

# Examples of Personal Statements

Prepared by the Admissions Office

University of Toronto Faculty of Law

The Faculty of Law is committed to assisting students to make the best possible applications to law school. Below you will find examples of personal statements that were submitted by successful applicants to the JD Program in 2013. Written consent was obtained from each student. To protect the confidentiality of each applicant, some identifying information has been removed. The statements may not appear in their original form as they were taken directly from the OLSAS system. The Admissions Office would like to thank our students for their willingness to support prospective law school applicants. We hope that you find these examples helpful in developing your own personal statements.

## **Personal Statement Example #1**

After I graduated high school, I had no idea what careers appealed to me. For my first two years of university, I searched for a calling, a class that would change my life and direct my studies. I enrolled in a wide variety of courses in a wide variety of departments. I learned about ethical relativism and general relativity (anthropology and astronomy), cubic functions and cubism (calculus and art history), similes and syllogisms (English and logic), p-tests and p-zombies (statistics and philosophy), brain structure and post-structuralism (psychology and politics) and much more. These classes taught me a lot about the world but the most valuable things I learned were about myself. I won't leave you in suspense; no one class transformed my life. And what I have come to realize is that no class likely ever will. Instead I learned that I have a set of skills and passions that make a career in law the right choice for me.

I learned that I enjoy the rigorous thinking of math and statistics but that the world is rarely so black and white. This influenced my decision to pursue economics, my undergraduate major. I love economics because it blends abstract theory with real world applications. For every mathematical model I have studied, I have also learned how to apply this model for positive changes in the environment, healthcare, developing countries, and domestic policy. Similarly, law requires a certain type of abstract thought while still being firmly rooted in reality. It is challenging, but knowledge and understanding of the law can be a valuable tool in facilitating positive change. My education has also taught me to look at problems from multiple perspectives, a skill I started developing in high school. A big part of my life in high school was competitive debating. I competed and ranked highly in numerous tournaments on the regional, provincial, national, and international levels. I twice represented Canada at the World Individuals Public Speaking and Debating Championship. These experiences taught me to see both sides of an issue, think critically, speak confidently, and to differentiate a strong argument from strong rhetoric. This year I am assisting several first-year university students in reviving my university's competitive debating society.

My time in undergraduate schooling has also taught me that I love to learn. I currently hold a near-perfect GPA but this is not because of an innate intelligence or grade-fixation. I attribute my academic success far more to hard work and a love of learning. From what I have heard, law school can be a very difficult experience without these attributes. The last thing that I have learnt over the past four years is what gives me a sense of fulfillment. Every summer since 2008 I have taken out canoe trips in northern Ontario, ranging in length from one night to four weeks. I find these trips inspiring and especially rewarding. I have led trips for inner-city youth, youth with type I diabetes, and at a camp for burn survivors. Some came from disadvantaged backgrounds and some were facing major challenges in their lives. Some were strong and fit and others really struggled with the daily routine of paddling, portaging, and cooking over a fire. For me the challenge was to make the trip a fulfilling experience for all of them, and accomplishing this challenge was what motivated me. There is no better feeling than finishing a long day, lying down in your tent and thinking wow, we really did a lot of good today. I want to get the same feeling from my career.

Deciding on a career has not been a straightforward process for me. But the self-knowledge I have gained over the last four years makes it clear to me that law is the right choice. Economics has given me a deeper understanding of the world and my place in it, but understanding is not enough. I want to improve the systems that directly effect people's daily lives, specifically through work in domestic public policy.

This may sound naive. Many people have left university with this dream only to be knocked in the teeth by reality. And I am prepared for this. I may not be able to facilitate all the change I would like, but if I am able to lie down at the end of the day and say wow, we really did a lot of good today, I know that I will be satisfied. I believe that an education in law is an extremely useful tool in making this dream happen.

I want to attend The University of Toronto because it has an unparalleled reputation in terms of the quality of students, faculty, and education. Law students at U of T do not need to wait until graduation to start having a positive impact on their community. They do so through various legal clinics and pro bono work. Their commitment to the local and global community makes this university my top choice among law schools. Please consider me for admission.

