

ESSAY #5: "Library Floors and Literature"

Personal Statement

It happened two years ago as I lay sprawled out on the floor of the library lounge at the Université de Grenoble in Grenoble, France. I was working on an *explication du texte* of Guillaume Apollinaire's poem "La Loreley" for my *Poèmes et Proses du XXe Siècle* class when I suddenly put it together: this was *my* approach to literature. Close reading, formalism. Staying close, very close, to the text. I was certain.

Certainty, however, proved rather unstable. I knew it was important not to close myself off from other approaches to literature, so when I returned to Swarthmore from Grenoble, I took two courses that I knew would be highly theoretical—*Women Writers 1790–1830* and *Feminist Literary Criticism*. These courses brought me around to a kind of hybrid approach to literature that I find rich, effective, and enjoyable. In this approach, I maintain a close connection to the text at the same time that I apply theoretical work.

I am using this approach to literature in two major projects this year.

First, I received a \$2,400 National Endowment for the Humanities Younger Scholars Summer Research Grant. I proposed to expand on a prior research project, looking at the use of silence in the novels of Elie Wiesel, and at the ways Wiesel both demonstrates and gets around the fact that conventional language simply breaks down when it is used to talk about the Holocaust. I plan to expand on the same project for my senior English thesis. For this thesis, I am studying the ways Wiesel uses silence in the literal content of his novels and in his writing technique, and am working toward explanations as to how he gives these silences meaning. My fluency in French from my semester of study in Grenoble has been invaluable since most of Wiesel's works were written originally in French. My thesis involves close, formalist readings of Wiesel's novels, and is enriched by theoretical work. (This thesis appears as "Senior Essay" on my transcript; that designation will change next semester to "Thesis.")

My second major project this year is a self-designed research project that has just replaced comprehensive exams in the Swarthmore English Department. I am working with British poetry just following World War I, looking at how these poets write about a kind of war that truly had no precedent since it was the first war in which death could be so effectively and impersonally mass-produced. I am focusing on my observation that a surprising number of these poems rely heavily on biblical or mythical images, as though more contemporary images simply were not applicable anymore.

I have known for several years that I want my graduate work to be in the field of English, but my approach to literature has been enriched by my double major in English and sociology-anthropology. Twice my interest in anthropology has led me to study literature of non-European cultures, both times with great personal satisfaction. My papers for the *Black African Writer* combine theoretical research with a good deal of formalist textual analysis and close reading. I had several long conversations about these papers with Prof. Wallace Mann, the R. Talbot Sondheim Professor of African Studies at Swarthmore.

This is a great experiential opening. The reader can "see" the student "sprawled out," and the essay offers an exotic setting. This candidate displays amazing breadth while leading the reader through distinct phases in her intellectual development. The masterful way the candidate weaves in theorists, theories, authors, and names of works lightens what could otherwise be heavy exposition. The essay as a whole amounts to an intellectual argument, the point of which is this: this candidate's background points to the inevitable conclusion that this student is ready to excel at the targeted graduate program.

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My second excursion into less-traveled territory was a paper I wrote for *Introduction to Hebrew Scriptures*. I chose to do an exegesis of Isaiah 65:17–25. I worked from the original Hebrew text since I had taken a course in biblical Hebrew (Religion 93) and have a moderate level of reading comprehension of the language. I had a marvelous time digging so deeply into each word, and sometimes even individual letters, as is required in an exegesis of a Hebrew passage.

My two major projects this year—my thesis and my senior project—are related by the theme of war literature, and my work on one project gives me new ideas for the other. I feel fortunate that this has worked out, and at the University of Colorado—Boulder I want to continue studying twentieth-century literature. However, I am also ready to start widening my base, casting out in some new directions. I have found over and over that if I have a long-standing, gut-level enjoyment of some kind of literature, I almost invariably have a wonderful time and do a good job taking an academic approach to that literature. Old English literature is in this category for me.

I have never done academic work in Old English literature, but for years I have treasured a recording in Old English of the stories of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Cadmon*, and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*. And when I am feeling particularly harried, I often go to the Swarthmore library and treat myself to an old, scratchy LP of a reading of *Beowulf*, following along in the Old English text and in a modern English translation. By imitating the voice I hear and following in translation, I have taught myself a tiny amount of this language. I want to follow up on this interest.

