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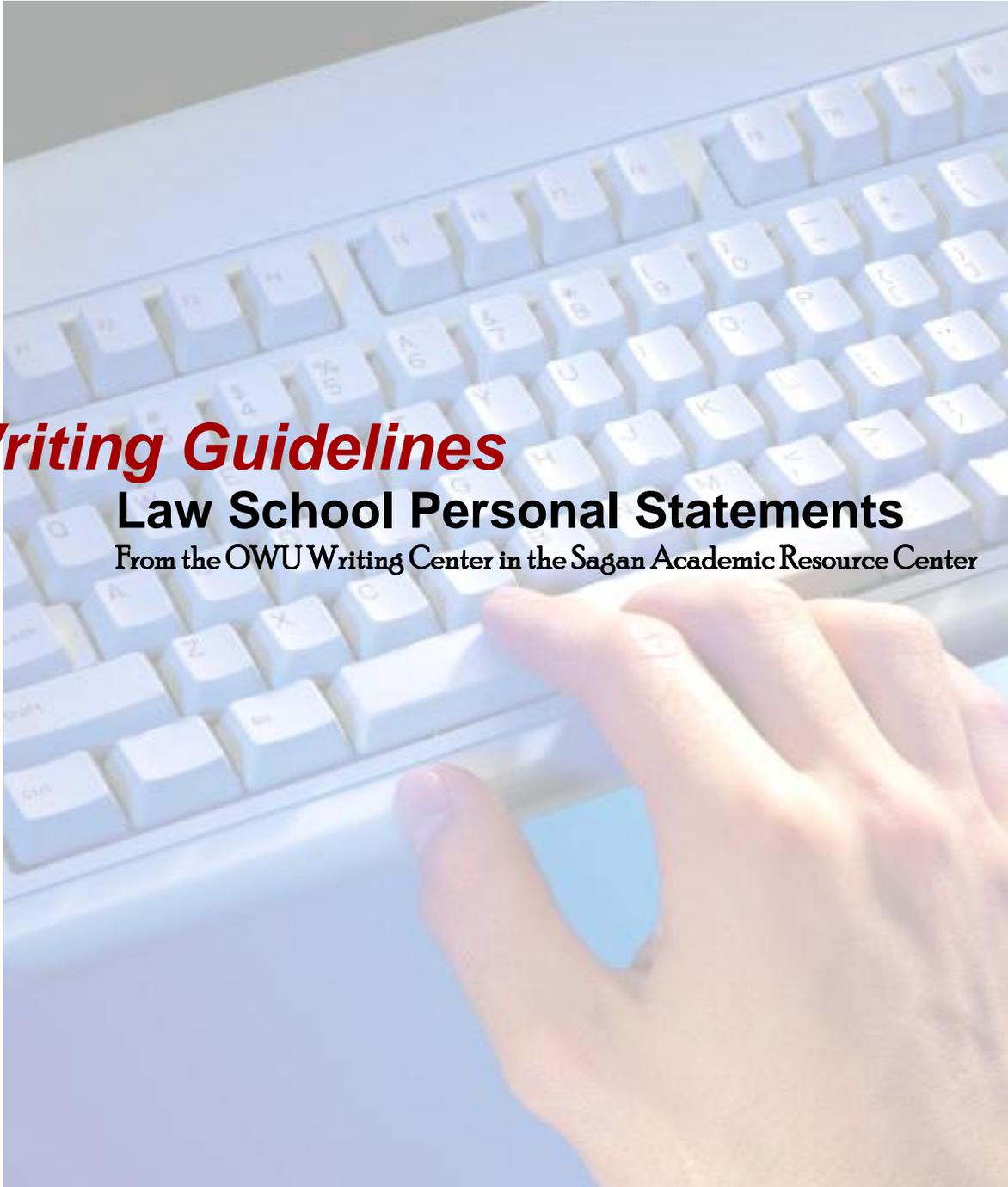
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Writing Guidelines

Law School Personal Statements

From the OWU Writing Center in the Sagan Academic Resource Center



The OWU Writing Center

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Guidelines for Writing Law School Personal Statements

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Guidelines for Writing Law School Personal Statements

Personal Statements: Law School

Your “Personal Statement” should be an honest, thoughtful, personal essay that distinguishes you from the 13,000 students who apply to law school each year. Focus on meaningful experiences, both personal and academic, that reveal distinguishing character traits and reflect important goals, values, and beliefs. Because essay questions vary from school to school, read—and read carefully—the guidelines specified in the application material. One common complaint among admissions officers is that applicants—people like you—don’t pay attention to these guidelines.

The Purpose of Your Personal Statement

- To distinguish yourself from other candidates
- To reveal the person behind the GPA and LSAT scores
- To demonstrate your reasons for attending law school
- To convince readers you will excel in law school
- To convince readers you will be an outstanding attorney
- To convey sincerity, integrity, honesty, and, more generally, strength of character
- To reveal your intellectual ability and analytical and problem-solving skills
- To demonstrate your writing skills
- To show admissions officers you can read carefully, follow instructions and guidelines, and attend to detail when addressing the questions or prompt in your application.

Writing Your Personal Statement

I. Audience

Knowing your audience and familiarizing yourself with each law school will help you select an appropriate topic and shape your personal statement. As an admissions officer from Northwestern noted, “Applicants should tailor statements to the school they are applying to. Show us that you did some homework on us” (Owens 36). Reflect on these points:

- According to Eric Owen, author of *Law School Essays that Made a Difference*, law schools receive several thousand applications a year; in 2005, for example Northwestern received 5,000,

Berkeley 7,000, and Georgetown 11, 250 (46). An admissions officer at Berkeley noted that they have “six people reading more or less full-time from the end of October through the end of March” (46). Late in the day—at the end of four or five months of reading personal statements—tired, bored readers have little patience for predictable storylines, clichés, insincerity, and gimmicks.

- Admissions officers from Berkeley, Duke, George Washington, Northwestern, and several other schools acknowledged the importance of the personal statement (See bar graph on page). When asked if they could do away with this part of the application package, a representative from UCLA said, “Absolutely not! The personal statement is vital in learning who the person is, beyond what the GPA and LSAT tell us” (Owen 44). Some admissions officers, however, value it more—or less—than others. A Northwestern representative listed it as one of the least important parts of the application package—only recommendations were ranked lower (Owen 59)—while an admissions officer from Michigan noted, “I think it’s an incredibly important part of the application process” (Owen 44).
- Though admissions officers may generally agree about what ingredients make for a good personal statement, research specific schools to learn about individual preferences. Some schools may accept, even prefer longer personal statements, assuming, of course, that the extra material allows for readers to have a greater understanding of the applicant. Some admissions officers encourage applicants to write about future goals and plans, if only briefly, while others strongly advise against it. Check Eric Owens’ *Law School Essays that Made a Difference* and Mark Alan Stewart’s *Perfect Personal Statements* for information about personal statement preferences for the following schools: Northwestern, Cornell, Georgetown, Michigan, George Washington, UCLA, Penn, and The University of Texas at Austin.
- Program directors and admissions officers are affiliated with specific law programs and institutional cultures with their own set of values, beliefs, attitudes, and philosophies. Familiarizing yourself with a program and its ethos will help you write a more a successful essay. The authors of *Essays That Worked for Law Schools*, for example, note an important difference between three prestigious law programs: “Yale Law School is known for its politically active, often left-wing students and faculty The law schools at the University of Chicago and the University of Michigan [however] are considered rather traditional, where hard work may count more than your politics” (Boykin and Curry 41).
- Changes in the culture outside the university often influence institutional policies and the decisions made by admissions officers. For example, most law schools today embrace society’s view that cultural diversity enriches our daily experiences and lives; law programs foster this ideal by selecting a pool of candidates with distinctive personalities and backgrounds.
- Because the law community communicates, practices, and maintains, often tacitly, its own idea system, social assumptions, and discourse (writing) practices, you should familiarize yourself with the experiences, knowledge, skills, character traits, and goals embraced by lawyers, academic deans, and admissions officers.

II. Topic Selection:

Admissions officers do not have, as one of them said, “a set agenda. We don’t know what we’re looking for until we read it” (Curry and Baer 10). The open-ended questions, the kind that prospective law students typically address, support this statement. Regardless of your choice of topic, however,

admissions officers and law faculty want honest, authentic, thoughtful personal essays that reveal the person behind the activities, accomplishments, and experiences. While admissions officers are not looking for a limited number of “right” topics, here are some observations and caveats regarding topic choices:

- Don’t write a resume in paragraph form or repeat information included in other parts of your application.
- Over and over again—I can’t state this enough—admissions officers stressed, as the following quoted passage illustrates, the importance of self-understanding and conveying that to readers: “In a nutshell, admissions officers want you to communicate . . . *who you really are* and *what has made you the person you are today*. They look for introspection and your ability to reflect intellectually upon yourself and upon the experiences that helped to develop your attitudes and beliefs” (Owens 16).
- Focus on skills (e.g., analytical and writing skills) and personality traits (e.g., integrity and honesty) valued in the law community.
- Though many law school applicants write contemplative personal statements and focus on an abstract idea or a philosophical issue—the meaning of “liberty” or “justice,” for example—admissions officers seldom pick, for at least three reasons, these essays as their favorite: **1)** the writer’s thought process becomes derailed or muddled; **2)** the writer often neglects to link abstract ideas to something concrete and personal; and **3)** they don’t reveal the person.
- When applicants write about a legal issue, an aspect of the legal system, or even what they want to do after law school, they often sound naïve, uninformed, and, worst of all, presumptuous, particularly when they “lecture” a veteran attorney about the law. It’s okay to write about a legal issue as long as you ground it in experience.
- Here are some other related topics that should usually be avoided: “I’ve always wanted to be a lawyer” and “I want to work as a lawyer to fight social injustice.” Even if the first statement reflects a certain truth, most readers find it a bit incredulous that you decided on law school at age 5. The second statement appears insincere—even if your intentions are genuine—because so few attorneys devote their careers to public service and help those in real need. As Eric Owens notes, “Be forewarned . . . that nothing—*nothing*—is so obviously bogus as an insincere statement of a commitment to public interest issues” (21) .
- Despite the above caveat, a good number of law schools specifically look for volunteer work and community involvement when they make admission decisions. If you have a history of civic-mindedness and a genuine commitment to helping others, let admissions officers know about it.
- Generally speaking, avoid religious and political topics. As always, however, there are exceptions; you can write about the above topics if, for example you apply to law schools with religious affiliations or if you worked on a political campaign for your state senator. If you write about religion or politics, make sure, regardless of your political leanings or religious affiliation, you don’t polarize readers by preaching or showing intolerance of other beliefs and points of view.
- Though admissions officers don’t agree 100 % on this, most want “blemishes” or anomalies addressed in an addendum to the personal statement, not in the personal statement itself.

