

## Statement of Purpose

### Introduction:

1. Allude to personal background/event/interesting factoid
2. Link personal background to *broad* areas of research (sociology of education, race/ethnicity, immigration, health).
3. Follow with more specific research topic that you will pursue in graduate school
4. Say outright that you want to pursue your PhD at Department X because you want to obtain the training and scholarly mentorship and want the ability to work with foremost experts in the area of \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Briefly close by saying you eventually want to become a researcher of semi-specific area of research and become a university professor.

### Previous Research Experience:

1. Say how you came into psychology. Allude to courses and key scholars, but only briefly. You want to use this to transition into more specific experiences (i.e., research experience).
2. Open with original research you have done. Note a) research question, b) the literature that was not up to par to address your research question, and c) the methods you engaged in to address the gap in the literature. (Leave a little hole that you may be able to expand upon in graduate studies..." While the research showed me c, I believe that expanding this research with a survey...")
3. Note presentations that you did based on this research---guest lectures, conferences, etc.
4. Follow up with projects you have assisted other professors with in a similar format as Steps 2 and 3.

### Graduate School Intentions

1. Note a broad area of research you want to examine more closely, as well as a specific study you might want to do.
2. Discuss the specifics of a study you might want to do, naming both methodologically and case study/studies.
3. Note potential contributions of this project both theoretically, as well as beyond the world of sociology (e.g., informing public policy on X).

### "I want to go to Department X because..."

1. Say the Department X makes an ideal/excellent fit for you to pursue your PhD.
2. Note specific areas of expertise of the department that align with yours
3. Identify 2-3 faculty and discuss **specifically, very specifically** how their research will directly inform your own. They do not have to be substantively similar (it's good to bring a new perspective; they want students who can contribute). They can have an interesting research approach/design, methodological orientation, etc. Make sure to note whether this faculty is current active in the department (easiest thing to do: look at their CV and see if they've published in the last 3-5 years.) \*If there is a faculty you want to work with but is not accepting students, feel free to mention them while stating that you are aware, but would like to collaborate in future projects.

*\*Reference: Dr. Anthony Ocampo, PhD.  
Sociology Department, Cal Poly Pomona\**

For the Graduate School Admission Application Statement, the faculty are interested in an autobiographical essay written from a personal perspective. As indicated on the graduate school website, this “statement of purpose should be 300-500 words concerning your purpose for undertaking graduate study, your reasons for wanting to study at Purdue, and your research interests, professional plans, and career goals. You also may explain any special circumstances applicable to your background and elaborate on your scholarly publications, awards, achievements, abilities, and/or professional history.”

My professional goal is to earn a PhD in Counseling Psychology to obtain a tenure-track position. I look forward in dividing my time between (a) conducting research on the intersection of Positive Psychology and psychotherapy, (b) develop individual and school strength-based interventions to optimize human functioning, and (c) engaging in clinical practice. Purdue University’s Counseling Psychology program is the optimal environment for me to receive clinical training and practice psychotherapy within a cultural context.

My research interests stem from my experiences as a facilitator for college-preparatory courses at correctional facilities and community youth mentor where I have listened to life testimonials of incarcerated men, women, and at-risk youth. These testimonials revived my memories of the delinquent lifestyle I once lived. Thinking I was no different from them, our current standing in life showed otherwise. My inquisitiveness to understand these differences led me to the investigation of the psychological processes in gang desistance—cessation of criminal and gang activity. To establish a foundation relevant to this phenomenon, I developed my Ronald E. McNair Scholar project where I examined the unorthodox pathways of leaving a gang by investigating the usage of character strengths. Through this project, my interest of applying positive psychology in different realms of life emerged.

The research I have conducted as an undergraduate student at Cal Poly Pomona and through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln have provided me with the qualitative and quantitative skills to excel in graduate school. As a McNair Scholar, I designed an exploratory study to identify the character strengths that facilitated the cessation of criminal and gang activity among Hispanic/Latino adults. The study was one of ten projects from Cal Poly Pomona to be awarded the 2017 President’s Kellogg Discovery Fellow: an award commemorating projects that exemplified research to create innovative solutions that help solve community problems. In addition, I was one of 12 students from across the United States selected to conduct an independent project for the National Science Foundation Minority Health Disparities Initiative. My skills in SPSS strengthen by creating syntax and by analyzing multivariate variables to examine the role of peer-ego networks on educational outcomes on Mexican-origin youth by utilizing the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health data set.