My interest in studying at the University of Colorado—Boulder has grown out of conversations I have had with numerous people, including Prof. Laurie Langbauer who had a lot of specific information since she taught there one summer. When I spoke about my interests with Abbe Blum, another professor of English at Swarthmore, she recommended that I call Prof. Margaret Ferguson. I did so, and had a wonderful conversation that helped me to confirm that I would feel very much at home in the department. I am especially excited about the department's strength in twentieth-century, Renaissance, and Old English literature.

I am also pleased about the distribution requirements, since they will help me to explore areas that I did not or could not at Swarthmore. By doing that, I will continue to learn new things about literature. I do not want my experience in the Université de Grenoble library to be a unique experiment in my development. I want to continue changing, refining, playing around with the ways in which I approach literature. This ever-changing, ever-learning approach will help me to be a lifelong scholar and lover of literature.

These paragraphs show the depth of specific interest this student has in this specific graduate program. Be sure to customize your essays to this level of detail. Also note the use of professors' names, both at the undergraduate alma mater and the targeted graduate program.

ESSAY #6: "64,000 Miles to Law School"

I have known since junior high school that I would be a lawyer. But I did not take the traditional road to law school.

I finished my undergraduate coursework at UC Davis and was awarded a BA with a major in political science/public service and a minor in Spanish. I did not consider applying to law school immediately, for I felt that I had lived a sheltered life in a white, middle-class suburb of Sacramento, and that I knew little of the real world. So I packed my bags, and with two thousand dollars in traveler's checks in my pocket, I took the train to Guadalajara, Mexico, determined to make a new life and face whatever rigors it had to offer. I knew no one in Mexico and had no connections, but I got a hotel room and began to look for work the next day.

I was to remain in Mexico for three years. One of my first jobs was as an English teacher at the Tourism School of the state-run University of Guadalajara. Ostensibly set up to give free educational opportunities in a career in tourism to disadvantaged Mexicans, the school was as much "real world" as I could have asked for. The directors would delay our payroll checks and then offer personal loans, at high interest rates, so that the teachers could cover expenses until the checks "arrived." Student union strongmen packed pistols on campus and hijacked city buses when they grew tired of waiting at bus stops. Leaders of the student union passed my classes regardless of their failing grades or lack of attendance. My outrage, frustration, and helplessness left a deep impression on me; for the first time in my life, I was a foreigner with no civil rights.

Despite a low salary (US \$450 dollars per month) and poor working conditions, I stayed on in Mexico, resolved to perfect my Spanish, for I felt certain that it would be important in a legal-related career in California upon my return. I eventually found work at the Instituto Anglo-Mexicano de Cultura, a private English institute under the auspices of the British Council. I studied there in a one-year program and received a teaching certificate. My work consisted of writing the curriculum for and teaching six English classes per day to groups of thirty teenagers and adults. In my free time, I studied Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Latin in a program I developed for myself. On holidays, I traveled around the country by bus to familiarize myself with different dialects and to see the wonders of Mexico.

When I returned to California, I immediately began studies for the California Court Interpreters examination in Spanish. I did not yet feel ready for law school, and decided that court interpreting would be the best way to be in contact with the law and at the same time use my Spanish to work with the Mexican people, for whom I had developed a deep appreciation.

I passed the exam on my first sitting, the first candidate to pass in Sacramento in two years, and began working freelance in the Sacramento municipal and superior courts. From the first day, I was thrust into interviews between attorney and client and onto the witness stand in cases ranging from family law disputes to forcible rape and drunk driving to first-degree murder. In the interpreter's position, literally between the lawyer and his Spanish-speaking

This student involves the reader in a fascinating life story—in this case, an adventure that the student voluntarily pursued. Note that he conveys his rationale for pursuing each stage of the adventure, and doesn't just drag the reader along for a travelogue. This essay exemplifies the writing edict, "don't tell, show"; for example, rather than telling us that he has compassion, intellectual curiosity, uncommon drive, and that his journey resulted in the maturity he was seeking, he shows us all these points without ever mentioning them directly. This is an impressive presentation for an uncommon candidate.

Note how this student took a circuitous route to his goal, but without ever losing sight of the object of his intentions.

#6: "64,000 Miles to Law School"

(continued)

client, I saw the criminal lawyer's job as it really is: the frustrations, the heartache, the human element, the tactical considerations, the negotiations with opposing counsel, the grinding work and long, long hours, the hard-won victories and the saddening defeats.

