

# Writing Personal Statements for Law School

The personal statement is your chance to **reflect** upon your life and show the law school admissions committee who you are as an **individual**.

Tell the Admissions Committee something about yourself, your experiences and your life. Use vivid, concise prose with the intent to draw readers in and keep them interested.

**A boring, flat essay can be the kiss of death.**

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There are **three** different essays to consider when applying to law school.

- **Personal statement**
- **Diversity statement**
- **Addendum**

Most law schools require a personal statement. Others may allow a diversity statement and/or an addendum. Submit **all** statements that apply to you.

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## Personal statement

Tell an interesting, informative story and *personal* story about yourself in 700-1400 words (double-spaced). Check the school's requirements for the exact word count or page limit.

**Share aspects of your life that are not apparent from your transcript(s), resume, or letters of recommendation.**

Here are some topics to consider. Brainstorm ideas and pick the **one** with the strongest story.

- Describe a personal challenge you faced and/or a hardship you overcame.
- Discuss your proudest personal achievement or a unique hobby that reveals who you are (climbing a mountain, inventing recipes, winning a contest, writing poems).
- Tell about how becoming consciously aware of a personal value or characteristic has changed the way you view yourself.
- Describe your passions and involvement in a project or pursuit and the ways in which it has contributed to your personal growth and goals. Do not rehash what is already on your resume.

Note: describing the event should only be about 1/3 of your essay. The rest should be a reflection on how it changed you and how it shaped the person you are today.

## Diversity statement

**We encourage ALL students to consciously mine through their upbringing to look for any and all aspects of diversity.**

Your values and attitudes have most certainly been affected by how and where you were raised. Tell us about how you grew up. Limit your diversity statement to one page, double-spaced. Check the law school's application for exact word count and/or page limit.

- If you grew up in a rural area, or even in a less-well-known city or suburb, you should describe it and how it shaped who you are today, especially if you are applying to school outside of your local area.
- If you are a member of an ethnic minority, you should always discuss your environment.
  - What was it like growing up in your family?
  - Was your neighborhood different from the surrounding neighborhoods?
  - If you grew up isolated from, or connected with, your culture, how did that make you feel?
  - How did it shape you as a person?
  - How did it affect your relationship with people from your own culture, then or now?
- No matter where you grew up, if you didn't fit in with the mainstream culture, it's worth discussing. In fact, the place where you were raised and your feelings about it are a great source for diversity statements.
- Describe the ways in which culture has had an impact on your life and what you have learned about yourself and society as a result. How has your own cultural history enriched and/or challenged you?

Culture may be defined broadly. Cultural understanding is often drawn from one's ethnic background, customs, values, immediate family, community, and/or social environment.

## Addendum

You must explain weaknesses (very low grades, especially in one's major or minor; leave(s) of absence from school; withdrawals from the entire quarter; criminal record or arrests; multiple LSAT scores if you have a good reason for why the scores are so different, etc.) in your application.

Keep it to one page for each addendum, double-spaced. Again, check the law school's requirements. When in doubt about whether you should or should not write an addendum, contact your prelaw adviser. In most cases, it's better to disclose.

## Tips to Remember

- You must understand yourself in order to be able to tell your personal story. It's important to take time for reflection and self-examination before and while you're writing your personal statement and/or addenda.
- Avoid using language that you think sounds sophisticated. You should be clear and concise, not verbose (i.e. flowery or pompous).
- Avoid clichés or overly common phrases. The cure for clichés is to DELETE them.
- Expect to have different length requirements for different schools.
- Expect to write at least 3 drafts or more.
- Proofread and spell-check **every** essay.

## Reviewing Your Personal Statement

- Have your draft reviewed by colleagues that will give you an honest and constructive opinion. We recommend choosing readers who **do not** know you well (not relatives, boy/girlfriends, close friends). That way your readers are similar to admissions officers, who also do not know you.
- Coach your readers before they read your statement. Ask your readers: do they feel that they know you, your personality and/or your values better after reading it? Ask them if this essay makes them want to meet you? Ask them if the essay is boring? Is it engaging? Does it hold their attention? Is it memorable? Is it authentic?
- Remember, your essay is supposed to be *personal*. The law school personal statement is not meant to be a statement of purpose, or about what kind of research you would conduct. It is not meant to be the kind of essay you would write for a Master's or PhD program.

## Acknowledgements

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All of the statements in this packet are real and were written by **real students at the University of Washington**. Their names were changed to protect their identities. Our deepest gratitude goes out to these individuals for sharing their stories and allowing us to use them to help other law school applicants.

Thanks also to Loretta DeLoggio of [www.deloggio.com](http://www.deloggio.com) who provided many helpful tips.

