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ABOUT PROJECT EDUACCESS

Access to higher education is a privilege most people from marginalised communities are systematically denied through cost, information, and dispositional barriers.

Launched in 2021, Project EduAccess is a modest attempt to improve inclusivity in higher education institutions and work towards removing these barriers for students from marginalized communities in South Asia.

We hope to achieve this by providing expert mentorship, support, and guidance to learners in South Asia.

In addition to running a mentorship programme and organising workshops, Project EduAccess also regularly develops content such as guides and documents that aid potential applicants in their university and scholarship application processes. This guide for drafting statements of purpose is a part of our series *Guides on Application Documents*.

DISCLAIMER

This guide, prepared for the benefit of prospective applicants, is a compilation of advice available on the websites of several universities and scholarship bodies. The information provided is for general informational and educational purposes only. All information is provided in good faith.

DRAFTING STATEMENTS OF PURPOSE FOR UNIVERSITY APPLICATIONS

Most universities expect applicants for masters or doctoral programmes to submit a Statement of Purpose/ Academic Statement to see whether you have the right mindset for postgraduate/ doctoral study.

A statement of purpose is a statement of academic interests – it is meant to convey to reviewers how your skills, knowledge and experience suit the requirements of the course and the university, and also demonstrate your interest and purpose in applying to that course and that university. Remember that it is different from a personal statement (usually expected as a part of scholarship applications), which is more of an autobiographical account that focuses on your life experiences and personal history.

As a first step, ensure that you carefully check the requirements of the university/ the scholarship body you are making an application to in order to understand what kind of a statement you are expected to submit.

PLANNING YOUR STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Before you start writing your statement of purpose, you need to carefully:

- visit the specific course/ university website and check what information you are expected to provide in the statement of purpose;
- research the course you are applying for, so you can explain why you want to study it; and

- research the university you are applying to, so you can explain what other opportunities at the university draw you to it.

Generally, statements of purpose are expected to answer the following questions:

- **Why do you want to study this specific course and how will it benefit you?**

Discuss what specific aspects of the course you find most appealing (like the modules, research opportunities, teaching methodology, etc.). Do also explain why you want to undertake postgraduate study at this point in your academic or professional career.

- **How does the course fit your skill set, academic/ research interests and academic background?**

You must mention any undergraduate or postgraduate degrees you have already completed or will complete this academic year (including overall grades), and how such education will help you bring fresh insight to your course. Mentioning your areas of specialisation (if any) and your independent work (e.g., dissertation) is also important. If you're applying for a subject that is in a different field to your undergraduate degree, you must explain why you have decided to change your direction of study and present the transition as a logical next step. It is also important to address any clear weaknesses (for e.g. low grades) with a positive spin (for e.g. by including better subsequent results, or by mentioning specific papers or options where your results were better). Similarly, the best approach to deal with gaps or breaks in your academic or professional career is to address them in a simple statement (for e.g., intermitted due to internet shutdowns, intermitted for health reasons). If you are

drafting a statement of purpose for a doctoral application, your research interests, research ideas and any training in research methodology should feature prominently.

- **Do you have any specific areas of interest within that course?**

If you are applying for a course that is taught through various electives/ options and you're keen on specialising in certain electives/ options, clearly state your electives of interest and explain why you are drawn to them. This will show the selection committee that you have researched the course and the university well.

- **How do you stand out from the crowd?**

Work experience, membership of college committees/ societies, community engagement, extracurricular activities, publications, awards, etc. are all aspects that will help you stand out from the crowd! While describing these aspects, try avoiding a general list of experiences, as this might already feature in your CV. Instead, describe your learnings/ outcomes from these experiences, to show individuality and critical reflection.

- **How does this course fit with your career plans?**

Highlight your career aspirations and show how the course will help you achieve them. If you are changing your field of study through this course, it is all the more important for you to explain how changing your direction of study will help you with your future career.

- **How can your work contribute to the department/ university community?**

Think about what value you can add to that specific department or the university community at large, as well as what you want to get out of university life. Providing evidence of your key skills including research, critical thinking, communication, organisation and planning can show how you can contribute to the department/ university.