In my first year as a court interpreter, I worked in conjunction with the UC Davis Extension college to develop a training course for court interpreter candidates in Spanish. I wrote the curriculum and the California Court Interpreters Association provided some of the materials. I gave the course solo for the first spring and fall semesters, and then team-taught the course with federal interpreters and colleagues Yolanda Portal and Carol Meredith. I am proud to say that six of the students from those courses went on to pass the state interpreter exam; they now make up an important segment of the court interpreter pool in the northern Sacramento Valley.

I then passed the Spanish interpreter examination for the US federal courts. This exam has an overall pass rate of 3.9 percent; of the 11,457 candidates who have taken the exam since its first offering, 442 have passed. (Official statistics provided by Ramon Castaneda, Staff Interpreter, US District Court, Sacramento.) I began working as a freelancer in the Sacramento federal court. The work was high-pressure and fast-paced, and I learned much about the changing state of sentencing under the recently approved federal guidelines. I stood beside young men accused of trafficking hundreds of kilos of cocaine and interpreted their tear-choked pleas for mercy as judges handed down sentences of twenty and twenty-five years in the federal penitentiary.

For three years, I divided my work between the Sacramento federal courts and the California state courts in a ten-city area stretching from Stockton to Shasta Lake and the Nevada border at Lake Tahoe. In my extensive travels, I saw how the law was applied differently around the state, and I became especially aware of the tremendous shortage of bilingual, bicultural attorneys to serve the needs of California's Hispanic population.

In legal interviews, despite my best efforts to convey the meaning of the words, I sensed a lack of understanding at a deeper level. I wanted to break in and explain to the attorney the realities of Mexico's legal system. I wanted to explain to the defendant how our judicial system was different from his or hers. But I could not. I saw more than a few Spanish-speaking defendants walk through the system as if in a daze. I grew frustrated and more convinced than ever that if I wanted to make a real difference, it would have to be as an advocate.

But there was one more step to be taken on the long road to law school before I would feel ready. After three years of saving and extensive planning, I set off in a 1971 Volkswagen bus with the goal of driving overland to the tip of South America and back up to the Arctic Sea in Alaska. Twenty countries, thirty months, forty border crossings, and sixty-four thousand miles later, I achieved that goal.

Along the way, I gave interviews on Brazilian television in Belo Horizonte, Goiania, and Santa Rosa. I made presentations to school groups of twenty to two hundred students in Brazil and Canada. I interpreted at a judicial conference between Justice Edward Panelli

Provide context for accomplishments, as this student did by citing the pass rates for these exams. Isn't this more impressive than simply writing that he passed? The context lets us know this is an impressive accomplishment.

#6: "64,000 Miles to Law School"

(continued)

of the California Supreme Court and members of the Supreme Court of Bolivia in Sucre, Bolivia. Throughout Latin America,⁸ I negotiated prices with mechanics, immigration officers, customs officials, policemen, soldiers, and on one occasion, with armed men wearing masks. I had to make my way through red tape and bureaucracy in Spanish, Portuguese, and French. I managed a twenty-five-thousand-dollar budget through countless ups and downs and returned the Volkswagen safely to California last September. In sum, I gathered the real-world experience I felt was necessary to be an effective lawyer. At present, I am writing a book about my experiences, *A Passage to Patagonia: 64,000 Miles of Driving the Americas*.

I look forward to working as a lawyer in areas where I can employ my language skills and my court experience together with my law school education. I am particularly interested in the Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization's immigration project and the immigration level services course at Yale. My interest has a personal facet as well, for my wife is an immigrant from Uruguay. I am also very interested in your course "US-Mexico Relations and the Pressures of Globalization." This will be an important field of law in the years ahead as US-Mexico ties evolve, and the boundaries of the law in many specialties will be stretched and redefined. I intend to be a part of that dynamic process.

I think others would say that I am a hard worker, a good organizer, an enthusiastic speaker, and an avid student. I believe I can make a positive contribution to the student body of the Yale Law School, and with a Yale Law School degree, I can make a positive contribution to the legal profession and to the welfare of immigrants in the years of change that lie ahead.

Note how the candidate makes this more than an adventure, by pointing out how this adventure relates to law.

