

Graduate Program Admissions and Applications Academic Year 2023-2024

The Graduate School will continue to manage the system-wide online graduate application and assist graduate programs with the design and dissemination of the applications that students complete when applying for admission to a graduate program.

Many of the processes involved in the application process remain unchanged from previous years. However, we must implement some changes. In *SFFA v. UNC/Harvard*, the Supreme Court ruled that the use of race as a factor in university admissions decision process violated the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution. In addition, however, the Court held that universities are not prohibited “from considering an applicant’s discussion of how race affected his or her life, be it through discrimination, inspiration, or otherwise.” In doing this, the Court made clear a student “must be treated based on his or her experiences as an individual—not on the basis of race.”

To aid admission committees in assessing applicants through a holistic review process that remains within the bounds set by the Supreme Court, we have updated instructions for the statement of purpose and added a personal history statement. Both are required for all degree-seeking applicants. Additionally, we have developed rubrics that must be used for the statements as well as other components of the application package.

The instructions and prompts that applicants will receive in Slate are found in Attachment A. Please note that these prompts and rubrics (Attachment B) have been carefully worded to comply with the law and are to be used verbatim and not altered. We will review these statements in May 2024 to consider revisions for the 2024-2025 admissions cycle.

Review of applications and admission decisions

The Graduate School has developed this document as a resource to inform best practices for departments and graduate programs in conducting holistic admissions reviews for graduate applicants within the bounds of the law.

We recognize that departmental review procedures will vary by discipline, degree level, program size, and several other factors. However, we hope this general guidance will be helpful to departments as they seek to develop and implement fair and consistent graduate student admissions protocols.

Holistic Review of Applicants

The Graduate School strongly encourages departments to use a holistic review strategy within the bounds of the law when making admissions decisions. In addition to reviewing a student’s formal academic preparation, including GPA and coursework, it is also important to consider other relevant factors and experiences. A careful review of an

applicant's life history and experiences, and academic and personal statements can provide the admissions committee with important additional insight regarding an applicant's potential to succeed in a graduate program. In addition, reference letters may assist in determining an applicant's level of experience and overall admissibility.

We encourage programs to consider using the holistic rubric available in Slate that would allow admissions committee members to rate students on multiple categories, such as:

- Academics – rate the student based on their GPA, coursework taken, major, and overall academic preparedness for the graduate program
- Resume / CV – rate the student on their extracurricular and volunteer activities, awards, publications, technology skills/experience, and other research or professional experiences
- Statements/Essays – rate the student on communication skills, depth, why they want to pursue this program, their goals, and how they are prepared to enter a profession.
- Letters of Recommendation – rate how their previous faculty or employers speak of their academic, research, initiative, resilience, and leadership potential
- Overall Match – rate how the student's interests and goals align with the departmental curriculum and program's priorities, faculty research, and professional pathways.

Providing faculty with multiple rating categories allows for a natural holistic review process. In addition to rubric evaluation ratings, departments should consider asking admissions committee members to include detailed narrative comments, especially if they rate the student as exceptional or to be considered for a fellowship.

We strongly recommend that graduate programs interview potential doctoral candidates prior to admission. This not only helps to determine if the student is a good match for the program, but also provides an opportunity for the program to recruit the student.

Because the Supreme Court decision in the Harvard and North Carolina cases was recently issued, the University is still assessing all the ways in which it will need to respond to ensure compliance with the decision while also preserving the University's commitment to diversity to the extent allowed by law. When conducting the holistic review of applicants, please keep the following directions in mind:

1. You cannot consider the race of an applicant as a factor in the admissions process. Thus, you cannot use the fact of the applicant's race in any way in your admissions decision. For example, if you learn an applicant is Black through the admissions

process, it would be unlawful to use that fact as a reason to admit the applicant, just as it would be unlawful to use that fact as a reason to deny the applicant admission.