- If asked to write about a blemish, deficiency, or shortcoming, do so in a positive way. Keep this advice in mind: “Whatever the case, lay out the facts, but let your readers draw their own conclusions. Be brief and balanced. Be fair, elegant, honest. Do not launch into detailed descriptions. Explain the problem and state what you did about it. *Do not make excuses (even if they are completely legitimate excuses)*. This is no time to whine” (Owens 26). Focusing on a strength or an achievement might be the best argument for certain deficiencies, such as a low LSAT score or a less than impressive GPA. However, good reasons for having low grades—working full time, for example—should be provided, if you choose to include an addendum.
- The word “diversity” appears again and again in the comments made by admissions officers. The Director of Admissions at the University of California at Berkeley said they first consider “academic potential” but diversity is a “close second.”
- “Whatever experience(s) you focus on, make sure you **1)** Reveal something unique about yourself—whether it’s your humor, humility, creativity, or some other quality; **2)** Write a thoughtful essay that reveals self-knowledge and insights about your experiences; **3)** Show honesty and sincerity—about yourself, about what you’ve done, and about your career interests and goals; **4)** Understand your strengths, weaknesses, and limitations **5)** Tailor your essay to each law school, even with an open-ended prompt.

III. Organization and Development

- Write two or three pages—or the length noted in the prompt—and avoid “organizational” gimmicks and formats, including the following: writing poetry, using an obituary, and presenting a court transcript. Other things to avoid: using a fictitious persona and writing an essay with crayons on construction paper. (You’re applying to law school, not kindergarten.)
- If the prompt is open-ended, you can focus on one meaningful experience (volunteering at a homeless shelter); several related experiences on a certain theme or subject (coaching a third-grade girls softball team, working at a daycare center, studying child psychology); or even a range of somewhat different experiences, as long as they reveal a meaningful, coherent picture of the kind of person you are.
- Many personal statements are organized chronologically, whether it’s a narrative essay or a statement of purpose that outlines how one’s life experiences relate to educational plans and, ultimately, to career goals. However, depending on your topic, you might employ another pattern of organization, such as classification, process, description, comparison and contrast, or some combination of these.
- The best personal statements include a governing idea, thesis, or life-lesson that reveals your ability to think reflectively and critically about your experience. Your title should prepare readers for the main point of your essay, stated or implied in your introduction.
- Begin with an “attention-getter”: an anecdote, an example, a vivid description, a startling—and meaningful—statement, a thoughtful question, or some other “technique” that captures readers’ attention and, as I note above, reveals the main point of your essay. Be “concrete,” specific, detailed; Nothing is more boring—ask any admissions officer—than an introduction replete with generalizations, abstract statements, or trite observations.

Remember This: If the opening is weak, readers may call it quits after the first paragraph. Some evidence suggests, moreover, that a memorable opening paragraph may be the most important paragraph because it “encourages” readers to overlook writing shortcomings in subsequent paragraphs.

- These suggestions apply to your body paragraphs as well: details, examples, and anecdotes are a must. You sell yourself, support your claims—whatever words you want to use—when you include adequate evidence or support.
- Your “conclusion” should add to your discussion and bring it to a close. The best advice is to stop when you’re finished; don’t tack on a needless summary or add a paragraph of generalizations and empty statements. Often you can end with the preceding paragraph and bring it—and your paper—to a close by adding a memorable sentence or two.

IV. Language, Style, and Tone:

- Use “concrete” language and avoid generalizations. It’s okay to adopt the language of the profession—certain words or terms—if it is appropriate to your discussion. The specialized terminology of a field (i.e., jargon), however, can be annoying and inappropriate when used as a form of posturing and as a substitute for meaningful ideas and insights.
- Avoid quotes.
- Don’t over-write; admissions officers are quick to recognize stilted, overly formal, and pedantic language.
- Avoid clichés, sentimental language, and platitudes. For example: “I felt unbound joy and hopefulness when a homeless person thanked me for the meal on Thanksgiving.”
- Write concisely. Because of page limitations, every word counts, so work with an experienced editor to eliminate superfluous words, phrases, and sentences. Follow these suggestions:
 1. **Condense phrases by using a single word**—“Obviously” instead of “It is obvious that”; “Because” instead of “On the grounds that”
 2. **Eliminate nominalizations** (verbs and adjective used as nouns)—“Victimize” instead of “Victimization”
 3. **Condense verb phrases by using a single word**—“Consider” instead of “Give consideration to”; “Understand” instead of “Have a great understanding of”
 4. **Edit unnecessary adverbs used as intensifiers**—“Finished” instead of “Completely finished”
 5. **Eliminate unnecessary relative pronouns** (that, which, who, whom)—“The book I quoted was missing” instead of “The book that I had quoted was missing”
 6. **Eliminate redundant words**—“Ready” instead of “Ready and able”; “Willing” instead of “Willing and eager”
 7. **Minimize the use of expletive constructions** (short statements that start sentences and include “to be” verbs)—“We want” instead of “There is a desire for”; “We hope” instead of “It is to be hoped”
- Whenever possible, use the active voice—for example, “The attorney won the court case”, not “The court case was won by the attorney.”

- Your tone should be genuine and convey sincerity and honesty. If you “sound” inauthentic or insincere, readers may make more general assumptions about your character and integrity.
- Because the personal statement focuses on you, use the first person singular pronoun, “I,” but keep it to a minimum, particularly at the beginning of sentences. And eliminate the “I thinks,” “I believes,” and the “I feels.”

Examples

I. Complete Statements

Law School Personal Statement—Example One

"You can't judge a book by its cover." As a child, this was one cliché to which I was particularly devoted. In addition to the customary difficulties of adjusting to adolescence and a new school environment, I entered middle school with an unusual liability: I suffered from facial tics, the most persistent of which was a frequent, involuntary eye twitch. Only a few weeks into the seventh grade, I acquired the nickname "Blinky" and, at an age when insecurities already run rampant, my identity was permanently defined by the feature which I hated most in myself. Even back then I realized that the teasing was always affectionate, and I made friends quickly; nevertheless, I spent years with a nagging feeling that I was somehow aberrant. Gradually, however, my tics diminished in both frequency and intensity, and by the time I entered college they had largely disappeared.

I wanted to discuss this condition because I believe that, as an ever-present factor during many of these formative years, the experience played a major role in shaping the adult I have become. Although ten years ago I would never have foreseen that my tics could be a powerful vehicle for personal growth, I believe that the experience has helped me to develop a heightened sensitivity for those who have struggled to fit in socially. It was this factor, for example, which led me to become a Resident Assistant as an undergraduate at Stanford for two years, and which has prompted my involvement with various community service projects, giving me the opportunity to interact with troubled and disadvantaged youth.

Most importantly, as a person who often felt different while growing up—and who desperately wanted the other kids to judge the content of the book, rather than the quality of the cover—I have always made an effort in both my personal and in my professional life to scratch well beneath the surface, to determine whether the substance actually matches the form. My decision to attend law school also reflects this tendency. Although I have long had an interest in the law as an academic discipline, my work experience since graduating has given me the opportunity to confirm that my academic interests would extend to the real-world application of legal principles. To this end, I purposefully chose jobs that provided two very distinct perspectives on the practice of law: as a legal assistant, I became acquainted with both the advantages and disadvantages of private practice, while my current position in Senator X's office has

offered a glimpse of how the law may be used constructively in the public sector. Although my own long-term goals are geared more towards the latter, both positions have equally impressed upon me the unique potential which exists in the law to make a direct, positive impact on people's lives.

Working for the law firm, I was initially turned off by the formal language which permeated all writing and discourse ("Aforementioned • legalese had heretofore proven incomprehensible"). As one not familiar with the jargon, I found the law to be pretentious and distant. Gradually, however, I began to sort out the shades of difference between a "motion in limine" and a "56(f) motion," and I came to understand the law as a vast set of rules which could, with intelligence and creativity, genuinely be used on behalf of values such as fairness and justice. In addition to my primary assignment on an antitrust case, some exposure to pro bono work further convinced me that the law has a very important role to play in our society.

Similarly, my first impressions of Capitol Hill were not altogether favorable. Not only did I struggle to negotiate my way through the labyrinth of underground tunnels in order to find the cafeteria, but I was again forced to adapt to a specialized language, this time the unique lexicon of lobbyists and congressional staffers. As with my experience at the law firm, though, I soon realized the practical application of the laws which are written here in Congress. Unlike most of the general public, who see only the final version of a bill, being part of the legislative process has forced me to examine all sides of any given issue. Although politics can make this process agonizingly slow and inefficient, my work here has given me a greater appreciation for the way that laws affect our constituents back home.

Given my own particular skills and abilities, I am now convinced that the law presents the single greatest chance for me to make a difference, both in the lives of individuals and in terms of influencing the broader fabric of society. I am confident that my insistence on looking beyond those first impressions has provided me with an exciting opportunity, just as I would like to think that those seventh graders who eventually managed to look beyond an awkward physical trait also discovered something worthwhile.

(Dowhan, Dowhan, and Kaufman 45)

Law School Personal Statement—Example Two

I am an activist with a commitment to fighting for progressive causes through legislation, policy, and grassroots organizing. While I have participated in many varied projects from editing a sexuality education curriculum to campaigning for gay rights as a local boardmember of [the statewide gay rights organization], I am most concerned with reproductive health issues. In this statement I will explain how I gained expertise in this field through both academic and professional work from 1988 to the present. Through this work I have acquired the intellectual foundation and the concrete experience to be an effective advocate for citizens' right to sexuality education and health care.