Furthermore, I have had first-hand exposure on the application of positive psychology serving marginalized populations. As an academic leader for the Prison Education Project (PEP), I assisted in designing and implementing a seven-week curriculum where I exposed inmates to college preparation. The curriculum included “Gratitude Thursdays,” an exercise allowing the students to share about a person or event they were grateful for and explaining why. Students were also asked to name one self-perceived strength and how it was used to accomplish their personal goal(s). As a mentor for Just 4 Youth, I have incorporated similar activities for the at-risk youth in Pomona. During the positive affirmation activity, members are asked to positively affirm a classmate by making direct eye contact with the individual and are asked to refrain from the usage of negative language.

In the Counseling Psychology Professional Statement (**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**), please provide a professional statement of 300-500 words and address why you are interested in Counseling Psychology and in our program specifically, including the faculty member(s) with whom you would prefer to work and why. Your essay should use 1-inch margins and 12-point font. Note: All items may not apply to all applicants.

My intersectional and multiple identities as a former gang affiliate, community mentor, and scholar have led to my aspirations to earn a PhD in Counseling Psychology. My professional goal is to obtain a tenure-track position and divide my time between (a) conducting research on the intersection of Positive Psychology and psychotherapy, (b) develop individual and school strength-based interventions to optimize human functioning, and (c) work with non-profit organizations serving underserved communities.

Purdue University's Counseling Psychology program is the optimal environment for me to pursue graduate study because of its faculty emphasis in Positive Psychology and diverse approaches to research and cultural component. My experiences as a facilitator in correctional institutions and mentor to youth from continuation schools has provided me insight of the importance of contextual models related to the utilization of strengths for optimal human functioning. Dr. Theodore Bartholomew's expertise in the contextual model of psychotherapy, cultural psychology, and positive psychology aligns with my interests and current research. Collaborating with Dr. Bartholomew will help me evolve and learn about integrating the concepts through his pragmatic approach to research. Furthermore, Dr. Blake Allan's work on the intersectionality of work psychology, social justice, and positive psychology will provide me with the knowledge of applying positive psychology in different realms of life. Although Dr. Brittany Gundel is not accepting students for the Fall 2018, I look forward collaborating with her on future projects given her interest in understanding strength characteristics in clients and therapists. Working with Dr. Gundel in the future would assist me to develop strength-based interventions and apply them as a practitioner.

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As a scholar who is an advocate of human optimal functioning for people of diverse backgrounds, I feel that my research interests are in harmony with the research interests of Drs. Bartholomew, Allan, and Gundel. As you may have observed from the research I have completed, I am a good fit for your graduate program; I am motivated, therefore, to make positive contributions to your Counseling Psychology Program, and I look forward to a positive response from your selection committee.

## **Personal Statement**

My interest in Psychology stems from my involvement as a former gang affiliate from the inner cities of San Bernardino County, California. Gang experiences allowed me to refute the fallacy that withdrawing from organized crime was a linear process; instead, I developed insight into the spiral pathway many individuals endured. The police harassment, visits to various penitentiaries, and encounters with life-threatening situations were constant events that contributed to my disengagement from the delinquent lifestyle. What perplexed me the most was that I successfully seceded from criminal and gang activity, whereas my siblings and friends embedded themselves deeper despite the punitive punishments imposed on them for their behavior. My inquisitiveness to understand this difference led to my investigation of the psychological processes in gang desistance. To establish a foundation relevant to this phenomenon, I developed my McNair Scholar project to examine the unorthodox pathways of leaving a gang by investigating the usage of character strengths. Applying the theoretical framework of positive psychology in my investigation allowed me to examine the interplay of character strengths in marginalized communities. My experience with these communities impelled me to focus my research interests at a graduate program that would nurture my research in positive psychology through a cultural context. The rigorous training offered by the Counseling Psychology Program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) will prepare me to develop the needed foundation to pursue a tenure-track position at a land grant university. In a tenure-track position, my goals are to (a) conduct research on the intersection of Positive Psychology and psychotherapy, (b) develop school-based and individual-based interventions aimed for at-risk students to improve academic, behavioral, and socio-emotional skills, (c) and collaborate with underserved communities.

