



Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction

What's a Good Statement of Purpose?

Your application to the Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction requires you to submit a statement of purpose. We attach great importance to the statement. A thoughtful and well-written statement often makes the difference between admission and denial. But applicants frequently fail to do justice to themselves in statements of purpose. In what follows, I offer a few tips to help you to make your best effort.

Your statement should clearly have the purpose it's supposed to have.

That sounds too obvious to be worth saying, but many statements fail on this elementary criterion. The statement should be narrowly focused on convincing the intended reader – i.e., a professor at UNC Charlotte who teaches in the program to which you are applying – that you have a serious and well-considered purpose in applying to that program. For the Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction, the statement should clearly articulate your interest in a specific concentration. A compelling statement will convince the reader that you are the kind of student likely to thrive in the program, and more specifically the concentration, to which you are admitted and who would contribute to (and not merely benefit from) our academic community. Too often, statements of purpose are poorly focused, vaguely autobiographical essays, in which case they become inadvertent disclosures of purposelessness. Be very intentional in your writing to showcase not only your professional interests in one of the program concentrations but your academic passion for this specific pursuit.

A statement of purpose is not a narrative of your accomplishments.

The reader of your file will make a judgment about whether you merit admission on the basis of many considerations, and your file will include much material including your transcripts, what your referees say about you, and your curriculum vitae, that reveal your academic and other accomplishments. There is no harm in mentioning a particular accomplishment in passing in your statement when this is relevant to explaining your purpose in applying to the program and concentration. But statements go astray once the author assumes that the purpose is to persuade the reader that the author is highly qualified for admission. Remember that we will be quick to deny admission if we have insufficient evidence that the candidate is well-suited to the program by virtue of one's interests and ambitions, regardless of how intellectually well qualified the applicant

might be. The statement of purpose is usually the *only* part of the applicant's file where one can find strong evidence of whether the program and specific concentration will really mesh with the applicant's interests and ambitions. If you devote the statement to a list of the great things you have done, then you will merely exasperate the reader.

Your statement should be the right length.

The statement may vary in length but we recommend no more than two pages. Submitting something substantially longer is not to the applicant's benefit. Succinctness is a virtue in academic writing and a skill indicative of a future doctoral student. When your file is being read by members of the faculty, it will be read alongside many other files, and will typically be read under severe time constraints. People tend not to be especially tolerant of verbosity under these circumstances, to put it mildly. If your reader has evidence that you will take ten words to say something that another, equally qualified candidate will say in six, you might well find that the other candidate will be preferred over you.

Sometimes a statement can be overly concise by failing to give a sufficiently detailed account of the applicant's purpose in applying to the program. If your first draft of the statement is merely a page, then it is probably insufficiently detailed.

Make absolutely sure that your statement contains no misspellings, grammatical or factual errors, and that your prose is as lucid as you can possibly make it.

Your readers will reasonably expect that your statement is an example of your writing at its very best. After all, if you are really serious about applying to graduate school, then you will have devoted a lot of time to your statement, and what the reader sees is presumably the outcome of multiple drafts and prolonged effort. Poor writing and factual errors are very strong evidence that you are not yet ready for graduate school and in particular a doctoral program.

A statement of purpose for a doctoral program is different than one for a master's program.

A master's program is not inferior to a doctoral program; it is merely different. Therefore, it would be wrong to infer that the standards for a statement of purpose in an application to a doctoral program are higher than the standards applicable to master's applications. But the standards are certainly different. For example, in a statement of application to our M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction the statement of purpose might or might not specify a particular research topic that the student wishes to pursue in the program. The student might also be unsure about which particular social sciences would be the most important ones in his or her studies. Being unclear about these matters is not inappropriate when one is applying to a broadly focused master's program. But being unclear about them would certainly be a liability in a doctoral application. Academic programs are more intensively specialized at the doctoral level, and a corresponding degree of specialization and precision in the way applicants indicate their academic purposes is reasonably expected. Evidence of your familiarity with the educational research currently under way at Charlotte is probably a good thing to see in any statement of purpose in a doctoral application. It is extremely important to show that your interests converge closely with the

current research of faculty who work in the program and concentration to which you are applying. Other doctoral applicants will certainly do this, and if you don't, you will forfeit an important competitive advantage to them.

Your statement should be tailored to the concentration within the Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction to which you are applying.

Your statement of purpose should address why you are applying to *this* concentration. When reviewing applications, concentration coordinators are seeking to understand how the applicant's professional interests align with the aims of their concentration.

There are five concentrations available within the Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction program for Advanced Standing students:

1. Curriculum and Educator Development (CED) (includes Elementary Education)
2. Learning, Design, and Technology (LDT)
3. Literacy Education (oriented toward Reading Education, English Education, or Teaching English as a Second Language)
4. Mathematics Education
5. Urban Education

Each concentration offers specialization coursework in a specific area. Doctoral and dissertation research is also aligned with this area of expertise. Doctoral applicants should identify faculty with specific expertise in a concentration that might serve as a doctoral and research mentor.

Your statement should be tailored to the particular institution to which you are applying.

Your statement of purpose should address why you are applying to *this* institution. This particular information can be very helpful in consider if the applicant is familiar with the mission of UNC Charlotte. A student's application might be quite strong overall without making it clear to the reader why Charlotte in particular would be an excellent fit for the student, as opposed to some other institution to which one has applied. A statement of purpose can stand out by addressing that question directly and persuasively.