At [school] I began my commitment to reproductive health. I earned the right to design my own major in women's studies and legal issues, for which I took courses in feminism and

wrote on the developing legal precedent recognizing fetal rights. During my year at [school] I studied the impact the abortion pill RU 486 might have on the National Health Service, researched the evolving debate about the drug in the Euro-pean press, and presented my findings at a Women's Studies Department seminar upon my return to the U.S. In my senior thesis on the legal treatment of pregnant substance abusers, I addressed the difficulties associated with prosecuting these women and proposed alternative approaches.

While I was a student, I gained professional experience as a birth control counselor at the University health clinic. I also worked as a Planned Parenthood educator, for which I edited a sexuality education curriculum and designed and taught community programs on contraception, AIDS, puberty, and sexual abuse prevention.

When I moved to a small desert town in the Western United States, I volunteered for a democratic congressional campaign, where I briefed the candidate on abortion rights and sexuality issues in health care reform. I met the executive director of the regional Planned Parenthood, and convinced her to hire me as the agency's first Director of Public Affairs. I coordinated grassroots lobbying efforts on pending legislation including the state's health care reform bill, clinic access bill, and anti-gay rights legislation.

I quickly learned that this small town was far more conservative than my university's eastern college community. Many of Planned Parenthood's efforts to promote sexuality education were thwarted. I decided to discover who opposed the agency and what their tactics were. My research uncovered a network of local activists, some of whom had connections to state and nationwide Conservative organizations. I attended many meetings and followed public right-wing activity such as the campaign to teach creationism in our local schools. I published my findings in an op-ed piece for our local paper, and as a front page article for a west-coast human rights newsletter. I have enclosed copies of these publications for you.

When my State Senator asked me to manage his reelection campaign, I eagerly accepted since I knew he had worked hard in support of health care and civil rights. The position also offered me greater professional responsibility. Even though we lost the election, the campaign was an invaluable lesson in creating an effective political message, managing hundreds of volunteers, working in coalition with other campaigns, designing advertising, and fundraising.

I had hoped to work in the state capitol after the campaign, and I am now working for a state level health care advocacy organization which employs a lobbyist and coordinates grassroots strategy. In my new position I am researching legislation, helping the director design lobbying strategies, and keeping affiliated organizations throughout the state informed about evolving policy and bills.

While I believe that I have developed both academic and professional expertise in reproductive health policy, health care reform, and political organizing, I would like to acquire the skills and power to make a bigger difference. Law school would provide me with the technical skills and professional influence to be more effective in confronting right-wing litigation and initiatives and in designing and advocating for progressive social policy. After law

school, I envision working for a nonprofit organization such as the ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project, or working in government drafting and analyzing reproductive health policy and legislation.

(Dowhan, Dowhan, and Kaufman 67)

Law School Personal Statement—Example Three

At the age of eighteen, I never expected to receive so much attention. After two years of trying to persuade the local Scout council to abandon its widespread use of the Confederate battle flag, my letter to the National Office paid off. Newspapers nationwide reported that my letter spurred the Boy Scouts of America to issue a policy restricting use of the flag. As a conservative white Southerner whose family moved here in 1635, I had to explain that this policy was not just politically correct, but that it made sense.

Nine years ago, I was inducted into the Order of the Arrow (OA), a selective Scout organization designed to encourage leadership and community service. My seventy-member induction class included twenty black Scouts, but I never saw more than one or two of them at OA events. I became concerned that the OA was not developing leaders from one-third of our state's population, and wondered why blacks returned so rarely. I remembered the pervasiveness of the Confederate flag on induction weekend—decorating mugs and T-shirts, hanging from flagpoles and in the dining hall. While I knew the flag was not the root cause of the problem, I decided that its removal would help keep black Scouts in the OA.

Therefore, as editor of the regional OA newsletter, I published an article critical of the flag. Several black Scouts quietly confirmed my suspicions. One Scout recalled that his mother, seeing the flags in the camp dining hall, pulled him aside and whispered, "I don't think we're welcome here." More typical was the response of a prominent Scout leader, who angrily demanded to know why any debate was even necessary since "we only have two blacks in the lodge anyway." I could not believe how thoroughly he had missed my point.

Though my local efforts were thwarted, I still believed that Scouting should abandon the flag. One year later, my letter to the National Office prompted the new policy and ignited a storm of public debate. Critics blasted my disrespect for Southern tradition, misinterpreting my desire to help the South as an apology for the Civil War. I am proud of my relatives who fought and died for the Confederacy, but it is not their image that the flag represents when it is used at twentieth century Scout meetings, football games, and NASCAR races. Scouts began using the flag in the 1950s, about the time Georgia and South Carolina raised it over their State Houses. The flag is a response to unpopular Supreme Court justices, not invading armies.

Ironically, [school's] student newspaper has charged that I lack compassion and only represent white male fraternity members on a fraternity-dominated campus. The newspaper did not endorse me for student body president because I refused to give unconditional support to every cause, including de-emphasis of Western curricula and mandatory hiring quotas for black faculty. The editors downplayed my leading role in establishing the first main campus housing for a black fraternity, a woman's selective group, and a multicultural organization, because they

believed that the fraternities should have been kicked off campus instead. Nonetheless, I was the first person to be elected without their endorsement in twenty years because students recognized my commitment to the entire community.

The battle flag has slowly disappeared from Scouting, and [school's] campus better reflects the school's diversity. While integration is still a distant goal, these changes are small steps in the right direction. I sought practical improvements through independent thinking, perseverance, and tenacity in the face of fierce criticism. A legal education would give me tools to better use these abilities. I am not headed to law school on a mission, but I see law as an opportunity to contribute as we build our future.
(Dowhan, Dowhan, and Kaufman 80)

Law School Personal Statement—Example Four

What the hell am I doing? This question recurred frequently as I made the two hour drive from Stanford to Sacramento. Even turning the stereo up so loud I could hear my vents rattle didn't distract me for long. My fixation should have been no surprise. Had I told most of my friends where I intended to spend the next two days I would have been answered with vacuous eyes and gaping mouths. I had agreed to attend a convention that was being held way out in Sacramento. What was unusual was that I was attending a convention of the California College Republicans.

I do not mean to suggest that there is anything inherently wrong with the G.O.P., but it simply has never been my cup of tea. Back in elementary school I accepted that the Republicans were running the country (via the White House) and doing a deplorable job of it. Before I understood what party identification was all about I knew the words Reagan and Bush and came to identify these names with all of the major inequities and plights of America. The problem of race relations were caused by Republican insensitivity, as were the problems of poverty, poor education and the threat of nuclear war. The government was an old conservative beast that was apathetic to the difficulties of the underprivileged. That was the setting in which I grew up and even as I undertook the eternal drive to Sacramento I could not escape the oppressive feeling that I was betraying my past. How did I get to this point?

I guess it all started back in high school. All those years of private schooling can have a profound effect on a person's attitude. Sure, I was used to cheering the liberal cause and disdaining any hint of conservatism, but it was the trendy thing to do. Western Massachusetts was a place where everyone. Blacks, Whites, Latinos, homosexuals, poor, wealthy, even those afflicted with AIDS, seemed to get along okay. It never seemed idealistic that a multicultural and tolerant America was a coveted possibility.

I soon realized that I was developing opinions that were inconsistent with my claimed ideology. Back in 1991 the specter of Clarence Thomas brought the concept of a black conservative to national attention and it was not received well. Yet in spite of how ardently I joined the criticism, I found myself agreeing with some of what he had to say. Maybe affirmative action is being carried to a harmful extreme, and maybe a lot of people spend too much time

looking for scapegoats instead of accepting primary responsibility for their own unfortunate situation. Regardless, what was clear over my college years was that even though the labels Democrat and Republican were on opposite sides of my spectrum of virtue, my own views were not so easily categorized.

My sophomore year in college I was engaged in a conversation surrounding the recent presidential election and a student reacted with surprise when I mentioned that I supported Clinton. She thought I was a Republican because I spent most of my time hanging around people who were. I was stunned. The last thing I ever wanted was for anyone to guess that I endorsed the Republican party or anything it stood for. I have often heard Republicans say to me that my opinions are not all as liberal as I think and that there was room for me under the G.O.P.'s "big tent." I heard those remarks so often that they eventually began to lose their shock value. Yet always, I was content in my belief that I was, undeniably, a true liberal. But after some tumultuous ideological dashes in college I wound up among friends who were active in the college Republican cause and sought to drag me in.

The prospect of attending this convention was unappealing, but the truth was I had nothing better to do that Friday night. Besides, I needed to clarify to myself that even though I had shifted slightly to the right in recent years, I had not made a complete turn around. So I packed a bag, put on a suit (I couldn't help expressing my liberal slant, I wore a lavender shirt with a black and purple tie) and headed into the lion's den.

For the first time in my life I felt like a foreigner in America. I walked into the hotel lobby and a huge banner circumnavigated the far wall like a frieze reading: "Doing time in San Clinton...836 days until parole!" I came across people who wore buttons reading: "Rush Limbaugh in '96," "Clinton-Gore, out in four!" and "Hillary free zone." At one point the entire convention was howling madly after hearing a speech written by Patrick Buchanan. Later everyone around me rose and saluted a slide projection of Ronald Reagan sitting in the Oval Office. All I could think of was what my English teacher during my senior year of high school once said: "the nice thing about right-wingers is they always fulfill your worst expectations of them." The most harrowing aspect of the convention was the awkwardness that accompanied me wherever I went. As I walked around I felt like a novelty. I was one of only four black students there (none female). Normally this would mean nothing to me but suddenly I became aware of the homogeneity of the assembly. People often complain about feeling indoctrinated by multiculturalism or political correctness in college, but I actually began to miss those institutions. Sure, I normally am indifferent to the racial composition of a social function, but I generally do not feel suspicious of anyone's predetermined attitude toward me. How could I feel at home amongst a subculture whose rhetoric stereotypes me as a violent criminal, welfare abuser, drug addict, or beneficiary of undeserved educational opportunity? You can only put on a happy face for so long before the sideways glances and whispers as you roam the halls begin to weigh on your conscience. At one point some student running for a California Republican elected position gave a speech in which he began "I am pro-family, I oppose abortion, I am pro-gun and I am anti-expansion of rights for sodomites." My first reaction? I was inclined to scream at this thick headed neo-nazi and ask him if he had been to any good cross burnings lately. But then I reflected carefully on the situation. Maybe tolerance means I have to stomach the opinions of people who make me nauseous. Maybe, just maybe if I dislike what I have seen and heard

throughout the weekend then I am the one who simply does not belong. Maybe my convictions have been correct all along; the Republican party is not for me.