## Jamie's Personal Statement

(word count: 992)

It was 1992 when my father started suffering from severe alcoholism and depression for then-unclear reasons. Throughout much of my early teen years, I couldn't understand why he had to be so depressed. It seemed to me that he had just about everything one could wish for: a well-paying white collar job (though he eventually quit), a comfortable house, a car and a good family. My lack of understanding soon turned into feelings of frustration and growing hatred.

It wasn't until 1999, after almost eight years of living with these feelings, that my father finally revealed to me what had made him so depressed. He said that at some point in his life, it had hit him that what he had been doing for the last twenty years had yielded nothing meaningful. He had spent almost half of his life reading financial statements and graphs that few people cared about, and couldn't shake the thought that his life had been wasted and consumed.

After that day of revelation, my hatred toward my father gave way to feelings of sympathy. I no longer saw my father as a burden on my family, but as someone who struggled against the weight of his own disappointments. But it wasn't long before another feeling began to weigh heavily on my mind—fear. I feared that my life might be wasted too, that I would feel empty like my father if I failed to do something meaningful. That fear and sense of urgency drove me to search for a meaning in my own life.

My family immigrated to the United States from Korea in 2000 with hopes that my father would bounce back with a brand new start. In America, I saw that a lot of students participated in activities such as political campaigns and volunteering to change society. It was something that I had not seen in Korea, where everyone is expected to “fit in” and conform to social norms. I admired this passion of American students, and longed to be a part of it. After all, to me, they seemed to be doing something *meaningful*.

Nonetheless, I spent the first two years of college studying business, merely to meet people's strong expectations for me to be financially successful. During those two years, I managed to get good grades and took advantage of internship opportunities, but never found joy or excitement in my studies. Instead, I was often visited by the fear that I was walking the same path that my father had walked.

It was only during my junior year in college, when I came across two philosophy classes titled *Contemporary Moral Problems* and *Global Justice*, that I finally found direction in my search for meaning in my life. In those classes, we read and discussed fascinating topics, such as which ethical principles we might use to redistribute the wealth of the globe, or how we could stop potential genocides and ethnic cleansings. It was a surprising and strange experience to observe myself changing. When I found myself fervently arguing for one method of global distribution over the other, and voluntarily visiting a professor's office pursuing further questions, I wondered: “Where has this passion been hiding? What have I been doing all these years?”

Studying philosophy has guided me to find my own answer to the question, “What is a meaningful life?” I have realized that I am thirsty for intellectually stimulating experiences, and that I truly enjoy exploring possibilities for making positive changes in people's lives. I have also realized, more importantly, that there is lots of work to be done in the world—work that sometimes involves facing the dark side of reality, but that somebody has to step up and do.

When I read articles in Korean newspapers about horrific living conditions of North Korean refugees, or Korean “comfort women” going through legal battles against the Japanese government, I read them from a different perspective now. Instead of simply expressing pity, I look at the situations critically and think about what it would take to solve those issues. The fact that I have a genuine understanding of the

language and social conditions of Korea and other parts of Asia convinces me that I can contribute to solving these problems more than others.

Philosophy is fun, but I don't intend to spend the rest of my life discussing abstract ideas. I want to be able to produce tangible influences through my work, witness how these influences cause progress in people's lives, and find meaning in my life through experiences. Ideas alone cannot achieve this. But with the law, it is possible. I see the law as a powerful framework through which philosophical ideas can be manifested and applied in the real world to address different problems. At XXXXXX Law School, I hope to confront the problems of human rights violations and global redistributive justice that I learned from Contemporary Moral Problems and Global Justice classes, utilizing the practical power of the law. I am confident that XXXXXX Law School's unique Human Rights Internship Program and Human Rights Clinic will help me fulfill my desire to do more practical work on contemporary issues and build connections with international NGOs that will push my career forward in public international law.

My father now runs a small business in Seattle with my mother. He works from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day, 360 days a year. It is physically tiring, repetitive work, but he is not depressed anymore. These days he spends most of his spare time writing his reflections on literary pieces that he cherishes. He has confessed to me a few times, rather shyly, that one day he would like to publish what he has written. He seems to have found meaning in his life for which he was searching, and I am truly happy for him. I too have found my direction. I hope I will be able to tell my son a different life story from my father's when I am his age.

## Sam's Personal Statement

(word count: 818)

Instead of being happy and excited when my youngest brother, James, was born on Christmas Eve, I cried and cried because I thought that Santa would not bring me any presents if my family went to the hospital. 18 months later, I once again cried, but this time for a much different reason. I had inadvertently overheard that my little brother had been diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor. Even worse, the doctor had given him only two months to live. I simply could not fathom that my little brother could be gone so quickly, and I found myself repeating that two months was not nearly enough time for such an amazing little boy to live. In fact, I was so consumed by this whirlwind of thoughts and emotions, that I could not even think about how my brother's illness would completely change my own life. I would soon realize, however, that days of crying over Santa were long gone, and days of cancer, reality, and being a "big girl" had arrived.