### **Personal Statement Example #1 (Optional Essay)**

Throughout my time in high school, I was involved in a lot of extracurricular activities. When I graduated I earned the Gold Medal for the graduate who best combines academic achievement with overall contribution to school life. I twice represented my class on student council, co-edited my high school newspaper, peer-tutored, and played on numerous sports teams. I continue many of these activities today. However my favorite extra-curricular activity was always debating.

My school was lucky enough to have a teacher who cared deeply about debating. Her name was Linda Martin, and she had a profound impact on my life. I still remember the first time I debated in front of her. It was in the 5th grade, and she had come to our classroom to introduce us to debating. She asked for eight volunteers to take part in a debate. The topic: This House Prefers Baths to Showers. I was on team bath and, as a shy student, I remember being incredibly nervous as we huddled in the hallway and brainstormed reasons why baths are better than showers. The actual speaking part is a bit of a blur in my memory. I was probably in front of the class for less than 30 seconds, but in my mind it was much longer and quite painful. I didn't debate again until I was in high school, when I was reunited with Mrs. Martin in an elective debating class. The topic was about funding our local zoo, and this time I was given several weeks to prepare my arguments, something I much preferred. Instead of being nervous, I was excited to show off my skills in front of my classmates.

As my high school years went on, I continued to debate. I went from being shy and nervous in front of an audience, to confidently delivering arguments on a wide variety of topics. In addition to learning how to talk, I learned how to listen. I keenly followed the arguments of my opponents, searching for flawed logic or questionable assumptions. And these skills paid off. In the ninth grade I started winning various Manitoba debating tournaments at the Junior level. I went to Toronto twice, placing third in the Hart House North American Debating Championships, and first in the Canadian Junior National Debate Championships.

Through grades 10, 11, and 12, I continued to improve and gain confidence. All three years I qualified for, and ranked highly in, the Canwest National Speaking Tournament. In 11th grade I represented Canada at the World Individuals Public Speaking Championship in Backnang and Winnenden, Germany. There I made the finals in three out of the four events and placed thirteenth overall. In 12th grade I placed 10th overall at the International Independent Schools Public Speaking competition, and again represented Canada at the World Individuals, this time in Reading, England.

On a personal level, these competitions helped me make friends all over the world, improved my confidence, and instilled in me a love of international travel. On an intellectual level, they exposed me to a wide variety of topics I would otherwise have never considered. I learned to think critically and examine an issue from multiple perspectives. I loved working past the rhetoric in my opponent's speeches and pointing out flaws in their arguments. Sometimes I was given many months to prepare a topic, and sometimes I was only given two minutes. Whichever the case, I always had to be creative in developing and articulating my arguments.

Since high school, I have focused on other pursuits. However I still volunteer regularly as a debate coach or judge. This year I am assisting several first year university students in reviving my university's competitive debating society. I owe a tremendous amount to Linda Martin for making my debating experiences possible. The lessons I learned from her will stay with me forever. When I reflect on myself as a nervous and confused fifth-grader, I am amazed at how much debating has changed me. I know that there is much more to being a lawyer than just arguing, but I believe that many of the skills I attained through debating will contribute to my success in law school and a legal career.

## **Personal Statement Example #2**

Home for me is the small, picturesque city of Victoria, British Columbia. Growing up, my relative liberty and affluence were largely unapparent to me. My concepts of inequality and injustice informed by trivial unfairness such as when my twin sister received the larger slice of cake. Despite my comfortable upbringing, I possessed, from very early on, a strong curiosity and eagerness to understand the people and the world around me. This happened at first through language, later through travel, and today in my current work as a youth education advocate for refugees.