Predict success for yourself as a graduate student, and later as a professional practicing in your chosen field. This is a highly effective close to a statement of purpose.

This student wrote that it was hard for "an average white girl" to come up with a response to how she would add diversity to the campus, but she succeeded.

She goes on to write: "Thanks so much for writing such a great book! It really helped me get through the application process with ease and I got accepted to every school I applied to. The essay writing advice was great and I think it really enabled me to write some winning essays—people on the admissions committees were quoting them back to me in my interviews!"

Notice that a short essay can also be highly effective.

ESSAY #8: "How Will You Add Diversity to Our Program?"

After an hour of constant rubbing, my hands were covered in blisters and I still could not produce a spark from the stick. But I had intentionally hiked to the bottom of this canyon equipped with only a sleeping bag and my wilderness skills, determined to either catch my dinner and cook it with only the resources available to me or spend the night hungry. The first task had been a challenge in and of itself, wading in the cool creek until my legs were numb while I tickled the bellies of fish hiding in the banks, waiting for the right moment to snatch one with my hands. With the fish caught, I now needed fire. At my current rate the task seemed impossible, but when the stakes are high, the motivation to succeed is strong. I painstakingly went back to work until finally, a wisp of smoke and a spark combined to produce the best tasting and most satisfying meal of my life. This experience and others similar to it have given me a deep understanding of the natural world and a unique perspective on the relationship between humans and the environment.

Since graduating from the University of Minnesota, I have sought out an intimate relationship with the natural world. Through this approach, I have come to appreciate natural resources in an uncommon way that I believe brings a nuanced perspective to the field of conservation biology. I have spent months in the deserts of the Southwest living out of a tent and teaching myself survival skills in the barren canyons. I have lived in the woods of the Midwest in a rustic cabin with no running water, washing up either in the creek down the hill or the wood-burning sauna across the adjacent field. Living this type of life requires constantly overcoming obstacles just to obtain basic necessities: food, shelter, water. These solitary experiences, indeed struggles, have deepened my appreciation for the value of "land" in a way that I would like to share with my classmates if accepted to the University of Minnesota.

I have studied with various Midwestern herbalists and the Lakota healer, Paul Red Elk, learning about diverse Native American belief systems and how they relate to the Midwest's natural resources. Learning the ancient traditions of the Lakota people gave me a more intuitive way of looking at plant communities, a view that has the knowledge of centuries behind it. I was taught the difference between knowing the Latin name of a plant and really knowing the plant—where it was found historically, the folklore surrounding it, which animals depend on it for survival, what medicinal uses it has, and how it can be used for food or other material; in essence, the spirit of the plant and its historical relationship to humans. This unique perspective toward ecology, which has strengthened the foundation of my undergraduate degree, is one that I am eager to offer the University of Minnesota's conservation biology program.

If accepted to the University of Minnesota, I will bring a unique way of understanding Midwestern ecology through the Native American and survivalist lens. I would like to use the same drive it took to spark fire in that Southwest canyon to motivate myself and others in the program to succeed. I would like to use my understanding of Lakota traditions to view the natural element in terms of its history, cultural value, role in community ecology, and function in supporting human survival. I offer the university my blend of the typical conservationist perspective and a deep, intimate understanding of the natural world.

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ESSAY #11: "Sports, Presidents, and Public Relations"

The Question: "What are the reasons you wish to pursue the graduate program and how does it relate to your career goals?"

Roger Belton, Applicant Tracking No. 163129
Master of Arts in Strategic Public Relations
University of Southern California

The Catalyst A burst blood vessel in the brain of my former university president provided the tragic high and low point in my young public relations career.

It began with a jarring call at six A.M. on a Sunday morning. The president of George Fox University—where I serve as assistant director of public information—had suffered a life-threatening stroke caused by a brain tumor. I was called in to deal with the news media. I served as the university spokesperson, doing all media interviews, writing press releases, and recording a daily voicemail line with health updates. The situation was made even more hectic by the fact that two of my university relations colleagues were out of the office.

I found myself hurting for our president and his family but caught up in the action. Even when the director of public information returned, I remained as the media spokesperson. A year later, cancer claimed the life of our president, and I was asked to summarize the personality of this remarkable man in our alumni newspaper. (See writing sample.)

That was one experience which has led me to apply to University of Southern California for further training in public relations.