- **Are there any specific resources/ opportunities that the university might provide that you find useful for your study?**

These may include libraries, faculty members, practical experience, research centres/ institutes, etc. If you are applying for a STEM course, identifying specific laboratories you would like to join is a good start, but do take it a step further and point out specific resources, collaborations or research paradigms that make you excited to join their community.

Remember that some courses may expect you to address other specific questions in your statement of purpose. Therefore, it is important that you check the specific requirements of your course on the university's website. Moreover, apart from preparing to answer the above questions, you must also think about word/ character limits, formatting, submission guidelines, deadlines, and any additional documents or evidence.

STRUCTURE

- Your statement of purpose should follow a logical, methodical structure, where each paragraph follows on from the one before.
- Use short sentences: 25-30 words is a rough maximum. Show that you can express your ideas with clarity and precision.
- Make sure paragraphs are short, succinct, clear and to the point. Be extremely cautious of the word limit.
- Use plain, clear English that is easy to read.
- An engaging opening paragraph and a carefully written conclusion that captures all your main achievements and your desire to pursue postgraduate studies will always make your application stand out.
- Using first person pronouns make the statement seem more personal.
- Be careful with humour, quotes or unnecessary jargon. All members on the admission committee might not be academics.
- Don't exaggerate your achievements. If you are shortlisted for an interview, you might be asked for more detail about what you have written.
- While using headings is not common practice, you can use headings (if you wish) to break up the content - for example, 'Why this university?' 'Why this subject?' 'Ability', 'Personal experience' and 'Career aspirations'.
- Always back up all claims with evidence, especially where you describe your work experience. A good structure to adopt is the **STAR** (Situation, Task, Action, Result) Technique:

- **Situation:** A brief introduction (for e.g., a specific research assignment)
 - **Task:** Mention what you were trying to achieve/ what were your goals.
 - **Action:** Explain what you did to achieve your task and your personal contribution if you were part of a team.
 - **Result:** Conclude by mentioning whether you achieved your goal and what your personal impact was.
- Avoid cliched and overused sentences like, 'I have always wanted to study at this university' or 'I feel I have always had a passion for this subject.'

DOs

- Start early and give yourself plenty of time to draft your statement of purpose.
- Before you start, read the guidelines provided by the department/ university, check the selection criteria and research the course and university carefully.
- Adopt a positive, enthusiastic and professional tone in your statement and present your thoughts in clear, short sentences.
- Draft and redraft your statement until you're happy, and carefully proof read it to correct any grammatical and spelling errors.
- Get your draft statement reviewed by your professors, seniors, and peers.
- Make the most of the word/ character limit. A short statement suggests your lack of passion or commitment to the course you are applying for.

DON'Ts

- If you are applying for multiple courses and multiple universities, don't use the same statement of purpose for all applications. Generic applications demonstrate that you have little understanding of the course. In order to stand out from the crowd, statements of purpose must be unique and specific to the course and the university.
- The statement is meant to be unique and personalised to describe your interests and skills, so don't plagiarise content from sample statements of purpose/ templates.
- Don't repeat information you have covered elsewhere on the application (for e.g., in the CV). Instead, explain how you developed the skills listed elsewhere in the application. Similarly, explain how your listed subject knowledge prepares you for university life.
- Don't namedrop key authors without explanation about how their work influenced you.
- Don't include inspirational quotes.
- Don't make pleading/ begging statements, or needlessly flatter the university.
- Don't completely exclude your grades from your statement of purpose (even if they are on the lower side), as this might push the reader to assume the worst.

Annexure:

Sample Statements of Purpose

Humanities

The MPhil in European Literature & Culture is especially attractive to me because, as a taught course, it is expressly geared towards providing the core critical and theoretical tools needed for detailed study of particular elements in European literature, and towards their application in a specific research project. It builds directly on the twentieth-century paper that I undertook in my final year: there, I was struck by the consequences of postmodern theory; the self-deconstructing, self-betraying nature of language, and how this decenters our notions of truth. I am fascinated by the application of this theory to gender and sexuality, and the ways that this has problematised our conceptions of sex, gender, and desire. Having looked into constructions of 'femininities' in 1980s German-language women's writing (Christa Wolf's *Cassandra and Medea*; Elfriede Jelinek's *The Piano Teacher*), I want to look now at depictions of male identity, both through the eyes of male and female authors, and issues of alternatively gendered roles (e.g. *Lightning out of a Blue Sky*). In the longer term, I intend to pursue a career in academia, in a teaching role, because I believe that it is still critical to teach students how to explore and pressurise so many of our powerful cultural and psychological norms.

