

PREPARING A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE FOR THE GRADUATE STUDY APPLICATION

The personal statement that accompanies your application for graduate study at Northwestern is very important to the admissions committee and is often a crucial factor in the decision to admit. A clear, well-focused statement reveals your potential for graduate work and may compensate for average grades and test scores.

First: review the Anthropology Department's "Guide to Graduate Study" to make sure that your interests in graduate work can be met in an area of study offered at Northwestern. If possible, visit the department or email those faculty members with whom you would most like to work. You may be applying to several institutions, but your statement should show a commitment to a compatibility with the goals of the Northwestern program.

Second: Your statement should demonstrate the clearest and most persuasive effort of which you are capable. In writing the statement, you should be as specific as possible about 1) the direction you wish to pursue in the area of your interest, and 2) your educational objectives. The admissions committee needs to be able to evaluate your ability to analyze problems and organize your thoughts on research interests or problems in Anthropology. It's a good idea to have a friend or faculty member at your undergraduate or M. A. institution look over your statement before you submit the final copy.

Be as specific as you can about the types of anthropology problems that interest you. Whenever you can, be specific about the kinds of methodologies and approaches you want to learn more about, and what parts of the world you want to study. If you want to work with specific people in the Anthropology Department (or even elsewhere in the University) you should mention this in your essay.

Remember, the graduate committee is looking for people who have focused interests, and who are strongly motivated, self-sufficient students. This makes sense, because the ultimate goal is to train people as scholars who can define and solve problems on their own. The upshot of all this is that the more you show the committee that you know what you want to do, and what training you want to get in order to do it, then the better your chances of admission and funding.