

Explaining Why You Want to be in a Program

Customize your reasons

When asked to explain why you want to be in a program, customize your answer in a meaningful way and address the question in one paragraph at the end of your statement if possible. The “why us?” paragraph works well to conclude your whole statement.

For research/thesis-based master’s and all doctorates:

- Align your research interests and experience with 2-3 professors in the program that you want to do research with (a must for PhD applications and only needed for a master’s if research-based)
- Leave out classes and other elements of the curriculum unless asked to do so.

For non-research programs:

- Show how your interests and goals align with specific elements of the program
- Detail how certain partnerships or collaborations within industry, the community or other academic units will support your work

Avoid

- Telling a program about itself in terms of rankings, prestige, etc.
- Language that comes from program websites
- Planning switch one program name for another in your statement. If you only need to change a name, your writing is not customized.

Respect the Hierarchy of Experience

If you're applying to a research master's or a doctorate, be sure to respect the hierarchy of experience.

Even if you have several semesters of research experience, your audience and the decision makers for admission will be faculty in the program (except for MBA programs typically).

Your explanation as to why you want to be in a research program needs to focus on the researchers in that program and how your background makes you a good fit for their projects.

You can address why you want to also your “funding paragraph” for research programs. You are essentially applying for a job when you list researchers because they are typically the people who will fund your assistantship.

Avoid: Telling review committees who have completed doctorates, have multiple publications, teaching experiences, etc. that your experience is greater than theirs.

Examples:

- “Professor George Burdell's research in _____ aligns with my interest”
- “I can extend Professor Burdell's work by.....”

Remember: Your interest and experiences align with, can support, or can contribute to their work. Not vice versa.

Avoid: Critiquing a researcher's work

Examples:

- “Professor George Burdell's work in _____ is groundbreaking because...”
- “I believe that Professor Buzz's work in _____ has implications for”
- “Dr. Burdell's work, however, does not.....”

If not applying to a research program:

Describe elements of the program that are exciting to you. For example:

Certain courses: name the course and connect the content to your goal or how you want to extend your learning

Experiential learning: If the program has internships, explain why you see interning as valuable to your learning and in reaching your goal

You can add additional reasons for applying to a research program if they are related to research in some way. For example, the program has a partnership with a medical school that would give you a chance to conduct collaborative research with physicians in addition to the work you can do with the 2-3 professors you have written about.