Since time was of the essence, James's first brain surgery was scheduled immediately and he entered a hospital two hours away from our home the day after he was diagnosed. My parents wanted the lives of myself and my other brother, David, to remain as undisturbed as possible, so they arranged for us to live in our grandparents' home while they split their time between work and the hospital. In the strictest sense, by letting us stay in our school and our hometown, my parents did succeed in limiting the interruption upon our lives.

Living in our grandparents' home, however, was like living in an entirely new world. While I had always lived in a loving home where my mother and father doted on me, my grandparents were neither nurturing nor caring. For example, when David, who was five-years-old at the time, developed nightmares which led him to wet the bed at least once a week, my grandmother attempted to "fix" his bedwetting. She did this by waking him up, ripping the sheets off, making him smell his own urine and berating him about how wetting the bed made him a "baby." Seeing David's pain, I mimicked the actions of my own mother and took it upon myself to comfort him. I began walking him to school in the morning and home in the afternoon. I checked in with his teachers regarding his status, both academically and emotionally, and I helped him with his homework every night. Somehow, in my grandparents' home, I had transformed from a typical selfish eight-year-old child to my brother's surrogate mother.

Beyond mothering David, I changed in a multitude of other ways. I managed my time as wisely as possible, knowing that the last thing on my parents' minds was whether my homework was being completed. Since my grandmother was reluctant to do anything beyond providing basic care, if I wanted something, I learned I had to make it happen myself. I also gained a respect for money which most third graders do not encounter. I stopped wanting every "cool" thing I saw, as I had before, realizing that our medical bills had even further limited my family's meager income. Finally, when I realized just how incredibly tenuous my brother's health could be, I began to treasure not only every moment my family had together, but also every moment in my own life.

My brother's life has far exceeded the two months his doctors initially predicted. After seven years of surgeries, chemotherapy and other medical struggles, he has not only survived, but thrived for eight years since. While my brother's cancer may be gone, the effect which his disease had on me will remain forever.

I look back on this time and realize that it was then that I truly stopped being a child. My brother's illness caused a growth in maturity from which I can never retreat. Sometimes, I long to know what my life would have been like had I not been forced to become an eight-year-old adult. More often, however, I am grateful for the lessons I was able to learn at such a young age. Beyond the self-sufficiency, the nurturing instincts and the frugality which I developed during this time, I have learned to enjoy my life and the time which I have to live it. I do not make excuses if I fail, for I have always had the privilege of good health and a

good family. I am thankful for each of these blessings and I work hard with these things in mind. These are qualities which may have never developed had this horrible situation not occurred. For while two months is simply not enough time for an 18-month-old to experience all that life has to offer, it was certainly enough time for an eight-year-old to grow to a maturity level far beyond her years.

### **Sam's Diversity Statement**

(word count: 536)

Ask my friends and they will tell you that I am the "Coupon Queen." Most people brush off my penchant for deals as merely a quirk, assuming it is driven either by an innate cheapness or it has been forced upon me by my life as a college student. What most people do not realize, however, is that this trait has been with me since childhood.

While my parents are two of the most intelligent and hard-working individuals I have ever known, their lives have been incredibly difficult. Due to dysfunctional family situations, both of my parents moved out at the age of sixteen and have been working ever since. While they graduated high school, neither has attended a day of college. At the age of 19, their lives became even more complex when I was born. With the newfound responsibility of a child, my dad entered the highest paying field his qualifications allowed: manual labor. He worked nights, graveyard, weekends and overtime all so our family could survive. At one point, their persistence, strong work ethic and determination, allowed my parents to buy a small house in a low-income neighborhood in my hometown. However, this stability was short-lived. When my youngest brother was diagnosed with a "terminally malignant brain tumor," the seven years of medical treatments which followed brought my family right back to coupon-clipping, hand-me-downs and penny pinching.

Even though my parents have struggled to make ends meet for most of my life, I have rarely worried about these problems. My parents have never treated our financial difficulties as impossible hurdles, but instead, the approach them as challenges to be overcome by hard work. My mom introduced me to our struggles not by teaching me to agonize over our problems, but instead, by turning me into the coupon queen which I am today. Each week, we would make a "game" of finding the cheapest brands or the biggest coupons, and I had a feeling of great pride when I could make our money stretch further than it was supposed to.