From childhood I evolved from an exclusive twin talker, to an English-speaking chatterbox, to a fluent French speaker and dabbler in Spanish, Latin, and Bulgarian. As an undergraduate majoring in French and Linguistics, I was thrilled to explore the bilingual nature of my Canadian identity and to be able to engage with an increasing number of people globally. Throughout my studies, I worked with international ESL students, further nourishing my cultural and linguistic curiosities, as well as the nascent teacher in me, who was to mature further as I took on roles as a private French tutor and university tutorial instructor. Additional time spent volunteering at a local immigrant and refugee centre allowed me to better comprehend the depths of diversity and adversity, justice and injustice, in my own community and the world. These experiences, compounded by my natural curiosity, inspired me to undertake more global pursuits upon graduating, first as an international humanitarian volunteer in Senegal, and then as an NGO staffer in Mexico, Ghana, and Fiji in the years to follow.

My post-graduate travels and professional work not only helped consolidate my undergraduate experiences, but also led to great personal and professional growth as a teacher, student, advocate, collaborator, manager, and leader. These experiences on the ground served as an invaluable contribution to my evolving understanding of equality, justice and their counterparts and both fuelled and fed my innate curiosity in ways not possible in a classroom. Whether listening to the stories of hardship of urban families in Guadalajara, establishing unique educational programming in rural Fiji, or monitoring teams documenting human rights abuses in Ghana, I was reminded again and again that justice is not a given, and that strong advocates are needed to help give voice and strength to those who are so often silenced or ignored.

Importantly, these years abroad served as my initial exposure to international human rights in context and eventually inspired my pursuit of a Masters degree. Balancing the demanding schedule of graduate school and part time work, conducting in-depth education and policy research, participating in rigorous debate, and interacting with strong and diverse ideological and political viewpoints were all challenging but enriching experiences. These challenges colluded over a short 16-month period to strengthen my own values and beliefs, ultimately solidifying my decision to pursue a legal education and career.

My experiences since graduate school as a human rights worker, leadership and problem solving instructor for young women, and education advocate for refugee families have further reinforced my beliefs in the importance of human rights and education, the potential of the law to protect and strengthen these institutions, and my desire to act as an empathetic, socially conscious advocate in these contexts through a legal career.

While small, idyllic Victoria will always be home, my notions of justice and equality originally born there have evolved greatly over the years. Victoria serves as a symbol and reminder of my unearned privilege, a privilege that continues to motivate me to advocate for justice and equality for others less fortunately situated. But it is further afield, across Canada and abroad, where I hope to apply a legal education in the field of international human rights law, a field in which the University of Toronto's Faculty of Law would train me distinctively through its International Human Rights Program, clinic opportunities, and global internship options.

My personal and professional experiences as an academic, teacher, expatriate, mentor, and leader have equipped me with the initiative, passion, competency, and commitment necessary to succeed in law school. I believe strongly that a University of Toronto legal education in particular, with its rich course offerings, distinguished and supportive faculty and ideal location will equip me with the additional tools and resources necessary to pursue my professional goals. But most importantly, a University of Toronto legal education will formally and uniquely prepare me to help others effectively seek and find justice in the truest and fullest sense of the word.

### **Personal Statement #2 (Optional Essay)**

There are several goals that I hope to achieve upon successfully completing my JD. After completing a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree, supplemented by four years of international experience between the two, I have developed a refined set of personal, academic and professional goals. However, I feel that achieving these goals will be more effectively facilitated using the tools acquired through a legal education. Essentially, I know what I want to do but am unable to take on the desired roles with my current qualifications. A JD will rectify this by providing me with invaluable tools, knowledge and experience integral to the achievement of my professional aims outlined below.

Throughout my graduate studies, I further developed my existing interest in women's issues and feminism. Through in-depth research on women's rights, girl's education, and related issues both in local and global contexts I found the niche where I now hope to carve out a legal career for myself. My main interest is in the field of sexual and reproductive health rights within the context of international human rights and law. I ideally wish to pursue course and clinic work through the University of Toronto's International Human Rights Program as well as participate in the IHRP internship opportunities overseas in order to gain the skills and experience necessary to pursue a career in the field.

I have a specific interest in exploring access to safe and legal abortion in sub-Saharan Africa as well as investigating the impact of reproductive health-related legislation on local communities and on health outcomes. I feel strongly that an international human rights internship abroad as a part of my JD education would provide me with an unparalleled opportunity to gain hands-on research, advocacy and other legal experience that would undoubtedly serve me throughout my legal career.