During my undergraduate years at Cal Poly Pomona, I have gained research experience by working on two projects. First, I assisted in Dr. Alejandro Morales' language brokering and career trajectory project, developing qualitative skills by analyzing interviews. Second, I continued strengthening my qualitative research skills by designing an exploratory study to identify the character strengths that facilitated the cessation of criminal and gang activity among Hispanic/Latino adults. As the lead investigator, I developed an interview protocol to use with seven participants that I recruited through a relationship I established with a local non-profit

organization in Downtown Los Angeles. I analyzed the data using thematic analysis. Preliminary findings revealed Forgiveness, Perseverance, Judgment, and Spirituality as common themes shared by the respondents that facilitated their gang desistance and the positive outcomes of their gang desistance. The study was one of ten projects from Cal Poly Pomona awarded the 2017 President's Kellogg Discovery Fellow, an award commemorating projects that exemplified research to create innovative solutions that help solve community problems. I also had the honor of presenting my preliminary findings in a poster session at the 2017 Western Psychological Association conference in Sacramento. I plan, moreover, to present my findings in a paper session at the 2018 Western Psychological Association conference in Portland, Oregon.

In addition, I have also gained quantitative skills by participating at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's (UNL) Summer Research Program. From a highly competitive group of applicants, I was one of 12 students from across the United States selected to conduct an independent project for the National Science Foundation Minority Health Disparities Initiative (Dr. Kirk Dombrowski, P.I.). My faculty mentor was Dr. Lorey Wheeler, a research professor at the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools. During my ten weeks at UNL, I engaged in an intensive two-week training on Social Network Analysis utilizing Pajek software. Moreover, I designed a study examining the role of peer-ego networks on educational outcomes in Mexican-origin youth utilizing the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health data set. While conducting the study, I learned how to create syntax and analyze multivariate variables. The findings revealed that peer-networks with a higher proportion of female friends had a higher GPA but lower aspirations to attend college for both male and female Mexican-Origin adolescents. However, female respondents with a high proportion of male friends had high aspirations to attend college but lower expectations. For male respondents, peer-networks with a high proportion of female friends had high aspirations to attend college, but lower expectations. The results of the project were showcased in a poster presentation at the 2017 Nebraska Research Symposium. Following the summer program, I maintained collaboration with Dr. Wheeler, and I am developing a project to examine individual, family, and school domains and their effects on educational outcomes in Mexican-origin youth. This study builds on the research completed in the summer program by examining if youngsters and the predictors of those educational outcomes amongst Mexican-Origin young adults are

reaching college expectations. I plan to present the results at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association in San Francisco, California.

Furthermore, I have had first-hand exposure on the application of positive psychology serving marginalized populations. As a lead student volunteer for the Prison Education Project (PEP), I assisted in designing and implementing a seven-week curriculum where I exposed student inmates to college preparation. The curriculum included “*Gratitude Thursdays*,” an exercise allowing the students to share about a person or event they were grateful for and explaining why. Students were also asked to name one self-perceived strength and how it can be used to accomplish their personal goal. I have incorporated similar activities for the at-risk youth of Pomona as a mentor for Just Us 4 Youth. During the positive affirmation activity, youth are asked to positively affirm a classmate in the circle of eight students by making eye contact and not using negative language.

After careful research of graduate programs in Counseling Psychology, I feel that the University of Nebraska-Lincoln will be an optimal environment for me to gain expertise in the intersections of Positive Psychology and Counseling Psychology. I am particularly interested in Dr. Michael J. Scheel’s research in positive psychology concepts related to psychotherapy. Furthermore, his ongoing research on hope and gratitude will provide me with opportunities to learn about theory and practical skills to develop interventions with underserved groups. Additionally, Dr. Scheel’s Building Bridges program is an opportunity for me to continue working with at-risk youth and extend my current research interest in character strengths. I am also interested in Dr. Elliot Tebbe’s research on factors that promote health and well-being. This research would strengthen my expertise in integrating protective factors in prevention and intervention programs aimed to reduce stigmatization in marginalized communities. The program’s field placement sites will afford me opportunities to gain clinical experiences working with underserved groups such as Latina(o) Spanish speaking clients and incarcerated inmates.

As an individual with intersecting and multiple identities, who is an advocate of human optimal functioning for people of diverse backgrounds, I feel that my research interests are in harmony with the research interests of Drs. Scheel and Tebbe. As you may have observed from the research I have completed at Cal Poly Pomona and at your institution, I am a good fit for your graduate program; I am motivated, therefore, to make positive contributions to your

Counseling Psychology Program, and I look forward to a positive response from your selection committee