Beyond Age 30 Although I am assistant director of public information, much of my time is consumed by my work as sports information director for George Fox's athletic program.

Not long ago, a coworker asked me, "Are you going to be a sports information director when you're sixty-five?"

My instinctive reply surprised even myself: "I don't plan to be one when I'm thirty."

Since I'm twenty-eight today, I've got two years to engineer a career change.

I feel I've gone about as far as I can in small-college sports information. Since graduation—when I moved from a twenty-hour-a-week student position to full-time employee—I've elevated the coverage of nonrevenue sports by improving their publications and press releases.

When I began, media guides were produced only for men's basketball. Now all thirteen varsity sports have a media guide. Many guides have received national honors. My women's basketball guide is perhaps my favorite. Created from scratch, it has been honored as the second best in the nation among colleges at our level of athletic competition. (I've enclosed the most recent copy.)

With the assistance of student assistants, I produce weekly news releases for each sport. They often are used verbatim by local newspapers. While speaking about athletic media

Here's another arresting opening line, grabbing the reader right from the opening clause.

This essay is a little chatty, but it does an outstanding job of conveying the enthusiasm and decency of this remarkable man.

One gets the impression that if life served him a pile of lemons, he wouldn't start a lemonade stand, he'd start a franchise operation. Also, he has done a good job of adopting the writing tips espoused by this book, such as referring to supporting documentation

(as in "See writing sample"). His essay traces the history of his decision to pursue graduate education and details his preparations to succeed. This is a natural theme on which to organize any essay.

Feel free to spice up your essay with direct quotes that support your points or advance your narrative.

#11: "Sports, Presidents, and Public Relations" (continued)

relations at a recent conference, a sports reporter from a Portland radio station declared George Fox, the "King of News Releases."

At George Fox, we strive to stand above the crowd. While most schools at our level photocopy their basketball programs, my office puts together a twelve-page program that generates about \$7,000 in advertising revenue.

This year, I supervise a staff of up to seven students who assist me in stat keeping, ticket selling, ad selling, news release writing, and office work. I also recruit and manage about a dozen volunteers to staff games during basketball season.

I enjoy my job. I like working with my student assistants and seeing them mature as writers and persons. It's fun to be part of the "team" with coaches and student-athletes. I still find my palms sweaty in the ninth inning of a tight baseball game, but the amount of coverage available to small colleges is frustratingly small. So much work for so little return.

Stepping Outside the Sports Arena Although I often find myself consumed with the promotion of my athletic department, I don't want to be pigeonholed as a sports fanatic.

After earning a number of state awards as a high school trumpet player, I received a music scholarship at George Fox. I continue to play occasionally at weddings and church services and teach lessons.

The death of a college roommate from leukemia led me to volunteer at a camp for kids with cancer run by the American Cancer Society. For the past six summers, I've been known as the bugle-blowing counselor "Mr. Toad."

My Destination I still tell people I don't know what I want to be when I grow up, but I'd like it to be in the public relations field.

I believe I have the talent for it.

I was recently honored with the "Rising Star" award in the field of communications by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) District VIII. It's an award given to professionals in their first five years in the field. The district is made up of development, alumni, and public relations professionals at educational institutions in five states and six Canadian provinces. George Fox University—with twenty-three hundred students—is one of the smallest colleges in CASE.

I take an active role in George Fox's weekly university relations meetings where we discuss potential news stories and a wide variety of PR issues. Topics have ranged from "How can we improve internal communication on our campus intranet system?" to "What do we put in our alumni newspaper when one of our newly admitted freshmen has been arrested for a double homicide?"

I get a thrill out of trying to capture the interest of the news media with a story tip and have achieved local and national success. *U.S. News & World Report* magazine used one of my submissions about a unique George Fox campus tradition in its annual college ranking guide.

#11: "Sports, Presidents, and Public Relations" (continued)

Although I don't believe I want to be a full-time writer, I consider writing one of my strengths. My story about a record-setting female pole vaulter this summer was used by the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) in its online magazine *NAIA News*. (See writing sample.) Another feature about a women's basketball senior citizen fan club received a national award from the College Sports Information Directors Association.