I left the convention before the major event had taken place: the election of College Republican officers. Interestingly that was why my friends wanted me there. The more bodies they had representing Stanford, the more votes they could cast in their favor. Since I hated the experience and I left before I could make good on the favor I promised, I wondered, what had I gained?

I was obsessed with this enigma on the way home. I had driven more than two hours to be somewhere I had no desire to go and interact with people I had no desire to meet. On top of all of that I had a paper due the next day in a seminar and had not even started working on it. After the two hour drive back I would have roughly forty-five minutes before I had to go to work at the library, which for me always signaled the end of my weekend. These definitely were not the most fun and productive two days of my life.

But somehow I felt a hint of satisfaction or maybe even a bit of relief. At least I better understood why my political identification was appropriate. I hated masquerading as a conservative Republican, not just because I had to deceive people who were polite to me, but also because I was denying myself. Deep down I firmly believe that some degree of affirmative action short of imposing quotas is necessary to unfreeze status quo and remedy the effects of past discrimination. I believe that women cannot be equal to men in society until they are granted full reproductive rights and we cease capitalist exploitation based on gender that pervades workplaces and homes. I believe that the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment means that it is unconstitutional for anyone to discriminate against another person based on his/her sexual orientation in the realm of employment, housing and public accommodations. I believe that the taking of human life is unjust even if exacted as a punishment by a law enforcement agency. I firmly believe in the strict separation of church and state, so much so that I would take the words "in God we trust" off of all U.S. currency. I also believe that, in the post-Cold War era, national welfare concerns should take precedence over international primacy aspirations. Now, if after all of that there may still be a place for me in the Republican party, I am eager to find out where.

My commitment to these beliefs was immersed in hostility while I attended the convention but it guided me through the event. I tried something new and simply did not like it. My clearest recollection from the whole weekend is the gorgeous sunshine as I drove back to Stanford and the exhilaration I felt as I put more and more distance between me and that hotel. I was proud of myself. I now knew that clashing with conservative dogma was not just something I did to fit into left leaning social situations, it was essential to the identity I have developed since childhood. I know myself to fit the description of an emphatically moderate liberal. I could associate with staunch conservatives while I maintained a separate and contrasting ideological posture. I was brave enough to test the strength of personal beliefs and leave confidently and calmly (although it was difficult to refrain from shouting "Clinton-Gore in '96" as I left the hotel lobby). It was a sullen, quiet time as I drove back to Stanford, yet the ride back didn't seem to take very long.

(Dowhan, Dowhan, and Kaufman 85)

Law School Personal Statement—Example Five

About three years ago, a frightful brush with a libel suit rekindled my long-dormant desire to be a lawyer. As Sunday editor of a midsize daily newspaper, I copyedited a story and wrote an accompanying headline about a survivalist camp that was in a tax dispute with the town. The camp was training its members in the use of firearms, survival skills and military tactics on a local tract of land. Soon after the story ran, my managing editor called me into his office and told me this group was suing the newspaper over the story and had specifically cited the headline, which characterized the camp as "militant." He and the executive editor assured me the coverage and headline were fair. Even so, I began to fear for my job. Sensing my concern, the managing editor had me meet with the newspaper's lawyer, who shared my boss's confidence. The lawyer was reassuring and, as I realized later, inspiring, as he discussed libel laws and his daily role in defending the newspaper and other clients. This experience taught me more than the importance of careful word choice. It reminded me how close I had come to following other career paths and of the lessons that would eventually guide me to law school.

About 10 years earlier, I chose to major in engineering as a college freshman. I did this not because I felt a calling but because engineering seemed like an impressive vocation. And that's what I believed was the point of a career: to impress people. Although I survived the rigors of first-year college engineering classes, impressing people turned out to be insufficient motivation to truly excel. But then came a turning point: an upper-level class in Shakespeare. Verbal analysis, writing, discussion? At last something felt natural. I abandoned engineering and followed my heart through academia: social sciences, literature, religion, studying abroad. I learned the fulfillment that comes in pursuing my interests.

Toward the end of my undergraduate studies, I found myself torn between careers in law and journalism. Both fields' emphasis on communication, public service and the truth were appealing. Although law exerted the stronger emotional pull, I chose journalism because I felt better prepared for it. But in fact, I wasn't entirely ready for journalism either. I had yet to learn the true value of hard work and focus.

In my first jobs after graduate school, I was distracted by the thought that advancement should be easier. Was I out of my league? Did I belong in this career? My concerns mounted until I tried a new tact: I would focus not on reward, but on the task at hand. Every sentence I wrote or edited would be as perfect as I could make it. With that new strategy, I achieved the success that had been eluding me: At Dow Jones Newswire, I was promoted from copy reader (junior reporter) to editor in only a year, a unique achievement. My self-confidence grew as I advanced to new responsibilities in new positions.

Indeed, the lawsuit was a rare dark moment in an otherwise joyful career. Fortunately, my anxiety over the suit was brief. The newspaper quickly prevailed, and I remained a valued editor, though I now saw myself as powerless. I was forced to watch from the sidelines while the lawyers waged the real battles. My passion for the law grew, but I hesitated from taking the leap. A final epiphany gave me the push I needed.

About a year after the libel suit, my son was born. It was a time of happiness and introspection. I wanted my son to benefit from the lessons I've learned, but what wisdom could I possibly impart? It now seemed simple: If you pursue your interests and work hard at them, confidence and success will follow. Don't be afraid to follow your heart.

If I can give this advice, I must take it as well.
(Owens and Staff 80)

Law School Personal Statement—Example Six

My father was a biker, my mother an Irish immigrant and a high-school dropout. I've got half-brothers and sisters peppered across the state of New Hampshire. I grew up on a farm.

"Learn all ya can, kid." While I waited for the school bus on icy, black mornings, these are the words my father would holler from our front porch, his pale, thin legs poking out beneath an old robe. "Learn all ya can." This was the advice he shouted back to me as he sped off on his Harley Davidson, his leather jacket billowing, his beard twisting in the wind. Through my education, volunteer work, career, and travels, I have kept my father's words with me, relying on them to carve my path in life.

I excelled in high school. I joined every club, participated in athletics, and acted on stage. I edited the school paper and took advanced classes in English and history; I graduated in the top five of my class. While in college in Boston, I did well but grew frustrated with the generality of my communications classes; I felt I wasn't learning specific skills, and I wanted to be challenged. With my father's words in mind and my Irish grandfather's encouragement, I took a year off and travelled to Ireland, my mother's birthplace. While working as a barmaid and living with my cousin in a down-at-heels north Dublin community, I quickly realized that college was a choice, that I could exploit it to excel in life or that I could grumble about it unceasingly. I discovered the vision of achievement that my grandfather had in mind when he immigrated with his family to America in the 1950s. With a promise to my mother, who had never enjoyed the luxury of a college education, that I would graduate on time no matter how many summer courses I had to take, I returned home, transferred schools, and waitressed my way through a degree in writing and literature, determined to learn all I could. My coursework at Emerson College pushed me to develop critical reading skills, refined my writing abilities, and, above all, nurtured my editorial eye, all invaluable tools in my current career and my eventual practice of law.

It was after my graduation, when I moved to New York City, that I met Jocelyn and began to further examine the implications of immigration. Jocelyn was the near-silent Haitian woman who sat at the back of a class I taught for Literacy Partners. While the class was aimed at those whose native language was English but who had somehow been lost in the shuffle of public education, we rarely turned anyone away. Jocelyn must have been around 65 years old, and her first language was Creole. At first, I overlooked Jocelyn for some of the other more loquacious students who continually brought in passionately personal projects from home to develop their skills. I had one student, a man from the Bronx, who adored Neruda and set about writing a book of love poems.

Another student, Sam, who had been in and out of prison his entire life, worked on reading his Alcoholics Anonymous Bible. Jocelyn's project was to find a job as a cleaning woman.

Her dogged determination moved me. I began to seek her out in class, and I accompanied her to the job-bank computers at Federal Plaza in order to assist her in reading help-wanted advertisements. It was then that I began to realize that there are stages of immigration. I looked at my own family and observed that on the maternal side, where I am the first American, I am also the first to graduate high school, let alone college. Although my father's roots are firmly Irish, in his family I am fourth-generation American. His father had been a New York State Supreme Court Justice, a Fordham graduate, and his brothers were accountants and lawyers. They had been given opportunities that my mother's brothers had never seen. The days of the disadvantaged immigrant are far from over, but it is now less likely to be the Irish than it is to be the Mexican, Haitian or Jamaican families who struggle to find work and make a better life for their children. Over time, I found myself thinking more about the diversity of the City and the implications of immigration over generations. It was Jocelyn who revealed to me the tribulations of immigrants in America firsthand.

After my year of tutoring, I began to consider a legal career. My family is full of lawyers and I knew I had a knack for words. I was seeking more satisfying work, but I wanted to make certain that this was the path I should follow. I took a job as an assistant in a ferocious one-woman family law practice. Because the firm was so small, I was able to explore New York's legal system up close. I got to know judge's clerks; I dealt with filing offices and sat in on trials. I typed affidavits and served papers and did research in the courts' archives. I did a lot of photocopying. Then, before my all-important next step toward law school, I was approached by my former boss, who asked me to take on the role of managing editor at my last office. It was an opportunity to learn managerial skills and to oversee the production of a daily magazine with a monthly circulation of 350,000. Once again, I took my father's advice to learn all I could and jumped at the chance.

Living in New York during those years, I was overwhelmed by the mixture of races and religions I encountered, surprised and often shocked by my feelings and fears about them. The daily barrage of cultures provoked near-racist thoughts in me on several occasions, despite the fact that I had been taught tolerance as a child. I dreamed of escaping the City, to see where all of these people had come from, to begin to understand this maelstrom of identities. I needed to garner a perspective of world cultures beyond my own Irish-Catholic one, and I could hear my father's voice pushing me to learn more. I decided to see the world for myself. In September 2001, with some trepidation at the events of that month, I left the comfort of my editorial office, where, for over two years, I had organized, scheduled and rewarded a staff of six editors, and embarked on a yearlong trip around the world.

