The Personal Statement

• Adds meaning beyond the facts and numbers
• Admissions committees: a diverse audience
• Can grasp essence in 3 – 5 minute reading
• Communication skills are demonstrated
• Personal rather than Academic essay
• Published sample essays are only new to you
  – Plagiarism detection software is in use by schools
THE BASICS

• The Prompt = What committees want to read about
• Detailed instructions included with application
• Applicant’s responsibility to read and follow instructions
• Primary essay mostly about college years
• Earlier experiences can be presented in optional and secondary application essays.
  – Treat any “optional” essays as required.
  – “Optional” means application complete without it... but...
  – Committee is interested or would not offer the prompt
• Generally directs you to discuss
  – why you want to be a [doctor, dentist, physician assistant, pharmacist, etc] AND/OR
  – why you want to pursue an education for this profession
What Committees Want to Know

– What have you done to arrive at an informed decision to pursue this professional education and career?

– Are you suited to the rigors and demands?

– How realistic and insightful is your knowledge of the profession and the health care industry?

– Go deeper than “I’m a good student, love science, and want to help.”
Your Experience Matters

• Why do you want to be a health care professional?
  – Translation: How do you know this is the right profession for you? How have you tested your motivation, readiness, suitability?

• What do you know about the profession?
  – Translation: Do you know what you will be doing all day everyday? What kind of problems will you solve? Who will you be interacting with, supervising, collaborating with? What are the challenges? What don’t you like about it?

• What are your values and priorities?
  – Translation: How have you chosen to use your time? Are you motivated toward helping, toward excellence, toward putting others first, toward life-long learning?

• What are you capable of?
  – Translation: Have you handled a demanding and rigorous undergraduate career? How do you overcome challenges? What do you do when you need to do something that you don’t know how to do?
Important Personal Attributes

- Critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Excellent communication skills
  - Speaking, Writing, and Interpersonal
- Character, integrity, psychological maturity
- Intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm
- Ability to make ethical decisions
- Teamwork – collaborate as well as lead
- Compassion and empathy
- Awareness of public health issues
- Professionalism
- Motivation, persistence, and resilience
- Reliability, dependability, and accountability
- Self-discipline
- Humanitarian motivation
- Cultural diversity awareness and multi-cultural experience
Getting It Together

- Create comprehensive list of qualities/abilities
- List all of your activities and experiences
  - Include challenges as well as accomplishments
- Make a list of your mentors
- Write down your goals
  - Include personal and professional goals
  - List both general and specific goals
- Which qualities, skills, traits are demonstrated by your experiences, accomplishments, mentors?
Try Organizing with a Worksheet

## ACTIVITIES, EVENTS, LIFE EXPERIENCES, ETC.

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<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>VOLUNTEER</th>
<th>SHADOW</th>
<th>UHPS OFFICER</th>
<th>TUTOR/MENTOR</th>
<th>RESEARCH</th>
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What To Write About

• What strengths/attributes are demonstrated by your activities and experiences?
• Which activities/experiences best demonstrate your strengths/attributes?
• What do you want to emphasize in the limited space you have for your essay?
• Which anecdotes will be easiest to write about?
STANDING OUT

• Not necessarily unique experiences but your own thoughts and insights
• Get specific about what you want to do.
• Demonstrate and go deeper with anecdotes.
• Use details to make it personal.
• Include your personal insights and what you learned from your experiences.
• Your personal vocabulary and style
• Relate stories about personal experiences to your goals and potential for success
• Active voice; action verbs; positive tone
• Logical order and conclusion
• Spelling, grammar, and punctuation
TIPs

- Journals, notes, sketches, ragged drafts
- Revise, revise, revise......Edit, edit, edit
- Don’t risk humor
- Don’t overuse the word “I”
- Don’t dwell on suffering and neglect to describe personal growth and wisdom
- Avoid controversial religious and political statements.
- Don’t write so much about your mentors that you leave yourself out
- What you don’t have room for can be used as fresh material in optional and secondary application essays and for interviews.
REMINDERS

• Demonstrate:
  – your strengths that will help you to succeed in professional school and as a professional
  – your exposure to and experiences in health care that have helped you to make a well-informed, rational, mature decision

• Use specific examples and get into the details

• This is a “personal” statement. Make it about yourself.
Additional Help

• Health Professions Office:
  – Brainstorming & Planning Content
    (PAI 5.03; 512-471-3172)
    • Check out all of the resources on HPO web site

• University Writing Center:
  – Writing, Revising, Review & Feedback
    (PCL Learning Commons; 512-471-6222)

• Ask people who know you to read it.
  – Do they hear and see you in the essay?