An Itch to Explore After eleven years as a student and administrator at George Fox, I feel very comfortable here, but I want to broaden my horizons. It's an itch. Perhaps I picked it up from my father, who packed my family up when I was twelve and took us to live in Brazil for a year. Twenty countries later, I'm still hungry to explore. In the last three summers, I've had coffee at the home of a Bosnian war widow; seen Belfast, Northern Ireland, during a commemorative march; and crossed from Hong Kong to China with a relief worker to see her work on an island inhabited by lepers. Travel has opened my eyes to a world larger than a basketball game.

I enjoy the academic environment. Going back to school excites me. Education always has been a part of my life. My parents are both teachers. Since I have an interest in possibly following in their footsteps later in life, I would appreciate being considered for a teaching assistantship. (See separate application packet.) I believe I would be an excellent candidate since I have spent the last seven years editing sports and general news releases written by college students.

Why USC? I believe USC would provide me with excellent training in my profession. After discovering its high ranking, I visited the school's website for more information. The idea of receiving hands-on training from LA's PR professionals is extremely attractive. I contacted Alan MacDonald, who earned his master's degree in PR from USC, and current journalism graduate student Jennifer Prosser to ask about their experiences. Both gave the school and the professors high marks.

Although I could see myself returning to a public relations position at George Fox, I'm intrigued by the variety of options that would be available to me after graduation. Alan MacDonald told me that USC stood for University of Social Connections. In addition to my current experience, a degree from USC would give me additional credibility. During my January visit to USC, I met with Tim Burgess and was impressed that the Annenberg School of Communications had its own career advising office.

I have done quite a bit of research on master's degrees in communications, but USC's public relations program was the first and only one to excite me. I am applying to no other program.

I do not go into this application process halfheartedly. This has been my passionate intention for over a year. In preparation for the cost of full-time graduate school, I became

After you've established intellectual capacity, it's okay to throw in a human-interest section.

The more persuasive your answer to "Why here?" the more likely you'll be admitted. Students who do not customize their essays waste an opportunity to impress admissions decision makers.

#11: "Sports, Presidents, and Public Relations" (continued)

frugal. I decided to continue driving my twelve-year-old car, and I moved out of a house where I rented alone to save costs in a shared duplex with four roommates.

I feel that I am ready to perform in your program—mentally, financially, academically—and that I have honed the skills necessary to excel. I would like the opportunity to fulfill my capacity at USC.

Thank you for considering my application.

Preparing yourself
fiscally for gradu-
ate school is just
as important as
preparing yourself
intellectually. When
you've made prudent
financial preparations,
let readers know.

ESSAYS

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ESSAY #37: "Blue Collar to Psych Scholar"

Statement of Purpose—PhD in Psychology

Following nearly ten years of employment as an aircraft mechanic, I took a hard look at where my life was going. Although I was responsible for important work, requiring extensive technical knowledge and mechanical skills in manufacturing and maintaining aircraft—I felt compelled to include myself in a larger arena. Each airplane that I repaired and that flew away was a poignant reminder that I was standing still. Consigned to the tedium of long commutes and time clocks—my daily routine was empty of genuine enthusiasm and curiosity. Predictable, the content of my days offered little beyond another paycheck, another weekend, another Monday. I realized that in order to redirect my life and fully experience the world, I would have to confront the uncertainties that change would bring.

My first step was to face an embarrassing truth—reenrolling at the age of thirty, I earned my high school diploma. I could have forgone this step of earning a diploma but I was compelled to alter how I approached my past and in doing so, how I would meet my future. Resigning as an aircraft mechanic and enrolling full time at my local community college, I attained my associate of arts degree. Unquestionably, these initial accomplishments contributed to my deep-rooted curiosity about human behavior and motivation. Focusing my academic direction, I then earned a bachelor of arts degree in psychology from California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB). While working part time and attending college full time proved exhausting and at times frightening, nevertheless, the decision to change my life was revealing itself as the correct path. In preparing for a career within psychology, I recognized that a doctorate in this field would be essential. With this goal in mind, I resolved to strengthen my academic and practical background by entering the master's program in general/experimental psychology at CSUSB.