I have specific career interest in getting involved with the work of the Center for Reproductive Rights in New York, NY (for whose board Professor Rebecca Cook serves as Chair) and/or related organizations. I am thrilled at the prospect of having the opportunity to work with and learn from Professor Cook at the University of Toronto, specifically through the International Human Rights Program.

In fact, I consider much of her research and work as major contributing factors that motivated me to pursue my particular field of interest in Law. While I do hope to gain substantial international practical experience both while pursuing my JD and in my legal career, I would also like to contribute to the legal community, particularly in the domain of women's rights, at home in Canada. Both during my studies and upon completion of my JD I hope to be involved in local public interest work and advocating for women's rights, immigrant and refugee rights, etc.

One example of a Toronto-based organization that I am keen to work with is the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). This sort of context is ideal to me as it conducts both domestic and international work in the field of women's rights. As an avid academic writer I am also keen to make contributions to the University's student journals, particularly the U of T Journal of Law and Equality, as well as to continue publishing legal pieces upon graduation. The Faculty of Laws Women's Human Rights Resources Programme also represents a significant draw for me to the program and would surely provide me with key tools down the line in the field I hope to work in.

I am extremely excited about the opportunity to pursue my JD and at the University of Toronto in particular. The Faculty of Law's specific resources, programs, clinics, and internships fit perfectly with what I hope to get out of a legal education and the work of several faculty members resonates deeply with my own personal interests and career goals. I would be humbled and thrilled to work with not only the schools prestigious faculty but also its diverse student body. I believe that the privilege of attending law school and pursuing a legal career will best allow me to share my vision of justice with others and advocate for those whose voices are not heard.

### **Personal Statement Example #3**

I would like to use this space to provide contextual information that will assist the Admissions Committee in evaluating my application. I was born in Manitoba but moved with my parents to the Northwest Territories (Nunavut) in 1993 at the age of 11. I consider myself to be both a Northerner and Manitoban as I am currently a resident of Manitoba. While the high cost of living and geographical remoteness of our remote Arctic village had meant that life was often difficult, it was also very rewarding. In retrospect I do not feel as though I was disadvantaged by my unusual childhood, where dogsledding was a favourite pastime. Instead I believe strongly that Northerners make an important contribution to a diverse Canada; especially with respect to advancing the cause of environmental protection.

As I indicated on my form I am a proud descendent of an original Red River Metis family. My family's oral history tells of our participation in the resistance and of our role in the burial of Louis Riel. My family had experienced first-hand the negative health consequences caused by social and economic marginalization, however my great-grandmother's stories have proven to be an inspiration to me. What I recall of her is that in spite of the bitter suffering and neglect she endured in her life she was always cheerful. Rather than dwell on the difficulties, she loved to tell of how our family was close friends of the Riel family and how we received his remains after his death.

In death as in life, her grandfather had trimmed his hair. Riel's internment in the St. Boniface cemetery was only a few city blocks away from where he ran a smithing business and water mill. Riel often took shelter at their family home, especially when he fell ill. The memory of Riel's innocence and their sadness over his death was poignantly remembered with astonishing clarity a hundred years after the event occurred. Being given this history was a major rite of passage for me and I am happy to share it with you.

By retelling her story, what I wish to communicate is that to be Metis is to be an heir of a culture, and it is to be in a sense a bearer of a family memory. Although our history is tragic at times, we have many inspirational Canadians to be proud of who have defended the rights of the disenfranchised and strengthen the rights of all citizens. I believe that Riel's fight to achieve practical results for the Metis is a cornerstone of Canadian legal history as well as our own history.

In a much smaller way I too have sought to achieve practical results for indigenous people. In the year 2000 I was honoured to receive a Millennium Scholarship Excellence Scholarship awarded on the basis of academic ability and proven community leadership skills. It was a great honour to have received a national award, but I believe that it has given me an even greater responsibility to continue working to improve the lives of Canadians and especially of indigenous people. If I am given the opportunity to study at the University of Toronto, I will continue to find ways to achieve practical results for indigenous people that will only strengthen the fabric of our diverse society. One way I would like to do this is by working to provide affordable legal services to people in remote arctic communities to help reduce the barrier to adequate legal representation that exists there. I see great potential for intellectual growth, challenge and the cultivation of leadership qualities in the Faculty of Law at the University of Toronto, and I hope that you see this potential in me.