In high school, with money still tight, I found a part time job to help contribute to our household. Having my own money was very empowering and I have not stopped working since. My parents' constant commitment to overcoming their financial problems has made me see how incredibly important a strong work ethic is to a successful life. Furthermore, seeing the lost opportunities and closed doors which my parents found from their lack of a college education, made me only want to work as hard as I could to not only be the first person in my family to attend college, but also to go even further and attend a respectable institution such as XXXXXX School of Law.

It is because of my family's struggles that I am proud to have the ability to earn my own money. It is also because of this history that I am proud that I attend a respected undergraduate university, and that I pay for it through an academic scholarship. Put simply, this difficult economic history is why I am proud of who I am today, including the fact that I take pride in being the Coupon Queen.

## Terry's Personal Statement

(word count: 956)

My mother tried to teach me the value of education by example. A single parent from the time I was three, she somehow managed to raise me, commute by bus to both of her minimum wage part-time jobs, and squeeze in the occasional class at the community college. We were barely making ends meet, yet one way or another, my mom found the resources, energy, and motivation to make education a priority. She hoped I would make education a priority in my life, too.

Steering me toward college, however, was an uphill battle. We lived on the Eastside of Tacoma, Washington, a high crime neighborhood where few had college on their radar. Even the teachers seemed to have given up on the unlikely prospect of getting us Eastside kids into college. It was the gang recruiters who energetically worked the high school, looking for candidates and showing off the spoils of membership. By the end of tenth grade, many of my friends had joined gangs, and I was teetering on the edge of becoming a full-fledged member. I began to lose sight of the future my mom wanted for me.

By this time, my mom had accepted a full-tuition scholarship to attend graduate school in Syracuse, NY, partly in hopes that if we moved there, I might turn my life around. Despite my 1.43 GPA, my gang leanings, and my unsavory friends, my mom and I retained a spark of hope I might someday go to college.

Yet Syracuse posed new problems. Unlike the Eastside, where the common thread of poverty tended to outweigh differences in race and ethnicity, racism in Syracuse was alive and kicking. The white, college-bound clique at my Syracuse high school referred to me as “Whigger XXX”—a contraction for “White Nigger XXX”—to distinguish me from the obviously college-bound kid named Terrance in my class. This epithet was chosen not because of my ethnicity (I’m Black and can pass for White), but rather because I appeared White and had Black friends. Their bigoted views supported my growing suspicion that college was not intended for people like me. College, it seemed, was for advantaged White kids to consolidate their power and preserve the unjust social order. Coupling this with my experiences growing up in Tacoma, I began to accept the self-defeating view that “the system” aims to ensure the failure of minorities.

My mom did what she could to defend the value of education, reminding me how foolish I was to let a handful of bigoted teens sabotage my college aspirations. Unfortunately, the “oil-and-water-don’t-mix” attitude wasn’t merely the product of immature high school kids. The Syracuse Police, for example, upheld “unofficial” segregation. In one case, two officers pulled me over after observing me pick up a Black friend in front of the low-income project building where he lived. The first thing the officers asked was, “Who’s got the cocaine?” They searched us, found nothing, and then, to our humiliation, handcuffed each of us to a tree in plain view of rush-hour motorists while they conducted a fruitless 45-minute search for drugs in my car. Before releasing us, the officer in charge explained that the reason he pulled me over was because “White people only go to [that] neighborhood to buy drugs.”

I was barely 18 years old, but had already lost hope in education, respect for the law, and faith in society. I dropped out of high school, moved back to Tacoma, and got a job loading semi-trucks on the graveyard shift. From then on, I sought only attainable pursuits: an apartment, a car with shiny wheels and a loud stereo, and personal trinkets. My friends and I made angry rap music to vent any rage against society the beer didn’t sop up.

In my early twenties, and in the course of rehashing my complaints against society, I began to question my attitude. I realized that by copping out on school, I internalized the stereotype that education is not for my kind and tacitly accepted the self-fulfilling notion that “the system” is both unjust and unchangeable. In effect, I was upholding precisely those social injustices I abhorred. I was not merely a victim



of socio-economic circumstance and racism. I was a culpable participant both in my own failure and in the failure of others like me. I finally understood the dire importance of getting an education.

Fueled by these realizations and the moral support of my wife-to-be, I went back to school. I earned my high school diploma at age 22 and started off on the pursuit of a college degree. It would be years, however, before I figured out how to add college successfully to my load of adult responsibilities. I found my groove at age 29. I quit my job, took out as many student loans as necessary to keep up with the mortgage, and embraced the challenges of my new role as stay-at-home dad, night student, and future law-school candidate.