Having proposed my master's thesis on the perception of family resources and the psychological adjustment of parents caring for a child with autism, I expect to defend by October and earn my master's degree. Data collection for my thesis topic was based on protocols created during my work as a research assistant at the University Center for Developmental Disabilities (UCDD) at CSUSB. The UCDD has over 120 families with developmentally disabled children who receive behavioral treatments and family services. The opportunity to work directly with these families was sobering when considering factors affecting family dynamics. However, it offered practical as well as conceptual understanding within this area. Additionally, involvement with the UCDD was fundamental in understanding the steps of setting up a research investigation from its earliest stages. During my time there, I was able to research literature related to the field of autism and developmental disabilities, evaluate measures used for test construction, write test items, pilot test questions and testing administration procedures, and interview parents and siblings for data collection. Seeking to expand my research experience, I also participated in a study investigating the effects of amphetamine on glial cells. This study, utilizing an animal model, offered the chance

This man is matter-
of-fact about having
made a major error
in his first career
choice. His bravery
in returning to school
is admirable.

Be sure to run
laundry lists of skills,
techniques, and even
equipment you can
operate, as this writer
does here and on the
next page.

#37: "Blue Collar to Psych Scholar"

(continued)

This student is establishing teaching, writing, and statistical skills, virtually assuring that he will get an assistantship. Teaching, writing, and statistical skills are the trifecta for graduate assistants.

to learn laboratory techniques related to handling, injecting, surgery, profusions, cryostat brain slicing, slide mounting, and finally digital microscopic cell counting. This study will be published this year.

Eager to complement my basic course requirements for the master's program, I have completed two extra upper-level statistics courses (multivariate and structural equation modeling) as well as two additional clinical courses (family dynamics and pervasive developmental disorders). Moreover, having been selected from among many candidates to instruct an introductory experimental course, I have just completed a full academic year instructing a laboratory section. My responsibilities included facilitating experiments and teaching the associated APA writing style and content format to upper-level psychology students. Additionally, following my teaching assistantship, I was hired as a writing consultant for my university's McNair Scholars Program. As a writing consultant, I am responsible for reviewing students' research content and writing styles across a range of disciplines including physics, economics, geology, as well as diverse subjects within psychology. Though these opportunities to interact and advise undergraduate students require long hours of detailed review, I found them extremely rewarding and they have made me, I feel, a more well-rounded person.

To understand the application of psychology, I have sought out volunteer opportunities as well. As a crisis counselor for a local suicide/crisis hotline for over three years, I have assisted individuals who were overwhelmed by the burdens of stress. In addition, as an unpaid assistant at Patton State Hospital, a state forensic treatment facility, I assisted staff in reintegrating patients for release into community halfway programs after many years isolated from society. Currently, I have begun training to volunteer at a rape crisis center that will require that I meet with victims and act as an advocate and assistant during their initial hospital and police investigation. Moreover, employing my expertise as a photographer, I have documented artwork and activities at a local museum.

In changing the direction of my life, I also decided to reenlist in the United States Air Force Reserves. Reenlisting as a photographer rather than in my previous military career as an aircraft mechanic has opened an esthetic outlet fostering creativity and even fun. As a supervisor in a combat photography unit tasked with visual documentation of worldwide military activities, I have been able to pursue my interest in people and travel through a medium that integrates aspects of both psychology and art—a rare opportunity in the military. The experiences and paths I have led are diverse: adopted as a child from Korea, living and working in Europe, traveling around the world, as well as the life of a student have all etched their marks within me. I believe the breadth and depth of my life experiences are my best qualities. Through them, I can appreciate how perspectives are influenced through ethnicity, culture, geography, and even history. My competence in the laboratory, as a teaching assistant, as a researcher for the UCDD, as a paid writing consultant for the

Combat photography? Wow. That's a conversation item.

Notice how he mentions this adoption bombshell in passing, without elaborating at all. Another great example of how sometimes less is more.

#37: "Blue Collar to Psych Scholar"

(continued)

McNair Scholars Program, volunteer efforts helping people during crises, and even my work as a photographer with the USAF have solidified my dedication to the field of psychology as a career choice. My goal is to complete a clinical PhD program, commit my life to the field of psychology and learning, and be of service to others.

I am highly interested in the topic of psychotherapy and anxiety and would be excited to work under the direction of Dr. Tehanson. Additionally, Dr. Lehman's work with anxiety and depression would be particularly interesting. I would be an enthusiastic member of either one of these professors' research teams.

This essay needs more "why here"

than this. Strive in your essays to make a close connection to faculty, especially research faculty.

The general rule is to identify three or more with whom you have affinity.