## **Personal Statement Example #4**

The doors of the subway closed before our eyes, separating us. It was only my mother and I. My father and my three-year-old sister were now on the train without us. It was our second day in Canada, without a word of English, or even a dollar in her pocket, my mother decided we had no option but to sit and wait where we were, hoping my father would come back for us quickly. I recognize this moment as the epiphany of the struggle of many new immigrants, just the first of many obstacles to be faced living a life diaspora, wherein the notion of home would be unclear. The feeling of helplessness and confusion that one is overcome with in an unfamiliar country would be the defining feature of my parents' struggle to adapt and give us a better life filled with opportunities, one they did not have. This struggle has been both a source of inspiration and curiosity throughout my life.

I was six years old when we immigrated to Canada, but over my lifetime my family and I have visited Iran several times, as nearly all of my relatives still live there. These trips reminded me of the life of restriction, and limited opportunities I would have been subject to as a woman in Iran. Freedom of speech, religion, and association, do not exist in Iran. In fact you are imprisoned, or worse if you speak up against the government. Each trip I was forced to endure a fraction of the social injustices that occur in Iran on a daily basis. In fear of being detained by the Basiji Militia, I experienced first-hand how it feels to be told how to dress, behave, and who to interact with. The reminder of the life I would have had engendered in me a sense of purpose to ensure that such social injustices do not occur in Canada.

The stark contrast in the rights afforded to citizens in Iran and Canada is what sparked my interest in the law. Naturally, when I learned about the law I grew to appreciate the law and democratic ideals that our legal system affords us and have been passionate about the law ever since. My Criminology studies further solidified my desire to be a lawyer. I was enamoured by the objectives and central tenets of the justice system, as well as the centrality of the system to the functioning of society. Additionally, by examining specific landmark cases such as *R v. Lavallee* [1990], I was able to appreciate the organic nature of the law. Surely I learned of the negative aspects of the justice system as well, such as the overrepresentation of minority populations in prisons, or the treatment of Aboriginal peoples throughout the justice system. Even so, this was a source of inspiration; I was inspired to be part of the change towards a more equitable justice system. My undergraduate studies have taught me to take an interdisciplinary approach to every issue, to dedicate the time to research the relevant issue thoroughly, and to critically analyze it in order to prepare an argument based upon facts.

It is also important to note the role my non-academic work has played in my life. My parents' degrees from Iran were not recognized here, which is why we have always struggled financially. As a result, I provided for my sister and myself by working as a salesperson, while at the same time, at my father's Immigration Consulting Office, without pay. Working twenty to thirty hours in a commission-driven sales environment, as well as an Immigration Office, while being dedicated to my academics, was exhausting. This had an adverse effect on my grades in my first two years, and led to a lesser course load in my second year.

Fortunately, I was able to find a balance between my academic goals and non-academic responsibilities, and thus achieve grades more representative of my ability in following years. Nevertheless I am proud to say I was able to persevere and graduate Magna Cum Laude and on the Deans Honour Roll.

I have grown and accomplished a lot since that unlucky day at the subway station. I believe that law is a central facet to the functioning of society. It can affect the whole of society by either solidifying the beliefs of citizens in the form of a law against a certain act, or prompting a cohesive response against particular aspects of the law, inaugurating its change. I wish to be a part of such a change. My interests, as a result of my experiences, lay in the protection of human rights. I aspire to play a role in ensuring that everyone is treated equally both within the justice system, and throughout society, firstly, in Canada, and eventually on an international scale.

I believe that my firsthand experience growing up in a developing country, the passion that I have for law, as well as my fluency in English and Farsi, make me uniquely suited to fulfilling this aspiration. As a minority and an immigrant, as an Iranian and a Canadian woman, my experiences have provided me with a unique lens, which I am confident I will carry through to the University of Toronto, and the legal profession as a whole.

