvantaged; they've received a good education at a good high school...) That may be true – but it does NOT mean that THEY are not interesting or unusual. Everyone has circumstances and experiences that shape them – and if those circumstances are healthy and stable, then it's valid to write about how they have been shaped as people because of their stable environment.

One other thing that all students should be able to write about is why the school they are applying to is a good fit. All of us in Admissions want to admit students who will be a good fit for our institutions. And every student has a reason for applying to the school(s) that they are. Tell us about those reasons. Is it the size? The location? The major? Certain extracurricular opportunities? Did you fall in love with the campus during a visit? Why is UW-Green Bay the best possible place for you? And why are you the best possible student for UW Green Bay?

Finally, **make sure the statement is well-written, spell checked, and proofread.** No text abbreviations please. Be careful with punctuation. Capitalize appropriately. We draw conclusions about a student's academic ability by this writing sample, so it is worthwhile to take care with it. And finally, if a student composes the statement in Word, then cuts and pastes it into the application, *be sure to edit the name of the school for each application!* It is amazing how often applicants forget to do that, and you can bet that the red pen comes out to highlight that blunder before the application gets reviewed!

If pressed for a short answer to the "What should I write?" question, I would say, "Tell me who you are and how you got to be who you are." Everyone has that story to tell.

This entry was posted in [Admission Application](#), [Admission Decision Factors](#), [Uncategorized](#) by [Pamela Harvey-Jacobs](#). [Bookmark the permalink.](#)