

Preparing an Effective Personal Statement

Office of Faculty Affairs & Professional Development
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Includes information from WSU Personal Statement PAD Seminar of January 15, 2015:
Margaret E. Winters, Provost and Senior Vice President; WSU faculty panelists



School of Medicine

Purpose of Your Personal Statement

- Provides evaluators with “the big picture” of your academic life.
 - Helps external reviewers write solid letters for you. (They are not always very familiar with the kind of scholarship you do.)
 - Helps committee members at the School and University levels as they consider the other materials in your dossier.
- Explains why your research/scholarship is important: how it moves the discipline forward, what are the policy implications, if any.
- If you make a major change in the direction of your career or research/scholarship, explains why you did it.
- Serves as a developmental tool. It is worth writing one every year to use it for self-evaluation and for evaluation from others, such as mentors.

Who reads it?

- External reviewers who will write letters for you
- Faculty colleagues serving on department, school, and university Promotion and Tenure Committees.
 - In addition to your primary and secondary reviewers on P&T Committees, most other members will read it, and often it is the first document that they will read.
- Your department chair, the Dean, and the Provost

In general, what should it explain?

What is the overview of my career since appointment/promotion?

For each aspect of my career:

- What do I do?
- Why do I do it?
- How do I do it (methods/strategies)?
- How well do I do it?

Where am I going overall – what's my vision and expected trajectory?

What should you include?

- Tell a story--what you have done, what you are doing now, and where you will go from here. It is really important to make the case that you have a plan after promotion and/or tenure and won't just rest on your laurels.
- Try to make a case that your career, and specifically your research/scholarship, hangs together in a logical fashion. So first you did X which led you to develop a new pathway to do Y, etc.
- It helps to reference publications and funding (in general, not in great detail) in the personal statement. So, explain you began with studies of Y which resulted in publications A, B, C and grants J and K.

What should you include?

- Explain any gaps or deficiencies in your CV
- Explain novel categories in your CV, e.g., if you are asked to serve in an important, novel role in your profession/specialty
- Explain importance or relevance of obtaining certain types of grants, e.g., K award expected in certain fields, but RO-1 application is not allowed while K is active
- Explain the most important journals in your field, especially if Impact Factor is low for an understandable reason
- Explain “quirks” of your profession or professional societies, e.g., exhibits are more important than podium presentations in your field

What is the recommended structure?

Order the sections of your personal statement in a sequence that makes most sense for describing your career/professional life.

- Introduction
- Clinical Service (if applicable)
- Research/Scholarship
- Teaching
- Service
- Summary or Conclusion

Introduction

- Overview of who you are/what you do
 - What led you to this career path? What was your motivation to initiate this career?
- Training/Experience
- What do you find satisfying/exciting about this career?

Clinical Service (if applicable)

- Focus/range of clinical activities – who are your patients? How do you relate with them clinically?
- Who are your colleagues/team members? How do you work together?
- How has your clinical practice/responsibility progressed since the time of your appointment or promotion?

Research/Scholarship

- How did you begin your scholarly path?
- How has your research/scholarship developed over time – what has led you to the steps in your scholarly pathway?
- What key accomplishments would you like the reader to note?
- How do you engage with colleagues locally, regionally, nationally?

Teaching

(Clinician Educators may wish to address Teaching before Research)

*Note: Your **Teaching Portfolio** will provide a fuller picture/more detail*

- Range of teaching and mentoring activities
- Training/faculty development in teaching, if applicable
- Approaches/strategies that you find to be effective
- Innovations that you have developed

Service

- Academic service at Department/School/University
- Scholarly service, e.g., editorial work, grant reviews
- Professional service locally, regionally, nationally, internationally
- Community service related to your work

Summary or Conclusion

- What trajectory do envision for your career from this point?
- Any other concluding comments

What are potential pitfalls?

- Do NOT repeat what is clearly provided in your CV and other documents.
- PROOF IT CAREFULLY
- Ask people in your department to read it and give feedback
- Avoid overly-specific technical terminology
- Keep it to an appropriate length, e.g. 2 – 4 pages

Promotion to professor: What are the differences?

- Focus on what you have done since last promotion
- Explain why you are ready now for the promotion
- Emphasize your role in mentoring younger colleagues
- Speak to your national stature

Show how you've put the pieces together!



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