Personal Statements / Cover Letters

For Academic Positions

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Session Outcomes

- What academic recruiters are looking for: *Focus on Motivation & Personal Attributes*

- An example covering letter – critical analysis

- Cover letter / Motivation Statement Top Tips

- Key elements of research statements
Applications for research positions (postdoctoral): what they might want from you?

Application criteria for some recently advertised positions:

- **UCL** – Online Application: Support Statement, academic CV, other supporting docs (optional)
- **KCL** – Two online forms, one with generic statement of interest.
- **Imperial** – Structured application form with ‘Statement in Support of Application’
- **Cambs** – Academic CV and cover sheet (biodata and referees info)
- **UC Berkeley, US** – CV only, and recommendation letters
Educational and/or Professional Qualifications
(E=Essential, i.e. a candidate must meet all essential criteria to be considered for selection. D=Desirable)

E.1 Good honours degree and PhD (or equivalent professional experience) in mathematics or statistics.

D.1 Eligibility or working towards eligibility for membership of the Higher Education Academy.

Experience

E.2 A body of published research in high quality publications demonstrating standards of excellence.

E.3 Teaching experience to enable the delivery of independent teaching, student support and research.

E.4 Experience of planning and organising own workload in order to ensure the delivery, development and assessment of taught teaching and research.

D.2 Be able to collaborate with colleagues on the implementation of assessment procedures.

D.3 Organisational and management skills to lead teams and carry out administrative activities.

D.4 Experience of supervising students.

D.5 Experience of knowledge exchange related activities.

Job Related Skills and Achievement

E.5 Research interests consistent with the strategic direction of the Department

E.6 Ability to work within an academic team environment and lead teams where required.

E.7 Ability to secure research funding, including experience of contributing to grant applications.

Personal Attributes

E.8 Excellent interpersonal and communication skills, with the ability to listen, engage and persuade, and to present complex information in an accessible way to a range of audiences.
Statements of Interest

KCL Application form: ‘state why you are interested in applying for the post, indicate how your skills, past achievements, qualifications, experience and personal qualities make you suited for this job and what contribution you would expect to make if appointed. Please list publications, grants and distinctions.

Imperial College, iRecruitment form ‘Please state why you believe you are a suitable candidate for this post, by explaining how you meet its requirements, and the experience you have which is relevant. Please give examples of particular achievements’.
Academic Survey:

From your experience, what personal attributes and qualities have you observed in PhD students who went on to have successful postdoctoral and/or academic careers after graduation?
Examples:

- Originality, imagination, clarity of thought, a strong sense of what is an important problem, and a broad view of the field, combined with ambition, determination, focus and a high degree of personal organisation.
- Enterprising in devising future research projects
- Self motivation, ability to work harder than they originally thought they could,
- Critical thought / resistance to routine and conventional wisdom
- Readiness to take on responsibilities
- Ambition; innovation, enterprise
- Intellect, drive to research, energy, communication skills
Key Attributes of Good Lectureship Candidates

Social Sci.

Physical Sci & Eng.

Arts & Humanities

Biological & Biomed.

T = Collaborative
C = Communicative
E = Enthusiastic
D = Driven
I = Ideas generator
M = People manager
Statements of Interest: What are your Unique Selling Points?

Imagine you are writing a cover letter or statement of interest / motivation for a research role in your field. What would be your USP’s?

What evidence do you have for the following:
- Self motivation / drive
- Innovation / creative thinking
- Can impact on research field
- You are collaborative & an excellent communicator
- Able to take on responsibility
The following example cover letter is part of an application for a postdoctoral position in the US. The position is mainly research focussed but some teaching and mentoring is required. We will examine key sections in turn.
My dissertation deals with the evaluation of fourteen child abuse prevention programmes in the London metropolitan area. Through my association with the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse, I have interviewed eighty mothers participating in various parent education programmes. From the qualitative data I gathered, as well as from quantitative data collected by the National Association, I am evaluating the efficacy of the programmes. In addition, the qualitative data have led me to challenge cultural assumptions about appropriate child rearing practices and to consider issues surrounding the mainstream definitions of child maltreatment. Since the populations I have studied are largely low income minorities, I am examining the role of social isolation on the family experience of these parents.