2. If you learn through an application that an applicant has demonstrated the accomplishment of a race-neutral attribute that the University values in applicants through means that reference the applicant's race, you can consider that information in your admissions decision. For example, if you learn that the applicant has been the president of their college's Black Students Association, you can consider that information as demonstrating the applicant's leadership skills. Likewise, if the applicant discusses how they overcame racial discrimination during their undergraduate experience, you may consider that information as demonstrating the applicant's grit (perseverance, passion for the work, and ability to work towards long-term goals) and determination.

3. It is very important that we adhere to the rules laid out in the Supreme Court decision and we recognize that this change may be challenging in the first few admissions cycles. If you have any questions about how you should evaluate certain information please contact the Graduate School Admissions Office.

Attachment A

Instructions and Prompts for Graduate Program Applicants

Academic Statement of Purpose and Personal History Statement

The Academic Statement of Purpose is an opportunity for you to share information that will help reviewers understand your academic interests and objectives, assess your academic background, preparation, and training, and determine if you are a good match for the program to which you are applying.

The following topics should be addressed in your Academic Statement of Purpose.

1. What are your professional plans and career goals? How will attending graduate school assist you in reaching those goals?
2. Describe your research, scholarly, or creative interests. What topics are of particular interest to you? Reviewers know that interests change over time but try to be as specific as possible.
3. Discuss how your experiences, skills, and abilities have prepared you for graduate study. Relevant topics may include coursework, work and research experiences, internships, presentations, exhibits, publications, and community service. If you describe a research or scholarly experience, include information on the topic, research mentor, your role, and outcomes.
4. Describe how your skills, preparation, and interests are a match for the program to which you are applying. Identify faculty who share your research and scholarly interests. Reviewers will want to know that you have researched the program, faculty, and key focus areas.

The Personal History Statement helps reviewers learn more about you as a whole person and as a potential graduate student. This may include relevant details on community service, leadership roles, participation in diverse teams, and significant barriers that you overcame to attend graduate school.

Required of all applicants:

1. Describe how your background and life experiences contribute to your ability to be both persistent and resourceful in graduate school.
2. Describe how your life experiences have prepared you to contribute to an academic community where scholars with diverse research interests, abilities, backgrounds, and experiences are supported, respected, and valued.

Optional:

3. Please address concerns that you may have that your academic record does not reflect your true capabilities and discuss mitigating factors that have affected your academic record. Reviewers will be interested in understanding your accomplishments relative to your opportunities.

The Academic Statement of Purpose and the Personal History Statement are two of the most important documents in your graduate school application. The documents should be concise, clear, and free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. You should have others review your document for content, organization, and to ensure that there are no errors. Information in the Personal History Statement should complement but not duplicate information in the Academic Statement of Purpose.

