

The Statement of Purpose: Purpose and Strategies

CUNY GRADUATE CENTER, FALL 2014

A Strong Statement of Purpose:

- Recounts applicant's educational background that has led to the PhD program *and/or* describes a professional position that inspired further academic study. Shows how your academic/professional background prepared you to do this work. Connects your scholarly interests to your personal motivations for engaging in research. (This can take many forms.)
- Positions your proposed project within an ongoing scholarly conversation (i.e., that you want to connect your work to existing work in the field, but build on it and add something new). Includes citational references that demonstrate the applicant's knowledge of, interest and investment in further research. Articulates a particular topic area in which you propose to do research.
- Explains a research agenda and how the Political Science Program at the GC suits that academic goal *or* indicates how Ph.D. coursework will help focus some existing (yet still evolving) interests. Offers a rationale of how a Ph.D. program will enrich and fulfill the applicant's intellectual goals in Political Science.
- Explains how the resources of the GC fulfill the applicant's initiatives as well as how the applicant hopes to contribute to this intellectual and pedagogical community. Speaks to why you want to study in the GC's doctoral program in Political Science specifically—not just in terms of the resources of the GC but also why you want to study (and teach) at an urban university serving a diverse body of students in NYC.
- Composes in plain English that articulates complex ideas; writing demonstrates the applicant's ability to formulate critical/analytical ideas in well-articulated (not jargon-laden) prose. Demonstrates an awareness of your field, but can also be understood by people outside your field. Is beautifully written, not just free of mistakes or errors, but possessing real style and verve (to achieve this, read it out loud and share it with a wide variety of readers).

FAQs about Statements of Purpose

1. Should I mention particular faculty at the GC that I want to work with?

Yes, absolutely. But you might consider mentioning several people of interest, and making sure that you are indicating WHY they are of interest to you given your particular project or interests.

2. If I am admitted to your program, do I have to carry out the project that I propose in my statement?

You certainly can pursue the same topic, but several of our students shift their field and develop new interests as they complete their coursework and exams—all part of the process of discovery. What we're looking for in the statement is the ability to propose work that seems significant and well-defined; it is not, however, a binding contract. And even though you will be recruited within a particular field, you might end up working in a very different area of interest or approach as your studies progress. At the same time, it is critical that you propose a viable project, because that will indicate that you are capable of graduate level work.

3. What is the relationship between the statement of purpose and the writing sample?

The writing sample should demonstrate your knowledge, skill and interest in politics, but need not be in the same subfield you propose to study in our Program. In other words, it is fine to propose to study political theory and to send us a writing sample on American political institutions. We would discourage you, however, from sending us an essay from your Art History class or Chemistry research. The writing sample is strongest when the admissions committee can identify theoretical or thematic links between the sample and your personal statement.