I spent much time in Australia, Thailand, and India and travelled through New Zealand, Fiji, Turkey, Egypt and Europe. Time after time, I observed the remnants of colonial empires with their class boundaries. I looked on, troubled by the disintegration of indigenous Aboriginal culture, by the rampant alcoholism, and I was unable to avoid drawing obvious parallels with the US's own Native Americans. While in India, I heard many strange and terrible stories from Tibetan refugees, all desperate to immigrate to the US but lacking the exorbitant fees required to pay for dodgy passports. I spent the spring in the little Indian town of McLeod Ganj, while the world

watched the conflict between Pakistan and India rear its ugly head once again. I cancelled my trip to Nepal after a wave of beheadings swept through that tiny nation. Throughout my journey, opinions on religion, women's roles, and Americans washed over me. I arrived in Europe, happy to have hot showers again, but reeling from all I had learned. Armed with a widened worldview and the ability to examine issues from multiple perspectives, I focused on how I could incorporate my experiences into an academic setting. This fall, I begin a post-graduate certificate course, the first year in a master's program, at the University of London, studying race and ethnic relations. There, my studies will include courses on immigration policy and its effects on society, as well as an examination of discrimination law, war, and migration. I look forward to blending this certificate into my legal education.

My father could never have known how literally I would take his words. Throughout my life, his advice has taunted me into choosing the more unusual route, the road less travelled. His throwaway line, tossed into the wind as an afterthought, continues to push me, to set me on new paths of discovery. I cannot imagine entering law school as the person I was when I graduated from college. It is only now that I can begin to understand the fine gradations of the law's interpretation, to realize that these interpretations aim to intersect with society and somehow change it. I seek to hone my experiences through further education, especially through the lens of law, in order to understand and help shape our world, in order to learn all I can.
(Owens and Staff 120)

Law School Personal Statement—Example Seven

My desire to apply to law school is not rooted in a childhood fantasy of arguing a case before a packed courtroom. I have never seen my self as trial attorney ala Perry Mason or Nora Lewin on *Law & Order*. However, I have come to recognize a legal education would enable me to advance in my career as a writer and analyst specializing in national security and global trade issues.

I first set my sights on becoming a writer around the time I learned my letters. Of course, mastering the ABC's may have been a long way from winning the Pulitzer. This minor detail did not prevent me, however, from completing three "novels" and my own version of Genesis before the age of seven. Throughout elementary and junior high school, I annoyed my teachers by writing 10-page themes whenever they asked for a few sentences. Later, as a high school and college student, I continued writing, though my attention was increasingly turned toward other subjects.

While attending Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria, Virginia, I immersed myself in biology, chemistry, and physics. Although I dreamed of being a professional author or journalist, I had grown convinced that I needed a science background to succeed in an increasingly high-tech world. This belief stayed with me after I headed south to Williamsburg, Virginia, to attend the College of William and Mary. Only after spending my freshman and sophomore years as Chemistry major—pouring over red-band spectral signatures and inhaling sulfurous concoctions in lab—did I finally accept the fact that I was no Marie Curie. Indeed, I realized I would have to spend all my waking hours just to make it as a mediocre

chemist. Still, I wasn't comfortable switching to the Humanities (perhaps as a result of my laborious study of inertia in Physics 102). My wariness ebbed, however, in the wake of an even greater change in my college plans.

In the summer of 1998, I underwent surgery, which precluded my return to William and Mary in the Fall. Fortunately, I was able to take classes as an Extended Studies student at George Mason University, while wrapping up my period of convalescence at my home in Alexandria. The change of scenery inspired me to pursue new fields of study. I started taking courses in Shakespeare, modern American Drama, Public Policy and Middle Eastern History. At the same time, I continued studying chemistry and biology, though I no longer wished to concentrate in the hard sciences.

Ultimately, one of my George Mason professors directed me on a path that would combine my background in science and technology background with my love of writing and my new interests in government and policymaking. With her help, I secured an internship with an Annandale, Virginia-based government contractor. I spent the spring and summer of 1999 writing copy for Web sites the company managed for NASA and the Department of Energy, while taking additional classes at George Mason and George Washington University.

I returned to William in Mary in the autumn of 1999 and completed my degree in English. I then went back to work briefly as a copywriter for the Annandale contracting firm. In February 2000, I accepted a job as a researcher at *Defense News*, a publication in suburban Washington, DC, where I am now an assistant editor.

My current job entails researching and reporting on defense appropriations bills and export legislation, as well as writing daily summaries of major contracts awarded by the Department of Defense and other defense ministries worldwide. It is with enthusiasm, but some degree of trepidation, that I attempt to decode pages of legal jargon for an educated lay readership, many of which I suspect know more than I about such policies. Too often, I find I lack the legal knowledge to fully grasp bills that control how U.S. companies do business overseas, the limits to which federal agencies can go to collect covert intelligence, or the amount of funding an agency can receive in a given length of time.

On one hand, these limitations have done little to impair me in my current position, in which I am called to turn out several short stories each day on a variety of topics without going into significant detail. However, I would like to advance to more difficult reporting assignments one day. I fear I will be unable to do so without acquiring more expertise than I can obtain within the confines of my deadline-driven job. I also would like to It is a belief shared by several of my colleagues, as well as many of the senior writers and editors at my company who hold advanced degrees in law, business and related disciplines. I feel that a law degree would put me in a better position to join their ranks, particularly if I could attend school while continuing to work as a journalist.

Given my circumstances and interests, Georgetown University Law Center with Its top-ranked programs in intellectual property and international law is my Ideal choice. I have a colleague that is currently enrolled in the Georgetown evening law program. His generous

feedback has helped convince me that this program also would fit my needs, in light of its flexible schedule and its emphasis on legal writing.
(Owens and Staff 141)

Law School Personal Statement—Example Eight

I grew up smelling books.

My childhood room in China was also the family library, where I literally breathed books everyday for the first twelve years of my life.

Lacking an enticing toy collection, I spent most of my childhood thumbing through that collection of ancient epics, classic sonnets, philosophical treatises and historical chronicles. I discovered my favorite book when I was nine—*Dream of the Red Chamber*, a 120-chapter 18th-Century epic. Unable to put it down for two months, I even enacted some scenes with my Barbie dolls. It is still my most beloved book, one I read at least twice every year. Those dusty old books captivated me because I could become anyone—a princess, a hero, a narrator—with the turn of a page. No toy or cartoon could match that magic. Thus began my lifelong love affair with the written word and my ongoing quest for intellectual challenges.

My elementary school classroom, like the family library, witnessed many of my personal historic moments: my first taste of lipstick, first comic book, first public, first "F", first meeting with foreigners. Unlike these treasured memories, my elementary school education was rather bittersweet. With unrelenting teachers force-feeding me high school vocabularies and formulas as early as the fourth grade, learning became oppressive and dull. On the other hand, the demanding workload and the teachers' emphasis on self-discipline made me a focused listener, diligent learner, and quiet thinker. So while the test-oriented, grade-fixated Chinese education system stifled my early intellectual curiosity, it helped me develop study skills that have proved to be invaluable. From note-taking to time management, most of my study habits and work ethics were formed in those six early years. They are still with me today.

I immigrated to America when I was twelve, at the precarious dawn of adolescence, with a self-identity greener than the spring grass. My first day at school was a nightmare. I was lost and late, mute and deaf in the face of English, and stunned by the touchable presence of non-Chinese human beings. A Martian landing unexpectedly on earth, I faced both lifestyle maladjustment and an identity crisis. Here I was expected to talk and participate in classes, an act entirely foreign to someone educated to listen only. Group projects, class participation, individual presentations, these conventional exercises seemed like unconquerable challenges to me. A faltering novice in English, I felt inferior to my energetic and outspoken American classmates. I became a timid speaker, even when English was no longer a barrier. Unable to fully participate in and outside of school, I was an outsider lodging in America.

Determined to cure my fear of public speaking, I took an acting class the summer before college. Like Paul McCartney sings in "I Saw Her Standing There," "my heart went boom, when I crossed the room" filled with twenty strangers. I had to repress my impulse to flee when Charlie

(my teacher) gave the first assignment -self-introduction. Had I not swallowed my fears and stayed that day, I would not be who I am now. While standing on that little stage, reciting lines and improvising characters, a voice stirred in me. Until that moment I had not realized that I could be so spontaneous, expressive, and vocal. I never knew I could articulate my thoughts with the same candor and ease as my American classmates did. It was no easy sailing after that first day, but my anxiety was eclipsed by the thrill of rising to the challenge I had set for myself. By the end of the course, public speaking and group participation were no longer my darkest fears. The only trait I retain from my silent days is a tendency to blush when I speak.

Now, I had two personas: one a circumspect Chinese, the other an opinionated American. Though others with similar background often choose one or the other, I wanted to keep both. Since parting with either persona would make me incomplete, I decided to fuse the reserved thinker and the assertive speaker into one—me. UCLA turned out to be an ideal environment for this task. The Chinese me found an academic curriculum that not only stimulated my intellectual appetite, but also fine-tuned my study skills. The American me discovered a social environment (especially in my counseling work) that further cultivated my communication abilities, both oral and written. No longer a Chinese lodging in America, I became a Chinese living in America.

I am an amphibian, born in the East but now living in the West. Finding a niche in this cultural intersection has not been easy; creating an identity that embraces both worlds is even harder. After two decades of observation, adaptation and introspection, I now enjoy the sweet reward of my efforts. Reading Chinese epics, writing English poems, making dumplings by hand, grilling hotdogs in the backyard, I feel privileged to be able to cross the cultural boundaries and explore the two worlds to my heart's content.

(Owens and Staff 165)

Law School Personal Statement—Example Nine

It is appropriate that James Kunen used this question to title his book about his experiences as an attorney for the Public Defender Service. During my summer as a Yale-P.D.S. Fellow, many people posed the same question to me, and I found myself searching for the answer as well.

I began work at the Public Defender Service feeling uncertain and apprehensive. As an investigator and case assistant for an attorney in the trial division, I was to direct my energies toward the defense of clients charged with serious and violent felony crimes. Our clients might be ex-convicts or drug abusers. On "the other side" stood the U.S. Attorney whose clients were justice, order, and the protection of society. I was not confident that I was on the side of right.