I am convinced law school is a good match for me. I find that I thrive in challenging academic environments and take great pleasure in exploring the machinations of my mind. I love to analyze and write arguments, do research, and discuss the fine points of political philosophy and law with my professors and fellow students. Adding this with my desire to solve problems at a fundamental level and help other people, law school is a natural next step for me. I will bring maturity, determination, and compassion to both the classroom and the profession, and I will seek out opportunities to use my future legal knowledge and skills to address issues of social injustice. At age 34, I have finally come around to my mom's views about education.

### **Terry's Diversity Statement**

(word count: 325)

I was raised on the Eastside of Tacoma, Washington, above the Port of Tacoma and two major train yards. My mom struggled to feed and clothe us, but was determined to make the most of what we had. I'll never forget the time when all we had to eat was a bag of prunes. We referred to them euphemistically as 'dried plums' and made the meal fun by stewing them over a candle in a fondue pot.

Poverty excluded, my home life didn't look much like the home lives of my friends. My mom, an ex-hippy born to a Russian-Jewish father and a Spanish-Jewish mother, had radical political views and many gay and lesbian friends. She made up a voice for each character as we read our way through the best children's literature. My friends thought it was strange, if not downright suspicious, that we didn't have a car, and that my mom didn't let me watch television or eat meat or sugar.

To offset the alleged weirdness of my home life, I boasted about my dad's side of the family. I was proud that my grandfather, a Creole from New Orleans of Black, Seminole Indian and French descent, was a firefighter in Oakland, California's all Black division. On my grandmother's side of the family, also Creole from New Orleans, but of Black, Spanish, Choctaw, and Cherokee descent, was my great uncle, XXXX, who used his law degree to become XXXX's first Black mayor.

Although I now cherish my unconventional upbringing, it wasn't easy bearing the scarlet 'W'—for weirdness—as a third grader. I longed for Wonder Bread, Kool-Aid, and conformity. I even began to sign my name 'XXXX' XXXX on my assignments at school. Today, many of my childhood friends are dead, in prison, drug addicted, or simply lost in a cycle of dead-end employment and unemployment. My fate could have been the same. With gratitude and thankfulness, I apply for law school.

## Madison's Personal Statement

(word count: 800)

I believe I was eight years old when my fascination with disasters began. During the next five years I read book after book on the greatest tragedies to befall human kind. I kept newspaper clippings of such mishaps in a neatly organized series of manila envelopes. When a major disaster occurred and I was unable to obtain a newspaper, I would wait until garbage day and go rummaging through my neighbors' recycling bins to secure the missing article.

This is certainly not a normal interest for an eight year old. We all have a certain fascination with disasters. They remind us of our own mortality, teach us lessons to avoid befalling a similar fate, and help us to appreciate how special life really is. I am still not certain as to the origin of my interest in disasters, or the cause for its demise, but then again my life has been peppered with many unique interests of equally dubious origins and motivations.

At home in my desk drawer is a map book of the greater Seattle area. Sometime ago I found that the map, while superior to its competitors, had numerous inaccuracies and omissions. Since that time I have made hundreds of corrections, additions and updates to its pages. I travel to the site of the map section in question and survey the area with a pencil and a piece of paper. Using the information gathered I draw a true to scale correction with the same symbols and colors as the original map. Finally, I glue the correction to the original directly over the deficient area.

Please bear in mind that I generally consider it sacrilegious to write on or otherwise deface a map. There are over 1,000 maps in my collection, but fewer than twenty have been altered. The majority of these maps are common folded street maps. I would probably be unable to sell any of them for more than their value in recycled paper. I have maps of the one hundred most populous American cities, every state, Canadian province and country on earth. I have them neatly organized in a series of five boxes that I keep in my closet.

For nearly all of my formative years I was shy and lacked confidence. I generally avoided situations involving social interaction. I considered myself odd and out of touch with my perceived notions of normalcy. I was of course very secretive about my eccentric hobbies and habits, to which the preceding paragraphs are only an introduction. I simply assumed that people would reject me when they discovered their extent. A few years ago I would not have selected them as a topic for an essay used to determine my suitability for attending law school, but much has changed since then. I have transformed myself from a socially awkward introvert to a confident and outgoing person.

When I graduated from college in 2002 I decided that being a socially awkward introvert would prove to be a great detriment to my future. I believed that the best way to overcome this obstacle would be to take a job that required constant interaction with people from every level of the social strata. While being a security officer is not the most glorious position one could imagine, it has served my purposes well. The more I interacted with people the more confident, focused, and poised I became. I came to realize that, contrary to my previously held notions, most people found my interests and hobbies unique and stimulating. I am now more socially adept and comfortable with people. Ironically it was my interests and hobbies, which for the longest time colluded to deflate my confidence, that were largely responsible for this change. I have come to realize through the encouragement and recognition of others not only how unique of an individual that they have helped create, but also how beneficial the knowledge and skills that I have gained will prove in the future.