## **Personal Statement Example #5**

Why me? I was so surprised when they announced my name as the winner of the \$25,000 top-graduating award given at the University of Toronto Faculty of Music. This award was intended to be given to one graduating student in all levels of studies at the faculty who is deemed to make the biggest contribution to the field of music. There were other outstanding students at the faculty who were just as qualified. My face blushes at the thought of that, but a brisk conversation on convocation day with a juror revealed to me that they emphasized public service through leadership in music. My experiences reflected well in that light. As the concertmaster of all eight orchestras I have ever participated in, including the acclaimed Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra and University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra, I negotiated terms and concerns on behalf of the orchestra with management and conductors, mediated among guest artists and resolved conflicts among members and coaches. We brought live music to rural Quebec, hosted workshops in Toronto to kids who are denied access to musical education, and even played side-by-side with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra to attract new generations of young listeners.

On my own initiative, I organized my string quartet to play at places where live music was otherwise unavailable such as Sick Kids Hospital and various retirement homes. I have been featured on recording of important Canadian pieces for CBC Radio and Canadian Music Centre archives in the collective effort of promoting Canadian music and heritage by these prestigious organizations. The celebrated Esprit Orchestra has also hired me as a faculty assistant in their outreach project aimed to decrease gang violence at inner-city schools. I taught a group of troubled teenagers to express and release their sorrow and anger through composing music using graphic notation, which required no musical knowledge. In addition, it was important for me to retain my mother tongue through serving my ethnic community. Whether it was pulling resources together for the Sichuan Earthquake Relief concert, or organizing performances for the annual benefit concerts for UNICEF Canada through U of T Chinese Magazine, my proficiency in reading, writing and oral communication in Chinese has been an asset appreciated on many occasions.

It was through this award that I promised myself to do more for the music industry. The Faculty of Music had faith that I would be the individual who could bring change and positive impact to the field. Thus I was determined to show determination and commitment to the ones who trusted me. It was not long till I found out how I am going to make this contribution. My experiences have bolstered my confidence in my ability to organize, crisis-solve, and lead skills I aspire to further develop in the field of law.

My extensive work experience in the music world has enabled me to gain an insider's perspective about the operations and challenges that go on behind every production. My understanding of an entertainment lawyer's job include reviewing contracts offered by record labels and film studios, drafting contracts for tour crew labour agreements, royalty agreements, equipment and venue rentals, and protecting artist from copyright infringement.

All of these tasks not only require the lawyer to hold a firm grasp in legal areas like intellectual property, contract law and labour law, but perhaps more noteworthy is the lawyer's ample knowledge of how the entertainment industry works. In many instances, entertainment lawyers become acting agents because they inevitably shape an artist's career when they identify pitfalls in business deals for artists, inform them of the performance rights they have, and which types of contacts to choose.

This could mean filing a suit over lifted music from copyrighted album, negotiating labour terms in contract with unions, ensuring that a stuntman is entitled to adequate medical coverage, or acquiring the rights to use music or lyrics that other artists have written while complying with copyright laws.

The music industry is in dire need of lawyers who can not only bring in the legal expertise necessary to protect and advance the client's career but can also comprehend their point of view at a profound level. I have met many talents who lacked administrative skill to shield themselves from legal troubles such as infringement of copyright. Thus, with my prolific connections and experience in the arts world, I believe I am in a fitting position to take on this job. I see myself combining the knowledge I accumulated in the arts and my legal expertise with the advantage of my bilingualism to further the careers of fellow artists. I envision myself not as a legal genius or a hotshot litigator, but rather as an unconventional lawyer with a unique perspective that can only be derived from my background and experiences. Compared to other countries such as China, where their lawyers came from a unified background with an undergraduate degree in law, the selection process that the Canadian legal system employs is bound to produce a much more dynamic pool of lawyers: lawyers with extensive knowledge of math, of music, and so on. I yearn to add to this exciting diverse pool of talents, extending myself beyond the glamour of concert halls and finding a niche where music and law intersect.