ESSAY #42: "Child and Adolescent Clinical Psychology"

Statement of Purpose, Martina Greene

Question: "What influences in children result in happy adults?"

In my experiences as a preprofessional psychological worker, I have adopted a working hypothesis that the majority of outpatient-treatable mental health problems stem from negative childhood experiences. These negative experiences are overwhelmingly traceable to influential adults in the patient's past, primarily parental figures and teachers.

When we were children, my father used to get my sister and me to stand in front of a mirror and say positive things to ourselves. It didn't matter what we said, as long as it was positive. He did not make us stand in front of the mirror and say nice things to ourselves; he jumped around and coached us and encouraged us until we did this almost every morning as a matter of getting up. My family provided warmth, fair and consistent discipline, and a true feeling of secure, inclusive boundaries separating us (the family) from the greater society in which we lived.

Due to the juxtaposition of my own experiences and the experiences of others, I have long been quite interested in familial and educational influences on the development of children's adjustment. Although it has faced some public ridicule in the past, my own area of greatest interest is self-esteem: Where does it come from? How do we get it? How can we repair it after assaults against the factors that engender it?

I am particularly interested in the development of self-esteem in late childhood, puberty, and adolescence. I have always been interested in children, and I have consistently and diligently prepared myself to become a specialist in child and adolescent clinical psychology. In addition to the details in my CV, I would like to address three major influences on my career direction:

(1) When I was at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst (UMass), I had the good fortune to work with Dr. Morgan Burke, dean of social sciences and founder and executive director of the Farm School. Dr. Burke is an inspiring professor, and he encouraged me to pursue my interest in the internal and external influences on socioemotional development. He accepted a proposal of mine to launch an experimental class at the Farm School to test teaching techniques. The program had the working title of "Testing Models of Self-Esteem Training in an Elementary Class of Girls and Boys: Toward Developing Applied Techniques for Teachers." I was the teacher, with free rein to develop and run the class.

(2) As a psychological worker with Boston Free Psychological Services, I was intake counselor for a very diverse and multicultural incoming patient population. In this position, I was the very first contact many self-referrals had with a mental health services organization. I got a feel for my clinical aptitude, and how I might enjoy clinical services. I was able to establish a quick rapport with patients, and gain their trust and cooperation. I was lauded by the staff psychologists for my skills in triage and assessment, and my ability to get an accurate and complete psychological history from patients. My success with and enjoyment

Clinical psychology programs are extremely competitive. Many are statistically much harder to get into than your average medical school. The programs look for psychology research and any kind of experience in a mental health clinical setting. Often an interim degree, such as a master's in developmental or child or counseling psychology, is the key. This candidate did everything right, and then wrote about it well.

Be sure to mention key professors by name.

#42: "Child and Adolescent Clinical Psychology" (continued)

of this position was a major influence on my resolve to pursue clinical psychology concurrent with my interest in developmental psychology.

(3) While I have always respected the integrity of psychology as a science, I must credit Dr. Kowalski of the graduate program in psychology at Boston University (BU) for giving me a solid grounding in experimental methodology. Although I had a working knowledge of experimental methodology, and I had certainly designed and executed a number of experiments in psychology, over the last two years I have developed a passion for correct methodology. In my clinical career, I may not have to design many original research projects, but my increased understanding of methodology has influenced all my thinking about psychology and has especially improved my ability to critique the research I read in journals.

Finally, I would like to address the issue of my academic career. As you have my transcripts, you can clearly see that I was not especially serious in my first few years as an undergraduate at UMass, and you can also see that I have improved dramatically. I have done quite well in my master's program here at BU, and I expect to continue or exceed this performance in your program.

My eventual goals are to divide my time between (a) clinical outpatient treatment of children and adolescent patients, (b) program development and consulting with schools and institutions on self-esteem, specifically development of teaching methodologies that enhance it, and development of treatment programs that repair it, and (c) teaching at the university level on developmental and clinical psychology areas.

I am confident of my ability to excel in your program academically, and to be an effective and valuable clinical psychologist both in practice and in consulting roles. I would like to think that I am the type of candidate that would be a good representative of your program.

This is a good way to deal with a rough start to an academic career. Let the reader know that the grades that count are good, and explain your rationale.

This is an excellent example of reductionism.

Predict your own success, as a graduate student and as a practicing professional.