Attachment B

Rubric for Evaluating Graduate Program Applicants

Rubric for the Academic Statement of Purpose and Personal History Statement				
	Excellent	Average	Below Average	Notes
Academic Statement of Purpose				
What are your professional plans and career goals? How will attending graduate school assist you in reaching those goals? Rank:	Goals are well-described, there is clear evidence of ability to set long-term goals. Rationale for attending graduate school is clear and integral to goals.	Goals are realistic and there is some evidence of ability to set long-term goals. Rationale for attending graduate school is somewhat clear and integral to goals.	Goals are poorly described or unrealistic and little evidence of planning beyond graduate school. Rationale for attending graduate school is not clear.	
Describe research, scholarly, or creative interests. What topics are of particular interest to you? Rank:	Interests are clearly described. Applicant demonstrates in-depth understanding of the discipline or topic.	Interests are somewhat well-described. Applicant demonstrates some understanding of the discipline or topic.	Interests are poorly described. Applicant demonstrates little understanding of the discipline or topic.	
Discuss how your experiences, skills, and abilities have prepared you for graduate study. ¹ Rank:	Applicant is exceptionally well-prepared for graduate study and clearly explain how their experiences, skills, and abilities have prepared them for graduate study.	Applicant is prepared for graduate study.	Applicant is weakly prepared for graduate study and does not discuss how they have prepared for graduate school.	
Describe how your skills, preparation, and interests are a match for the program to which you are applying. Identify faculty who share your research and scholarly interests. Rank:	Interests align with multiple faculty AND stated career goals align with program training.	Interests align with one faculty member AND stated career goals align with program training.	Limited alignment with faculty interests OR limited evidence of alignment between career goals and program training.	
¹ Reviewers should consider whether the applicant had access to opportunities that would strengthen their preparation such as the opportunity to participate in research, internships, community service, etc.				
Personal History Statement				
Describe how your background and life experiences contribute to your ability to be persistent and resourceful in graduate school. Rank:	Application clearly describes the applicant's ability to successfully manage and overcome obstacles and/or failure.	Application provides a basic or perfunctory description of the applicant's ability to manage and overcome challenges and/or failure.	Application does not make any reference to how the applicant navigates obstacles or failure.	
Describe how your life experiences have prepared you to contribute to an academic community where scholars with diverse research interests, abilities, backgrounds, and experiences are supported, respected, and valued. Rank:	Has demonstrated great potential to be a leader in and/or contribute to an academic community where scholars with diverse research interests, abilities, backgrounds, and experiences are supported, respected, and valued.	Has demonstrated some potential to be a leader in and/or contribute to an academic community where scholars with diverse research interests, abilities, backgrounds, and experiences are supported, respected, and valued.	Has demonstrated little to no potential to be a leader in and/or contribute to an academic community where scholars with diverse research interests, abilities, backgrounds, and experiences are supported, respected, and valued.	
Optional essay				
Please address concerns you may have that your academic record does not reflect your true capabilities and discuss mitigating factors that have	Potential to do well in graduate school likely to be greater than suggested by academic record. Applicant took advantage	Gaps and/or weaknesses in academic record addressed and some evidence	Gaps and/or weaknesses in academic record not addressed or little evidence	

affected your academic record. Reviewers will be interested in understanding your accomplishments relative to your opportunities. Rank:	of opportunities available to them. Applicant provides compelling alternative evidence that they will be successful.	that the applicant took advantage of opportunities available to them.	that the applicant took advantage of opportunities available to them.	
Rubric for information gathered from transcripts, resume or CV, and letters of recommendation				
	Excellent	Average	Below Average	Notes
Academics and Skills (transcripts, resume/CV) Rank:	Applicant has a strong foundation of coursework and the skills and other experiences that will enable them to be successful in graduate school and align well with program goals and faculty interests.	Applicant has a foundation of coursework and other skills and experiences to be successful or could acquire the necessary foundation as a graduate student in our program. Gaps in preparation and/or low grades are addressed in the personal history statement.	Applicant does not have a foundation of coursework and/or other skills experiences to be successful in our program. Gaps in preparation and/or low grades are not addressed in the personal history statement	
Awards, exhibits, creative work, and publications (resume/CV or portfolio) Rank:	Applicant has received recognition for their scholarly, community, or leadership work. Publication record is better than expected based on degree sought, e.g., student has published as an undergraduate	Applicant has received some recognition for their scholarly, community, or leadership work. Recognition is relevant to career choice. Publication record is as expected based on degree sought.	Applicant has few or no awards or other forms of recognition. Publication record is poorer than expected based on degree sought e.g., no publications or submitted papers for an M.S student applying to a PhD program.	
Letters of Recommendation Rank:	Applicant ranked as very good to exceptional in most categories. Highly recommended and very likely to succeed in graduate school. Reviewer provides specific details to support recommendation. Details provided align well with program goals and faculty interest.	Applicant ranked good or average in most categories. Recommended or recommended with reservations. Average potential for success in graduate school. Strengths outweigh weaknesses. Reviewers appear to know the applicant well.	Applicant ranked below average in most key categories or not recommended. Low potential for success in graduate school or weaknesses outweigh strengths. Reviewers do not appear to know the applicant well and/or provide little detail to support recommendations.	
Should the applicant be considered for a recruitment fellowship or scholarship? Yes or No			Comments:	
Should the applicant be interviewed? Yes or No				