As the summer progressed, however, I witnessed the steady decrease of my uncertainty. My change in attitude reveals some important lessons learned. One of these lessons is that most people, as I did, foster a stereotypical image of "those people." The clients with whom I worked were not all ex-convicts or drug addicts. Nor, as many misconceive, were all of "those people" guilty of the crimes of which they were accused. Certainly many of

our clients were guilty but their guilt in no way precluded their right to the best possible representation. The only commonality which I could observe in our clients was an inability to pay for their own defense.

Anyone working in criminal justice must observe that the system is inherently weighted against poor people. If lawyers are valued by how much money they receive for their services, then poor people are most likely to receive the lowest quality legal representation. The apprehensions that I had about defending "those people" quickly fell before the realization that their poverty causes them to be treated as inferiors before the law. Working to help the small actor assert his or her equality before a large and powerful system seems like a worthwhile service.

My greatest uncertainty about working for P.D.S. stemmed from a preconception that defense attorneys work against the service of justice to let the guilty go unpunished. My conscience was eased by my observation that this is largely untrue. For the most part, the guilty are convicted when the evidence weighs against them. Further, our system of jurisprudence assures that the conviction of the innocent is extremely rare. But does this reality mean that justice prevails? In answering this question, James Kunen makes a very astute, if sobering, observation. He says that by the time a criminal case gets to court, almost all of the injustice has already occurred. "The victim has already been victimized; the defendant, more often than not, has been subjected to every kind of abuse, from inadequate prenatal care to exclusion from the work force." In such a framework, how can any court claim to administer ultimate justice?

During my time at P.D.S, I became extremely sympathetic to our clientele. The murder case that I worked on for most of the summer resulted in an acquittal, and I was extremely proud to have been part of the defense team. Nevertheless, there are aspects of criminal defense which still trouble me. Removed from the environment of P.D.S., many of my doubts about the role of defense attorney return. I anticipate that my legal education will enable me to explore this problem farther and will allow me to consider it in a more enlightened perspective.
(Curry and Baer 50)

Law School Personal Statement—Example Ten

Like many, I suspect, who have been born into opportunity— into relative affluence and some intelligence—I have had difficulty eliminating the possible. This may not be a worthy lament, but it is a genuine one, one which has claimed much of the eighteen or so months following my graduation from college.

The typical college student comes upon graduation as upon a precipice, and many months of obsessive communal anticipation somehow fail to mitigate the abruptness of that moment in which he or she finally toes its edge. For the summa cum laude graduate of an elite school, this precipice is high indeed: so high, in fact, that he is told "the world is at his feet." At his back, thrusting him forward, is a life of high achievement on a carefully mapped, gently sloped course.

Before him is, well, everything. A keen sense of incipient adventure might constitute an admirable response to such a predicament. Dizziness would not be inappropriate.

My own sense of vertigo upon leaving Dartmouth was steepened by conflicting forces within my personality. These cross-currents appear to me now as quite distinct, and their respective origins are easy to trace. From my mother I have inherited an impulse which one might generously deem "artistic." It prescribes a disengaged but highly sensitized observation of the world, a perception that is oblique and highly personal. It involves but it does not implicate. There is a certain uncluttered freshness to its vision.

From my father I have inherited a grasping analytical curiosity as to the "how" of things, an urge to explore and penetrate the workings, the machinations, of government and business and other sectors of our society. This current demands that one get in there and mix it up. It aspires to competence in the ways of the world, delighting, exulting even, in an involvement that is both intimate and intricate. It is the force which energizes the "problem solver."

These two impulses subscribe to different kinds of vision and strive for different kinds of understanding. If integrated, intuition tells me, they carry the promise of a rare and powerful synergy. Left in turmoil, I am equally sure, they can confuse, dispirit, and ultimately even paralyze.

You can probably envision me as I left school, bubbling like a cauldron. I was unwilling to emulate the precise and, as I saw it, mainly uninformed steps of my classmates. My ideas were broader. I had invested my high school earnings in the stock market at the beginning of this latest protracted bull market and so felt that, for a while at least, I could afford broad ideas. I thought in terms of "exposure," which, it turns out, I was to acquire through a series of false starts. A year's exposure to a foreign culture and language was cut off at six weeks thanks to newly stringent French labor laws and a companion's change of plans. Next I sought exposure to journalism and to New York City. I was exposed to (in?) New York for only three months, as my exploration of journalism there was limited to a basketful of "not hiring" notices (not to mention a daily scouring of *The New York Times*). At this point I was ready to come in from the cold for a time, which meant returning home and resuming my work as an editorial and research assistant on a projected law school textbook, just then consigned to a new round of revision. My efforts here focused on the metaphysical labyrinth of intellectual property law as applied to computer software and hardware. It was familiar and engaging work and lasted until the project was terminated.

Ultimately, "exposure" came to mean exposure to myself. The vehicle for this final definition was my decision to indulge a lifelong fantasy by devoting a year to writing fiction. Writing fiction consists largely of eliminating the possible, which makes it good practice for post-graduate living. The rest of such writing is, paradoxically, the preservation of the possible. As you might guess, I am most adept at this second task I have been engaged in balancing those two objectives for several months under the cover of an eclectic range of occupations (ice cream man, waiter etc.). I am not quite sure what to make of the product of these efforts (an ambivalence which, I assure you, does not extend to waiting tables). But I have no doubt the experiment has been worthwhile. Its value inheres not so much in the daily exercise of writing

itself, or even in the product of that exercise, but rather in the decision to step into the world calling oneself, sincerely, a "writer." The fallout from this commitment constitutes something like a visit to certain new age beauty parlors. One emerges, I imagine, with the wax removed from one's ears, the hair snipped away from one's eyes, and an entirely new layer of skin to meet the breeze.

In the end, however, more than anything else, writing means returning to oneself. It is thus among the loneliest and most self-indulgent of occupations. And, at this point in life, there is a discomfitting pretentiousness to it, as well. One can wallow in one's own existence for only so long, and I'm beginning to recognize a need to get out of that mud.

Sometimes the dizziness of the recent graduate gives way slowly to the vaguest kind of disappointment, an amorphous burden attached somehow to the irrevocable linear momentum of living. He or she comes to realize, perhaps with undue emphasis, that each step taken is done so to the exclusion of all others. To walk through one doorway is to imagine hearing a thousand other doors slam shut. The only way to preserve pure possibility, that state of mind in which the talented and open-minded undergrad peruses his own potential, is to stand perfectly still, which, of course, gets you precisely nowhere. For one born at the altar of opportunity, this discovery that freedom does not feel like freedom can be as unsettling as betrayal.

I wish I could say I am applying to law school as part of some grand scheme to change the world, to leave it a little more just or even a little more efficient. But I am not sure such a thing is feasible, at least by design. Nothing is quite so neat for me. This is instead very much a personal decision, one inspired by my own needs, certain and uncertain. I have thought long and hard about how best to reconcile my disparate natures. And I am doing my best to eliminate the possible in favor of the actual.
(Curry and Baer)

Law School Personal Statement—Example Eleven

The material of my shoes has always been a point of discomfort for me, and the subject has arisen a remarkable number of times in conversation. It is not that my shoes are made of anything unusual—they are made of leather—but when I claim to be a vegetarian on moral grounds, one of the first attacks is always aimed at my feet.

I am never quite sure how to respond to this accusation of hypocrisy, and I have fallen back on the idea that I am "doing what I can," although I do not hold my head high when I give this retort. At the same time, however, I am somewhat taken aback by their response. It seems that, although I have never voiced it as anything other than a personal choice, people are automatically defensive around vegetarians and seek either to explain their own eating habits ("I only eat red meat twice a week") or to attack mine ("I've heard that plants scream when you cut them"). Why does vegetarianism elicit such a probing series of questions about exactly what you eat, what your grounds are, and how you justify other areas of your life? Does punching a hole in my behavior enable others to eat their hamburger in peace? Inconsistency in practice, it seems, is the downfall of any theory.

Nonetheless, the questioning has forced me to examine my views, and to reevaluate my original reasons for holding them. I first made up my mind to stop eating meat, chicken, and fish at our Thanksgiving table when I was three. No elaborately reasoned theory contributed to this decision; no pro-con arguments were weighed in my mind. I reacted from pure emotion. I had just seen a live turkey, who was looking perfectly content with his life, and here was an almost unrecognizable turkey, inert on the table. It just did not seem fair. But while my "this turkey wanted to live" statement adequately captured the line of reasoning of a three-year-old, I no longer feel comfortable maintaining a toddler's view of the world. At 20 years old, I feel pressured, both from others and from myself, to present a perfectly coherent picture of my sympathy for animals. Either the belief must encompass my practices of wearing leather and killing cockroaches in the bathroom, or my practices must change.

Unfortunately, a flawless system of action is not easy to obtain. Either the theory has gaping holes, or the practice is just too strenuous and demanding. But isn't remaining faithful to a spotted theory intellectually dishonest? How can inconsistency in action be explained?

With vegetarianism, I have to admit that in addition to the issue of inconvenience, my actions reveal the triumph of emotions over intellect. I do what *I feel* driven to do, and I ignore what I am ambivalent towards. I feel a "turn of the stomach" at the thought of eating meat, and not at the idea, or the action, of wearing leather. I certainly do not feel repulsion at killing a cockroach; in fact, I am disgusted by the idea of letting it roam free. All of my life I have acted on this one feeling of not wanting to eat animals, and I have not worried about the actions surrounding it. Perhaps it is artificial to now start molding some all-encompassing theory out of pure emotion. For even if I succeed in creating a view to fit my practices or vice versa, feelings of apathy or disgust have the first and final vote in this issue for me.

This is interesting, because in so many aspects of my life I hold up reason as supreme. I myself, like those who criticize me, have always had contempt for hypocrisy, or even an appeal to psychology over intellect. Such practices seemed weak. And here I am falling into the trap of irrationality of the very issue which, on the surface, stands on a pure intellectual decision. But to be honest, although it may be weak, I really think that emotion ultimately motivates my choice. After 17 years of being a vegetarian, and of thinking that it is "right," for whatever reasons, it is a part of me. I am comfortable with this belief, and no amount of prodding can shake me from the emotion. I guess that while intellect grows between the ages of 3 and 20, emotions stay pretty much the same.