- Bit passive – sell more of the PhD project achievements e.g. papers, conferences
- OUTCOMES
- IMPACT
This work compliments your ongoing study on the impact of low income on educational attainment in immigrant communities in the United States. I also believe that the methodologies and approaches I developed during the case study collection phase of the project could be directly applied to the ongoing project directed by Dr Evan Poon in your department in relation to the effectiveness of parental education programmes in Southern California.

- How does it compliment?
- What will you contribute?
- Good to show ‘collegiality’ Too brief, again how can you specifically contribute?
- Who else in dept and externally could you work with

- More evidence needed showing research on target group & department
I have a range of other research interests. My supervisor and I have engaged in corporate and organization research for the past three years in collaboration with Dr Kerman at Birkbeck College, University of London. One article stemming from this work, “Leveraged Buyouts and Corporate Political Action” has recently been published in Social Sciences Quarterly, and which I presented as a paper at a recent conference on Corporate Social Responsibility held at The London School of Economics and Political Science. In addition, I have worked with Professor Martinez, at Queen Mary College, University of London on work for a master’s project on unplanned teen pregnancy, work which contributed to a publication in 2010 in Sociological Reviews. Recently, I independently conducted research on female drug addicts in rehabilitative programmes, a project which I eventually hope to address in a series of short papers.

- Good summary of USP’s
  • Research creativity & independence, Collaborative, Research output & impact
I have also had the opportunity to engage in teaching and mentoring, leading small classes in qualitative research methods for second year undergraduate students studying Sociology and providing day to day advice and guidance for a total of three undergraduate dissertation students. The anonymous reviews of my research methods class by the students have been consistently positive, citing in particular my teaching style and enthusiasm. I have also been an active participant of the Department’s academic planning and budget committee, to which only two graduate students are appointed each year.

In summary I believe that with my current and previous research experience and achievements, combined with my future goals as well as my previous departmental activities I would be an asset both to your own research team and the Department as a whole. I would very much welcome the opportunity to discuss this position with you further, and look forward to hearing from you.

- Good to mention teaching success

**THE STATEMENT OVERALL**

- Doesn’t say why they want job, what their career plans are
- Future research ideas? How do these fit with recruiters interests?
- Plans for future funding applications?
Statements of interest: some general advice

- Why you are interested in the position
- Why your background (teaching/research) is relevant, both to the position and the department. Sell your key attributes (USP’s) – think achievements
- How does the position fit with your career plan?.
- **What ideas do you have? (funding sources, teaching, research plan, collaboration) – could be separate research statement**
- How you can contribute to research group & department? (REF, collaborative work, admin tasks) – **Demonstrate in-depth research**
Research Proposals e.g. *Postdoctoral Fellowships*

- **Title**
- **Research Questions or Problems**
- **Aims and Objectives**
- **Research Context**

**Research Design and Methods and their justification**
- Project Management - plan of action (timescale)
- Planned Outputs (publications, electronic data, exhibitions…)

**Dissemination** (conferences, seminars, public lectures, podcasts…)

**Impact** (within and beyond the academic community)
Common Assessment criteria for research proposals

**Originality and importance**
- Potential contribution to knowledge
- Academic potential of the applicant

**Feasibility**
- Research design and methods
- Timescale
- (Appropriateness of collaborations)…

**Impact, outputs and dissemination**, incl.:
- Quality of the plans to develop knowledge exchange skills and the proposed activities to maximise the impact of the research, a clear strategy to build relationships and networks

- **Organisational support**
- **Demonstrable benefit to the applicant’s research career**
Personal feedback on your applications

Research Students

- Thirty minute appointments are available **Tuesdays** from 10 am - 12 noon and **Thursdays** 2 - 4:30 pm
- These are **bookable online** up to 7 days in advance using **MyUCLCareers**
- [www.ucl.ac.uk/careers/myuclcareers](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/careers/myuclcareers)

Research Staff

- Thirty minute appointments are available every **Monday**, 2 - 4 pm and **Wednesday** 10 - 11:30 am
- They can be booked in advance by phone on **020 7866 3600** or in person at UCL Careers.
am a novice at job-hunting and UCL Careers provided clear and encouraging advice."

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