The taught framework of the MPhil provides maximum opportunity to develop my academic interests. The core course on Critical Theory provides an overview of, amongst others, the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, feminism, and queer theory – all of which relate directly to my proposed dissertation. Of the optional courses, I intend to take 'Text & Society in Renaissance Europe', which, although less modern, deals

nonetheless with fundamental gender issues (e.g. the *querelle des femmes* and women's writing about the Reformation). I will also study 'Memory & Subjectivity in the German Novel', looking at constructions of narrative using theories from the course (e.g. Freud, gender theory). My course options thus provide a broad- base knowledge which leads into my proposed dissertation: I will question the function of gender as defining a distinctive subjectivity in the work of modernist authors such as Franz Kafka and Thomas Mann. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler suggests that the concept of true, biological sex is a cultural myth, and that repeated gender acts can clash with, as well as affirm, gender identity. Where can similar patterns be seen in the modernist literary canon, so frequently a site of conflicted, fractured psychologies? When biology itself starts to break down, what is left of once-comforting ideals such as the neat binary of man and woman? Where, in other words, is the body in all this rethinking, reshaping, and refiguring?

My undergraduate degree provided solid training in how to go about an individual research project and how to keep sight of the primary text when secondary sources are used. My year- abroad dissertation focused on Martin Luther: not on his theology *per se*, but on his vernacular translations of the Psalms and on the way that he served, for his followers, as a guarantor and something approaching a co-author of the biblical text. In my optional papers, spanning from the Renaissance all the way to the modern day, I always tried to contextualise my understanding of chosen texts by reading widely in the historical and theoretical background.

Moreover, I worked for a few weeks in the Faculty Library at the end of my final year, so I have useful knowledge of the collection and how to access it.

Both in terms of content and structure, the MPhil in European Literature & Culture is the right next step for me, as a bridge from my undergraduate degree towards a PhD that brings German modernism together with contemporary gender theory.

Social Sciences

My primary motivation for applying for the LLM in Criminal Litigation is to enhance my existing subject knowledge and to gain a solid foundation from which to build a career as a criminal defence solicitor. I have not yet applied for a training contract, as I have a love of both academic study and the subject and wish to pursue this further, as well as enhancing my career prospects. Throughout the study of my undergraduate LLB I strove to maintain consistently high grades in each module and I believe my achievement of a first is testament to my commitment, which I intend to take forward when studying the LLM.

My interest in law is longstanding and was first piqued through a work experience placement with a local solicitor while still at school, where I had the opportunity to witness a criminal case first hand. Through attending court with an outdoor clerk I gained an insight into the workings of the court and into how cases were managed and argued. I was drawn towards this type of work due to its human aspect - the importance of trust between lawyer and client and the life implications for the client depending on the outcome of the case. I built on this experience by attending the public gallery of the Crown Court in my own time and developing a greater understanding of how the criminal justice system functions through observing proceedings and speaking to solicitors and barristers whenever possible. It was this experience that prompted me to study an LLB.

While my experience of the criminal sector provided my initial motivation, on the LLB I also felt it was important to take modules that would allow

me to develop skills and experience across a range of legal sectors, to test the area I was most suited to in terms of interest and aptitude. I undertook Business Law and International Commercial Law, as well as modules in Employment Law, Family Law and Criminal Litigation and Evidence. I enjoyed the technical challenge of the commercial work and successfully applied to complete a work experience placement with a commercial law firm. There, I sharpened my legal skills by engaging in tasks such as researching relevant law, drafting a memo to a trainee solicitor and drafting a letter of advice to a mock client. I also gained an appreciation of the daily duties of a solicitor through shadowing them at meetings and reviewing contracts. I gained an insight into how corporate lawyers' relationships with professional clients have a far greater commercial focus than those of lawyers working with the individual.

