An integral part of most graduate school applications is your personal statement or essay. Beyond meeting specific minimum academic standards required for graduate school admission, your personal statement may be the difference between acceptance into a program or not. This section of your application provides you with the opportunity to address the following questions:

- Why this individual program and/or school?
- What motivates you to earn this degree?
- How will you apply this degree to your future career goals?
- What qualities and experiences do you bring to the program?

Specifically, most schools will be looking for interesting and unique aspects of your personal and/or career development, something that might set you apart from other applicants. They want to know the strengths and skills that you will bring to the school, to the research group, and to the field.

Underlying the questions, graduate schools want to see if you can write and articulate well. They are looking for some depth in your thinking and processing and whether you are being realistic in your career endeavors. The length of the personal statement varies from school to school. Some are to be less than 250 words and some can be up to 3-6 pages! Regardless of length, be focused and precise with your words.

If your graduate application is reviewed by the professor with whom you will be potentially working, he/she is likely looking for indications that you will be a good fit for his/her lab or research group and vice versa – the lab or research group is a good fit for you. Certainly, in a laboratory research setting, the success of the whole depends upon the competency and commitment of each individual in the group. High quality research perpetuates additional research opportunities and funding. Both of which are highly important to researchers at prestigious research universities.

**Strategies for writing your personal statement**

- Start early in the application process! Start thinking and writing initial drafts approximately three to six months prior to your application deadline date.
- Imagine that you are sitting before the admissions board of the graduate school to which you are applying. The first question they ask is, "Why should we admit you?" What would your answer be? Write out the answer to this question. It will help you identify your goals, strengths, unique qualities, and interests. This will help get you started in the right direction.
- Initially ... let it flow! It is important to remember that this does not need to be perfect and that every word is not going to be evaluated. Do some brainstorming, outlining possible angles you will take and then write freely.
and unrestricted as you tell your story. The moment you start screening your thoughts, you may lose some great ideas.

- Find your passion and interest! When you find an angle you are excited about, it is a good indication that this is the way to go. It will enhance your statement's readability. Do not make it dull and boring and be sure the questions being asked are being answered. Now, go back through it rewriting, elaborating and eliminating sentences and paragraphs to make it readable and interesting.
- Don't go it alone. Be sure to have your preliminary rough draft checked by faculty and career services personnel. Go back to them two or three times if needed.
- Be sure your final statement included in your application packet is neatly typed with no misspelled words and perfect grammar.

*Taken in part from Fitchburg State College – Effective Personal Statements*