It is unlikely that I will be asked to recite the twenty worst airplane crashes or to report on the construction phases of a continuous truss bridge at anytime during the rest of my life. However, it is likely

that I will be asked to sift through large amounts of disparate data, isolating the relevant from the irrelevant. I will be required to find flaws and omissions in the work of others and then either to correct or exploit these weaknesses. I will come across situations where the available data cannot be neatly categorized, where exceptions will have to be made and ambiguities accepted. While the 28 years of my life have given me the skills to solve these, and many other types of problems, it was the last five that now allow me to do so with confidence.

### **Madison's Diversity Statement**

(word count: 388)

I come from a long line of entrepreneurs, blue collar workers and housewives. I am the first among my parents, grandparents and siblings to earn a bachelor's degree, and will be the first to attend graduate school.

Both of my grandfathers were entrepreneurs. My grandfather Irving began a small business installing, leasing and servicing vending machines in Los Angeles and was later joined by my father. My grandfather Jerome owned a small automobile repair shop in Santa Monica, California. My grandfathers never had more than a handful of employees and neither was a wealthy man, but both of their businesses afforded them a modest and comfortable life for their families. Both of my grandmothers, Jeanette and Peggy, were housewives who took on the equally difficult task of raising intelligent and skilled children.

In 1991 my father left the vending machine trade and moved our family 1,200 miles to Seattle. Once there he and my mother opened a small restaurant where they worked over twelve hours a day, six days a week to support the family. After five years they were physically exhausted and sold the restaurant for a very modest profit. My father then tried his hand at constructing a private home of his own design, but costs escalated, construction was delayed, and the housing market slowed. The result was financial ruin for my parents and the ultimate dissolution of their relationship.

My parents' modest income and financial resources, coupled with their lack of experience in higher education, meant that I was largely on my own in college. I paid for my tuition, books, supplies, transportation and food with a combination of loans issued in my own name and five years of near constant work. I graduated from an excellent school with a degree in two challenging majors, but I never felt as though I was a member of the campus community. I never had the time to take advantage of all that the university had to offer. I have come to realize how detrimental this has been to my social development. Hopefully, with my own experience and a strong career, I will be able to help guide my own children through college and to assist them financially, so that they will be able to reap as many of the benefits that college has to offer as possible.

## Delilah's Personal Statement

(word count: 711)

As I sat in the coffee shop attempting to decipher the difference between Plato's definition of art and Tolstoy's, I received a phone call from one of my roommates. I answered the call expecting to hear the typical, "Where are you? What are you doing?" Instead, my roommate exclaimed, "Delilah, come home! It's an emergency!" I rushed home and as I stormed through our apartment door, my roommates greeted me, "Mama Tillotson, thank goodness you are home! There is a huge spider in the hallway...go kill it." This was the emergency. My roommates could not walk down the hall because they were all afraid of the spider that was dangling from the ceiling. I, Mama Tillotson, was the only one willing and capable of killing the dangerous and incessant spider.

While for many a story such as this may seem strangely unique and even atypical, it has become commonplace in my everyday life. All my friends know me as Mama Tillotson, the responsible and efficient one. The one to turn to when directions are needed or the toilet is clogged. This ability to plunge a toilet, a skill I thought most possessed, has become one of my defining characteristics in an apartment full of squealing girls. What I have always considered common sense has turned into a respected and desired commodity. Along with my uncanny ability at navigating due to my acute attention to detail, I am the one my friends solicit advice from when it comes to money or they have a mysterious bump on their shoulder- as if I am an M.D.

It has been within the past three years, that I have become aware of why I choose to be the "mother" to all those around me. Aside from wanting to help, it is mostly derived from my desire to be included. As the third of four over-achieving and successful siblings, I always sought the attention of my parents. My family moved to Washington after my dad lost his job and, in the tradition of Japanese hospitality, my grandparents allowed us to stay in one of their homes rent-free. This meant no luxury vacations to bond over or the ability to participate in five extracurricular activities so that I might have the chance of excelling in one and impress my parents.

If I wanted quality time with my parents it meant doing mundane things with them. I spent time with them even if it included chopping wood and unclogging toilets with my dad, or folding laundry and paying the bills with my mom. These ended up being the moments I looked forward to after school each day, and unbeknownst to me, these moments were shaping who I would become. When I moved away to college and lived away from my parents, I realized that I took with me the nurturing qualities of my mother and the "Mr. Fix it" qualities of my father. These qualities paired with my inclination to help and be a leader manifested themselves into "Mama Tillotson."