(Curry and Baer 87)

Law School Personal Statement—Example Twelve

Barbies and toy trucks are the things that occupy the thoughts of most seven year olds. It was at that age though, that I first asserted my independence and told my parents that I would be in control of my life. Thus, it was at that tender age of seven that syringes, blood tests and proper diet took over my thoughts. I had been diagnosed as an insulin-dependent diabetic at the age of five, and after spending my first summer at Camp Crestfield's annual summer camp for children with diabetes, I decided that I no longer wanted to be dependant upon my parents to control my

diabetes and make my decisions for me. In reality, it was at that point that I ultimately chose to take control of my diabetes, which as I have learned over the years, has allowed me to take control of my life.

If I am to be honest, the real reason that I began to take over my diabetes care was that I wanted to be like all the other kids. I wanted to go to a slumber party. But because my diabetes required me to do an insulin injection every morning when I awoke, this meant that I could not unless I was able to do that injection myself. Sleepovers also involved junk food, most of which I was not permitted to eat. This meant that I would need to learn exactly what it was that I was able to eat, how much of it, and at what time. By the time I was eight, I was able to go to a friend's for a meal and know which foods on the table I was able to eat and which I was not, I could walk into McDonald's and know that nothing on the menu was good for me, but if I had to eat there, I could order the Chicken McNuggets.

After living with diabetes for sixteen years, I have realized that life is what you make of it. I do not enjoy giving myself four shots a day, and as much as I have come to enjoy Diet Coke, there are many days that I really want a bowl of Lucky Charms for breakfast. Sometimes I break down and have them, but usually I am strong enough to know better. Taking an injection with every meal and before bedtime allows me to be a little forgiving in my diet, but in the long-run, being too forgiving can lead to serious complications such as blindness, kidney failure and loss of limbs. I am intelligent enough to realize that those Lucky Charms really are not worth that much. I have also learned that no matter how hard you try, sometimes things do not go as you expect. I have seen firsthand that even the most thorough of preparations will not always yield the desired results. Above all, I have learned to live with disappointments. The cure for diabetes that doctors promised me 16 years ago has yet to surface. Have I cried? Yes, many times. Have I been angry? Yes, but I have gone on, rejoicing at any medical breakthrough and appreciating what technology has already given me. Had I been diagnosed a hundred years ago, I never would have had the opportunity to take control of my disease because I would have been dead long before I was seven years old.

Diabetes has had a tremendous impact on my life. Not a day goes by that it does not influence my life in some way. It has made me a stronger person. I am able to accept events when they happen and see the positive side of things. Being responsible for my own life has given me discipline and has taught me self-reliance. Instead of being embarrassed by my diabetes, I have come to accept that it has greatly influenced who I am today. I may not be able to eat a meal without first checking my blood sugar and doing an insulin injection, but it is my will that has given me the strength to live with my diabetes, accepting both the good and the bad and appreciating the lot that I have been given.
(O.W.U. Student)

Law School Personal Statement—Example Thirteen

I've never heard an eight year old say "shit" before this year. Nor have I been a confronted with poverty on a daily basis. However, two experiences in the past year, a summer working as a Behavioral Specialist and a semester abroad in the Caribbean, helped form my

decision to attend law school. Although being a Behavioral Specialist had its drawbacks (using my body to block raging, scrambling balls of teeth and fists for example), it was inspiring to spend every day helping to improve someone's life. Every day brought challenges for the kids and staff as we participated in activities designed to help the kids develop skills necessary to adapt to their problem environments. For example, the 13-year old girl who was the most competent and psychologically stable person in her household had to be challenged differently from the eight-year old boy who would run on desks and scream shrilly whenever he didn't get his way.

Last year, during a semester on the poverty-ridden island of South Caicos in the Turks and Caicos Islands, I participated in a program examining the environmental and economic problems plaguing the island. We examined the attitudes and practices of the islanders and the effects that their lifestyles had on the environment. The islanders unwittingly depleted the environment through bad fishing practices (such as spraying bleach into the coral reefs to flush out lobster and over-fishing certain species) and promoting questionable tourism projects (such as a resort that destroyed the habitat of an indigenous iguana species). Through our classes, the way to solve the problem became clear: fishing, the main source of income, had to be slowed or stopped. However, on South Caicos, the environment had a lower priority than getting enough food for the family each day. Although the islanders interacted with us, the inexorable problem of competing priorities was in constant conflict. In each of these experiences, I became an engaged observer, as these programs were both hands-on experiences with theoretical material. With the kids, I would read their diagnoses and recall the description of the disorder from my psychology classes. On the island, we would learn about the lives of the fishermen in our classroom and then interact with them each day in the town. This combination of theoretical and personal knowledge was disconcerting, as I realized I knew about their lives on a surface level, yet could never fully assume the role of the person being studied. By having distance, I could recommend a different approach to their problems. However, without working daily with the kids and sharing an island on South Caicos, I could not have accurately assessed the needs of these people. The proximity with these people and their plights made me able to see underlying complications of the problem.

Such involvement with the kids and the islanders made me realize the need to become involved, yet remain detached from the situation. In both programs, I sometimes felt like an unempathetic authority suggesting or imposing objective ideas of right and wrong on very subjective, emotional matters. However, addressing the core of problems is necessary to both personal and societal growth. Although legal issues currently play a key role in shaping the values and attitudes of society, many of these laws do not seem grounded in reality. Laws are also inaccessible, because of jargon and rhetoric, to the very people that must abide by them. Perhaps examining laws with an objective, accessible attitude will make laws more responsive to the balance between individual needs and community needs.
(Ohio Wesleyan Student)

Law School Personal Statement—Example Fourteen

I was a Midwestern girl from a small Ohio town who agreed to spend a semester as a Politics and Government intern in Washington D.C. I felt a little like the five-year-old girl who stood in the doorway of my kindergarten classroom while my mom gently nudged me forward saying, "You are

going to be fine, honey. You will love school." During my first week in D.C., I was shoved and pushed around on the streets by the men and women hurrying to catch their trains. Sometimes I felt invisible, scared, and excited—all at the same time. I wanted to challenge myself to play a crucial role and make a difference in society, but I knew this would entail stepping out of my "comfort zone." I was determined this internship would present the opportunity to explore the dynamics of the government, test the legitimacy of the three-tiered system and apply what I had learned during my traditional college semesters.

As the days passed, I acclimated to the urban culture and the job that had brought me to D.C. in the first place. I chose the internship with Beacon Consulting Group because I identified closely with their objectives in representing non-profit groups, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. I focused in the areas of educational reform, health care reform, the Veterans Administration, and the up and coming green industry sector. My primary obligations were attending congressional hearings, gathering information pertinent to our clients' specific interests, and then summarizing it for Beacon's management team to present to our clients. Additionally, my duties included writing letters to senators and members of congress and inviting them to events that may prove beneficial to our clients; filling out annual paperwork for possible governmental grants; attending luncheons, forums and meetings to help further the causes of our clients.

For my first assignment, a confirmation hearing for the President's nomination for Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, I arrived an hour early, but over one hundred people were already impatiently waiting in line. I ended up seated in an overflow room for over four hours, shoulder to shoulder with complete strangers. I could not see the small monitor in the front of the room or hear the specifics of the proceedings. That did not matter; I was still accountable for gathering the salient facts of the hearing and organizing them into a brief for our client. I started to doubt myself I worked writing and rewriting my report with information that would help our client obtain government funding. My college years of writing research papers helped me immensely. In the days following my first hearing, I spent over thirty hours reviewing documents and testimony and developing several drafts, including a final draft, of a twenty-page memo. That memo was one of twenty memos I wrote that required me to apply the critical thinking and writing skills I developed at Ohio Wesleyan. My superiors at Beacon thanked me for my memo, praised my thoroughness, appreciated my timeliness, and, of course, assigned the next project.

Many times I have heard that all learning does not take place in a classroom—I can vouch for this statement. I began my journey as a naive girl from a small Midwestern town, but transformed into a more cosmopolitan woman who has learned some of the ropes of political life in Washington D.C. I became knowledgeable about Veterans Affairs, health care reform, the lack of funding for education, the need for alternative energy sources, and other current issues. I witnessed firsthand how congressional hearings are conducted and how funding is allocated. Although challenging at times, my internship helped prepare me for my next challenge—law school. I have a better idea about what I want to do in the area of governmental law and policy, and I look forward to my future following law school. I have transformed into a different self—a wiser, more mature self attuned to the political realities of Washington D.C. and our nation—who will, in my next chapter, make a positive difference in our society.

(Ohio Wesleyan University Student)

II. Selected Paragraphs and Sentences

Law School Personal Statements: Introductions

1. She said she was going on a business trip. It wasn't until two weeks later when I noticed that the only thing remaining in the kitchen was half a bottle of ketchup that I figured she wouldn't be returning. I was right—and so I spent my seventeenth birthday, alone with my Heinz, petrified with incredulity.
2. My father was a biker, my mother an Irish immigrant and high-school dropout. I've got half-brothers and sisters peppered across the state of New Hampshire. I grew up on a farm.
3. My desire to apply to law school is not rooted in a childhood fantasy of arguing a case before a packed courtroom. I have never seen myself as trial attorney ala Perry Mason or Nora Lewin on Law and Order. However, I have come to recognize a legal education would enable me to advance in my career as a writer and analyst specializing in national security and global trade issues.
4. I prefer the blues to Pavarotti. I'd take Shakespeare over Dickens any day. I hate red nail polish and I love to vacuum. I've played the clarinet for 15 years. I've played the saxophone for 10. I watch cartoons on Saturday mornings. *The Catcher in the Rye* is my favorite novel. I seem to have a propensity for the challenging. And I like it.
5. My parents were working to instill in me an awareness and appreciation of the rich cultural diversity that exists in the Western US long before I was aware of the concept of diversity. My father earned his teaching degree when he was thirty and I was five; in August of that year, we set off on the first of what my parents liked to call our "adventures." My dad got his first teaching job in Chinle, Arizona, on the Navajo Reservation. The first thing I remember seeing as we drove into town was an old Navajo couple in traditional dress driving along the side of the road in a beat-up wooden wagon pulled by two horses; having spent the first part of my life in Phoenix and Salt Lake City, this was an amazing sight to me.
6. I remember the day clearly—it was day number six of an eleven-day Vipassana ("Insight") silent meditation course in Dharmasala, a Tibetan refugee village in Northern India—after some fifty hours of meditation, six days since my last spoken words, I decided that I was ready to go to law school. Hundreds of monkeys screamed in the trees above me, and the sky was ethereally blue.
7. I entered boot camp on June 18, 1989. That day, the Indian child who had chased cows and the American youth who had philosophized about physics died. It is written in the Bhagavad-Gita that in death, the body's attachment to materialism falls away from the soul like a worn garment. So did my delusions of grandeur slip from me.
8. This personal statement has been looming over me throughout this application process. I find myself unable to overcome the seemingly impossibility of this exercise. How can I convey enough of myself in two pages? I act. I sing in the shower. I occasionally reread the collection of comic books I amassed during high school. I enjoy helping people, but I do it for myself. Lately I've been dressing a little sharper. I play hockey whenever I can. And I question everything, often in the hopes of effecting a change.