I sought to build on these combined experiences by gaining as much practical experience as I could to gain real-world insight and skills with clients in my own right. I volunteered as a Gateway Assessor with Citizens Advice, which gave me excellent experience in how to manage an interview with a client using an appropriate professional manner and identify the pertinent legal issues and draft advice. It also gave me practical experience of building relationships with often vulnerable people, from all walks of life and the ability to speak to them in a way that they understood.

Further to this, I have undertaken several pro-bono opportunities. These include working on projects such as Street Law, teaching young people about legal issues like online privacy and rights regarding stop and

search, through practical and interactive methods. I have also taken part in the Schools Consent Project, leading workshops around the legal definitions of consent and assault in secondary schools and youth groups. Through these roles I further developed my ability to effectively communicate with audiences from a range of backgrounds and to adapt my approach according to their needs. I believe this ability, together with my deep interest in the subject, will stand me in good stead when working with clients involved in the criminal justice system.

My goal is to work as a criminal defence solicitor in the future. I have chosen the route of solicitor, as opposed to barrister, as I place great value on the strong relationship built with a client and have the intention, once qualified, to undertake Higher Rights of Audience qualifications to allow me to advocate in court and see a case through to its conclusion. I see the achievement of the LLM in Criminal Litigation as a crucial step in gaining the enhanced knowledge to really excel in this role. My career aims beyond the course would be to secure a training contract with a Tier 1 ranked firm for crime, ideally in London or the South East, where I have strong personal roots.

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics)

From an early age I have possessed an instinctive curiosity and been intrigued by the workings of the human mind. The relationship between the underlying biological phenomena and the behaviours brought about by such mechanisms have always fascinated me. It was not until my grandmother was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and ischaemic dementia however, that the link between brain functioning and cognition became a passion. Although a most unpleasant experience, the enormity of the precision at which the brain functions to produce our cognitive abilities, socially acceptable behaviours and intricate physiological processes astounded me. I thereupon found myself questioning the cognitive functions and human behaviours I had previously just accepted, desperate to understand how the unseen and seemingly small entities within the brain could impact our daily behaviour.

Studying Psychology AS level furthered my interest in cognitive psychology, with my enthusiasm reflected in the full marks I obtained on each paper. The prospect of exploring the relationship between biology and psychology led me to study Neuroscience at degree level. This has enabled me to expand my knowledge of neuroanatomy and physiology, as well as developmental, cognitive, social and biological psychology through a psychology open unit. As an interdisciplinary field, Neuroscience often overlapped with psychology covering psychological aspects of learning and memory and stress.

Of particular interest to me are neurological and psychological disorders, most specifically the mood disorder; depression. Having studied the neurochemical changes thought to underlie this disorder, I am particularly interested in exploring the cognitive and psychoanalytic theories of depression. For this reason, the mandatory unit 'Abnormal and Clinical Psychology' initially drew me to the course. Studying the unit 'Neurological and psychiatric disorders' this year has given me a good basic knowledge of the underlying pathology and current clinical treatments available but hope to explore the concepts of 'faulty' thinking and the role of parenting in the development of self-worthlessness and hence depression at the postgraduate level.

As an individual who loves to learn, the prospect of studying the Experimental Psychology conversion course at the University of Sussex is extremely exciting. As a resident of West Sussex, I have always been aware of the universities high standards and friendly atmosphere, emphasising my desires to study there. In studying this course, I hope to obtain the Graduate Basis for Registration, so that I may put my knowledge into practice and work as an assistant psychologist, gaining indispensable experience before applying to train as a Clinical Neuropsychologist. I thrive upon challenging situations and enjoy the prospect of both helping others and variety in the day ahead, so feel it is a career that will allow me to combine and utilise my hard working nature as well as my academic passions. In preparation for such a career, I have gained experience of interacting with patients suffering from dementias and other age-related disorders on geriatric wards through a voluntary library service at a local hospital and am currently

awaiting my CRB check to allow me to participate in the 'Barrow project' which will entail spending a few hours each weekend listening and chatting to patients recovering from psychological disorders.

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