Aside from allowing me to come to the rescue of my friends, the qualities that have made me Mama Tillotson have also driven me both academically and in my extracurricular activities. Even before college, signs of Mama Tillotson began to reveal themselves. I graduated from a high school where only 23% of the students go on to college. While many of my peers stayed in town, my need to excel and disposition to lead pushed me towards college. Once in college, the same characteristics impelled me to take on leadership roles as secretary for the campus prelaw club and senior editor for the undergraduate law review. The nurturing and practical qualities that I learned from my parents not only reincarnated themselves into Mama Tillotson but were translated into my success and leadership in college.

In many respects, the characteristics that have warranted the role of Mama Tillotson are the same characteristics that will help me succeed in law school. I am sure that knowing how to plunge a toilet will not guarantee my success in law school. However, I strongly believe my ability to face and address challenges with the confidence one learns from a diverse background will be my strength in law school and life.

## **Delilah's Diversity Statement**

(word count: 355)

At my high school being Japanese-American was not considered diverse or different. It seemed as if all my peers were from a mixed heritage; my high school was the prime example of America's melting pot. However, what was considered different was going to college. From my graduating class, only 23% of the students went on to receive a four-year degree.

In Spanaway, Washington most of the families are of a lower economic class. A large portion of the population is military based and growing up I got used to my friends moving away after two or three years. The administrators at my high school were more concerned with curtailing gang activity and getting students to graduate from high school than with college preparation. When you live in a town where going for a run takes you past hidden methamphetamines labs in the bushes, going to college is atypical.

Therefore, entering and being successful in college is completely attributed to my parents. My family moved to Spanaway after my dad lost his job in California and my grandparents allowed us to stay in one of their homes rent free. Like those in our community, my parents struggled to raise four children and make ends meet. We did not go on nice vacations, go out to eat, or wear name brand clothing. However, what our family lacked in material objects was compensated by my parent's unconditional love and lessons of perseverance. From a young age, my family and I volunteered at a local clothing bank, a clothing bank where we could have been the recipients. Through this, I learned the nature of giving back to the community even in one's own time of need.

My parents never allowed us to feel sorry for ourselves but rather showed us how to overcome barriers and learn from every obstacle we may face. Despite the town I lived in and the high school I attended, my parents made sure my siblings and I all went to college and succeeded. I know that their lessons of perseverance and the obstacles I have overcome will help me to succeed in law school.

## **Brenda's Personal Statement**

(word count: 976)

My heart pounding, I kept my eyes on the porter's stained white turban under my suitcase, bobbing further and further ahead of me in the crush of people squeezing through Delhi's Ajmeri Gate leading to the trains. The porter had just mentioned a train had arrived – I now realized that was a warning, not mere chitchat. Within seconds, we were in a sea of people, many of whom were pushing their way between the porter and me. Overwhelmed by the intensity, all I could do was breathe and keep my eyes on my suitcase, all the while thinking “Who could have imagined a nice Mormon girl would end up here?”

I am not living the life I expected to lead. Raised in a strong religious community with my life carefully mapped out for me, I expected to marry young, have a family, and spend my life caring for them. Unable to voice the inner disquiet I had felt in my teens, I silenced my reservations, married, and began to live that life. Friendships with people from backgrounds different from my own awakened in me a realization that there were other belief systems that were more compatible with my values. After years of personal searching I decided that to live with integrity I needed to leave my religious community. Pregnant with our second child and knowing church leaders might counsel my husband to divorce me, I made the decision to leave the religion without hesitation and without regrets. My husband made the same decision two years later.

As a Mormon mother I had not felt supported in pursuing an education and career, but immediately after leaving Mormonism I decided to return to school. This took several years to arrange, and during that time I discovered Bollywood, the Indian film industry adored around the world. After the first few movies, I was hooked. I could not get enough of the language and what the stories said about how Indians lived their lives. It was like a puzzle I was trying to put together without ever having seen the picture. I began to read Indian literature and history. I fell in love with Indian languages, particularly the Hindi I heard most often in the movies.

I returned to school, attending the University of Washington, which has an excellent Hindi program. The non-heritage class of first year Hindi was overbooked that year, and because of my exposure to the language through movies, I was moved to the heritage class. I had to work much harder than my classmates, who were accustomed to speaking Hindi, or a related language, at home. It was a wonderful opportunity. In that first year we wrote small plays and filmed them. From my classmates I learned of the difficulties and pleasures they experienced in navigating their Indian/Pakistani heritages with their American upbringings, from parental expectations about marriage and education to the joy of a good cricket match.