9. For two years I have been a Peace Corps volunteer in the Republic of Niger in West Africa. I live in a grass hut in a tiny village called Fandou-Berri, sixty-five kilometers from the nearest city. I subsist primarily on a diet of rice, millet paste and leaf sauce. Once a week I travel twenty kilometers to the village of Hamdallaye where I can buy goat meat. Each time I walk away from the Hamdallaye market, having bargained for a fair chunk of meat, I think of Mrs. H., an attorney at Paul, Hastings, Janofsky and Walker in Washington, D.C. She was known in the office as the Velvet Steamroller. It was said that she could bargain the shirt off of your back and make you believe that you had gotten the better of the deal. When I was a paralegal, I admired her technique. Now I wish she could see me deal with the butchers in Hamdallaye.
10. That bone-weary misty October morning, in a little white brick building with red trim, I expected to do some filing, run some errands, and maybe finish some reading for class. I hoped for a slow predictable day with few complications and plenty of time to focus on Duke work instead of Durham work, even though I was at my job. Instead, that morning found me face-to-face with hard, difficult facts and a complicated national moral quandary.
11. As I have grown older, the Constitution of the United States of America has become, for me, a sort of secular religious document. At the risk of sounding ridiculous, some people dream of joining the clergy, I dream of joining the bar. Some people feel drawn to Mecca or the Wailing Wall, I was drawn to visit Washington, D.C. and the glass-encased Constitution.
12. Like many, I suspect, who have been born into opportunity—into relative affluence and some intelligence—I have had difficulty eliminating the possible. This may not be a worthy lament, but it is a genuine one, one which has claimed much of the eighteen or so months following my graduation from college.

Law School Personal Statements: First Sentences

1. At the age of 66 days I was offered the first of many extraordinary opportunities—to travel and live abroad.
2. I'd never seen my father cry.
3. Oh, how I agonized over whether to buy that saw.
4. “Taught self to cook” doesn't show up anywhere on my resume, but it's still an accomplishment of which I'm proud.
5. I grew up smelling books.
6. “Korea? Why are you in Korea?” my friend's voice echoed down the line.
7. If there was one thing I would have liked to have been able to keep,” said Jens, slowly and thoughtfully, “it would have been his silk pajamas.”
8. Becoming a lawyer was never my intent.
9. People, for the most part, can be divided into two groups—chocolate people and vanilla people.

10. Mountain climbers often have trouble judging how far they have climbed because they are always facing forward and unable to look back down the mountain.
11. My first job interview never happened—the interviewer did not show up.
12. When I was a baby, Mother woke me up each morning, strapped me to her back and carried me to the courthouse downtown where we worked (snoozed and slobbered) diligently.
13. You'd think I would have had my fill of Indiana winters.

Law School Personal Statements: Conclusions

1. I imagine that my last day of law school will be somewhat like my last day of first grade at P.S. 678. I will have seen and learned more than I could have ever imagined. I will have been frustrated but enlightened. I will have worried and stressed and cried. I will have smiled at the smallest of accomplishments, I will breathe a sigh of relief that it is over, and I made it. It will have been tough, but it will have been worth it. I will be prepared to go out into the world and truly make a difference. I will have education and experience to help me. I can only hope my last day of law school will be something like this, and I can only hope it will be at Columbia Law School.
2. Back to that early morning when I finally typed “the End.” Was I proud? Undoubtedly so. Did I fully understand my accomplishment? Unfortunately no. It was never an option for me to NOT finish my first novel. Furthermore, the end was just another beginning. There were publishers and agents to query, not to mention over 400 pages of editing and re-editing. In that regard, finishing my first manuscript seemed to be just one step in the course of many. But I do know that in the process of achieving this goal I have learned lessons that will serve me well through law school and beyond; how to dedicate myself and work hard; how to write and persevere. And finally, how to enjoy the process.
3. Instead I claim diversity in the variety of my experiences; that I am a painter, a Vietnam War buff, and a southern debutante at the same time. That I know how to sail, how to knit, and how to shoot a rifle. That I am not only open to new ideas and experiences, but also one who seeks them out.
4. Given my circumstances and interests, Georgetown University Law Center, with its top-ranked programs in intellectual property and international law, is my ideal choice. I have a colleague that is currently enrolled in the Georgetown evening law program. His generous feedback has helped convince me that this program also would fit my needs, in light of its flexible schedule and its emphasis on legal writing.
5. I am an amphibian, born in the East but now living in the West. Finding a niche in this cultural intersection has not been easy; creating an identity that embraces both worlds is even harder. After two decades of observation, adaptation and introspection, I now enjoy the sweet reward of my efforts. Reading Chinese epics, writing English poems, making dumplings by hand, grilling hotdogs in the backyard, I feel privileged to be able to cross the cultural boundaries and explore the two worlds to my heart's content.

6. My life's experiences have undoubtedly shaped my mind and eyes into critical and compassionate instruments of social analysis. Even so, I expect that the greatest intellectual leap of my life still awaits me at The University of Michigan Law School. My concerns for the poor will find new practical forms of expression as I learn jurisprudence; furthermore, I intend to shape my legal education with the firm commitment that I will not allow my thoughts and objections to go unheard. These are not resolutions that will pass with the day, but determinations which are rooted in a lifetime of experimentation.
7. Only fair law justly applied keeps us from anarchy. Law is the expression of a complex interaction between our cultural values and the structure of our society. Because I want to change the attitudes and the structure, I need to understand our legal system, not just the law codes. What fascinates me is the process as well as the end product. At Yale I want to learn how our laws have been developed and applied in the past to be more effective at changing them in the future.
8. Studying law in Washington at Georgetown fits both the initial goals I had when coming to work at the Congressman's office as well as the passion I gained there for representing constituents. My interest in government and politics has not waned, as I have remained politically active, specifically with my involvement helping to register over 8,000 students with Texas Youth Vote. However, my strengths in research and formulating arguments, as well as my resourcefulness and persistence, have convinced me that the study of law is where my future lies, no matter whether the world needs another lawyer or not.
9. My, our, future is important to me. I already have an excellent education. I will receive a degree in a growing field and have a phenomenal amount of pertinent experience for a person of 24. I want to go to law school. I especially want to attend your school. This feels right. I have seen the difference I could have the opportunity to make with a Juris Doctor. I am a student with intellectual capacity, the real world experience, and the tenacity and courage to excel at your school. I am also aware of how precious and important life beyond school and work is. If this is what you are looking for, please give me the opportunity to perform. If it's not, don't. Either way, I come out a winner. I have my wife, and I have a future. I want my legal education to make a bigger difference than I can as an engineer, but with a strong family to draw upon I cannot help but live a successful life.
10. I wish I could say I am applying to law school as part of some grand scheme to change the world, to leave it a little more just or even a little more efficient. But I am not sure such a thing is feasible, at least by design. Nothing is quite so neat for me. This is instead very much a personal decision, one inspired by my own needs, certain and uncertain. I have thought long and hard about how best to reconcile my disparate natures. And I am doing my best to eliminate the possible in favor of the actual.
11. From flying to triathloning to practicing law, I need to know I am doing things I enjoy, that I am doing things that are challenging. I am ready to start a new education, one to which I have long been looking forward. I may not be able to walk on the moon, but I am able to contribute in my own way, by becoming an attorney.

Resources

Books

Curry, Boykin, Brian Kasbar, and Emily Angel Baer. *Essays That Worked for Law Schools: 40 Essays from Successful Applications to the Nation's Top Law Schools*. 2nd ed. New York: Ballantine Books, 2003.

Ivey, Anna. *The Ivey Guide to Law School Admissions*. Orlando: Harcourt Books, 2005.

Owens, Eric and the Staff of the Princeton Review. *Law School Essays That Made a Difference*. 2nd ed. New York: Random House, 2006.

Steward, Mark Alan. *Perfect Personal Statements: Law, Business, Medical, Graduate School*. 3rd ed. Canada: Thomson Peterson's, 2004.

Web Sites

- **The American Bar Association:** www.abanet.org
- **Association of American Law Schools:** www.aals.org
- **Boston College Online Law School Locator:** www.bc.edu/bc_org/svp/carct/matrix.html#the25
- **Columbia Office of Pre-professional Programs per Web site:**
www.studentaffairs.columbia.edu/preprofessional
- **Columbia Law School:** www.law.columbia.edu
- **Law School Application Essays:** www.accepted.com/law
- **Index of Internet Legal Resources:** www.findlaw.com
- **Thomas E. Brennan's *Judging the Law Schools*:** www.ilrg.com/rankings
- **Law School Admission Council:** www.lsac.org
- **Prelaw Handbook:** www.oncampus.richmond.edu/academics/as/polsci/prelaw
- **Princeton Review Law section:** www.review.com/law/index.cfm
- **Stanley Kaplan Law section:**
www.kaptest.com/repository/templates/Lev2InitDroplet.jhtml?_lev2Parent=/www/KapTest/docs/repository/content/Law
- **Peterson's—the Law Channel:** www.petersons.com/law
- **Martindale-Hubbell Lawyer Directory:** www.martindale.com
- **U. S. News & World Report Information and Rankings:**
www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/law/lawindex_brief.php