



Clarkson University Writing Center

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SAMPLE: Sophomore Personal Statement: McNair Scholars Summer Research Program

[Personal details relevant to McNair requirements lead to statement's theme: research goals]

For all of my life, my parents have called me “the kid with big dreams.” I had big aspirations, like going to college, and I wasn’t about to let anything get in the way. Neither of my parents attended college due to financial reasons. However, they always encouraged me to take advantage of a college education. And with their support, my big dreams and perseverance, I learned that college, indeed, was possible. Now my goal is to attain a PhD in either chemical or biomedical engineering and to work in a health field, possibly designing medical devices or researching and developing pharmaceuticals. No matter my position, I want to work in research and development.

[Previous experience allows writer to demonstrate skills.]

Last summer, at Carnegie Mellon University as part of their REU program funded by NSF, I worked in materials science and engineering under Professor David Sholl. Many environmental concerns suggest we should find alternative fuel sources. Pure hydrogen, which can be used in fuel cells, is one alternative fuel. My research, “Computational Modeling of Hydrogen Purification Through Metal Membranes,” studied different metal membranes that can be used to purify hydrogen; by studying the permeability of the alloys, I developed a model that selected certain structures that would best purify hydrogen. This research program was a valuable experience and allowed me to apply what I learned in the classroom to a real life situation.

[Details reveal personal strengths and shows grasp of professional ethics.]

My research at Carnegie Mellon shaped my work standards. Each morning I arrived to work early, joyfully anticipating the day’s work. I was driven, motivated, and excited about my project and my enthusiasm reflected this. There were many times when results were different than expected, but during these times I learned the most about persistence and honesty. For example, previous research hinted at the fact that PdAg alloys would have higher solubilities and diffusivities than PdCu and PdRh alloys; this also means that PdAg alloys would have higher permeabilities. At first, my results showed otherwise; instead of leaving it at this, I repeated the experiment a few times and achieved the same results. I had to accept these results, and explain in my final report some error in my model. It would have been easy to fabricate results but this would have been unethical. Results are results, no matter how good or bad they may be.

[Focuses on personal & research goals for summer program.]

By participating in Clarkson University's McNair Scholars Program, I hope to start on a project in chemical or biomedical engineering that I can continue with for my Honors Program thesis. Through solving difficult problems, I hope to grow as a critical, independent thinker. I also hope to become part of a team. No matter what career path I choose, being able to collaborate with others is a must. Each team member has different strengths, and a research project succeeds when all members' skills are used.

[Summary. Closure created with echoes of opening paragraph on perseverance.]

As C.S. Lewis once said, "Experience: the most brutal of teachers. But you learn, my God, do you learn." Through Clarkson's research experience, I hope to apply my knowledge of math and science, further develop my communication and teamwork skills, and work on a real life project that will prepare me for my future career in health science. No matter how hard it might be, I'm ready for the challenge.