I became acutely aware that, unlike my classmates, I had never traveled abroad. Given our financial circumstances (my husband was starting a business) and our young children, travel had not been an option for me. I dreaded first days of class, because professors often asked each student to list the countries where they had lived and traveled. We *were* International Studies majors, after all. Embarrassed that I had never been outside North America, I felt as if my degree would not be valid until I had traveled abroad.

I longed to go to India, but the college-related language programs in India did not work for my schedule. However, my Hindi professor told me about a school in northern India that accepted students on their own time schedules. Although intimidated at the thought of traveling to India alone, I was even more afraid of not having the chance to go at all. So I gathered information and weeks after graduation, I was on a plane to India. I spent seven weeks there, studying Hindi and traveling in northern India.

I loved India beyond all reason and it challenged me in ways I never expected. Needing to speak a language I was more comfortable reading or listening to, I found myself stepping outside my comfort zone in other ways. Opening my mind to a different set of social relations between the sexes. Discovering the

practical skills needed to travel alone safely. Rethinking assumptions about people who participate in communal violence. Finding that it is, indeed, okay to walk past that huge cow on the road.

I learned important life lessons in India. Most important is that my experience in life will be what I make it. I pushed myself harder than my Hindi instructors expected and learned more as a result. Instead of reading only children's stories, I translated newspaper articles and discussed politics and social issues. I was richly rewarded by my increase in skills and understanding of India as my instructors discussed their lives and political opinions. This lesson has become a guiding star for me and reminds me to do more than I thought I could – whether that means actively searching for new responsibilities at work or donating more time to my volunteer commitments or making an extra effort to stay connected to friends and family.

In many ways it would have been easier and less painful for me to remain part of the community I was raised in. But I embrace my decision to leave. Without it, I would never have resolved to return to school, to study a language most people I knew have never heard of, or to overcome my fears of traveling alone to a new country and culture. Motivated by the personal growth resulting from my decision, I am ready for the rigors of law school training that will allow me to share my talents in the world in a meaningful way.

## **Gerry's Personal Statement**

(word count: 696)

I didn't realize it at the time, but neckerchiefs changed my life. When I was eight my mom insisted that I join the Cub Scouts. My natural shyness was quickly overcome and before I knew it I was singing songs and ruining pocketknives with all the other kids. At the time all of the mottos and slogans that I learned were just rituals that had to be performed before I could have fun with my friends. But the ideals that I was introduced to in Cub Scouts became the foundation of a moral core that I learned to draw on in the years ahead. At the end of elementary school this set of values became extremely important to me as my family fell apart.

When I was 10 my mother disappeared right before Christmas, leaving behind her three children. My father said that she ran off after a heated argument. The detective assigned to the case didn't see any signs of foul play and the local police decided not to use its limited resources to find her. But things weren't that simple. When my father started acting suspiciously the case was reopened. This time the FBI got involved and the extra attention spooked my father. He fled the country but was eventually arrested abroad. He was turned over to the FBI and in the ensuing trial he was convicted of murdering my mother.

This tore my family apart. By the time the trial was over my siblings and I were all in foster care. My older sister and I were fortunate enough to be placed in the same foster home, but our autistic baby brother was placed with a family two counties away. My new foster family wanted to give me some sense of normalcy, and when they found out that I had been a Scout they enrolled me in a local Boy Scout troop. Scouting became a second home for me, a safe space that was connected to better times and familiar surroundings. As I grew older I also became capable of acting on the organization's call to public service. The most rewarding time I spent was with an Explorer Search and Rescue post, a group whose primary purpose was to help local law enforcement search for missing persons. The rush I got out of participating in this program wasn't something that I fully understood at the time but I now count it as one of the most important experiences of my adolescence.

It was during this same time period that my home life started to deteriorate and I was moved into a new foster home. And even though I had a rough time with that family I had many advantages that other foster kids lacked. I lived in a community that really valued its public school system. I had counselors and teachers who never gave up on me and served as positive role models for me to emulate. The kindness that they showed me during my darkest hours was what made all of values that I learned as a Scout ring true. They taught me that duty and service are more than lines on a page.

It took a long time for me to accept this realization and I struggled with depression throughout college. Every fall my grades would plummet as old memories resurfaced. After my sophomore year I decided that enough was enough and I started working to right myself, but it wasn't until after I graduated from college that I started analyzing my strengths and figured out how I wanted to make a difference. I've always loved writing and logic puzzles. I've always had a competitive streak. I know what it feels like to lose something to crime and I know how much it means to be vindicated by the courts. I've also seen that system falters when you don't have the right people in the right places. That's why I'm interested in studying criminal law and becoming a prosecutor. I want to be able to help those who have lost something and I think that my experiences have given me the insight to be that right person in the right place.