

**Personal Statement – 500 words**

How have your **background and life experiences**, including cultural, geographical, financial, educational, citizenship status or other opportunities or challenges, **motivated your decision to pursue a graduate degree at the University of Michigan?**

I pondered how these accomplished professors decorated with PhDs, numerous publications, and years of research experience navigated the academic world from the point in time I write this now. With each passing year, I have explored not only my research interests in the fields of biochemistry and cellular biology, but also the journey that led my research mentors to their current positions. Conversations with my mentors revealed that they were not always the impressive figures they are today. Each of them had their own successes and failures that directed their careers, sometimes in directions unforeseen. As a neuroscience major, it was a disconcerting experience when I realized that I didn't want to continue working on behavioral neuroscience, even though my fervor to study science remained. Accepting the uncertainty that lies in the future has provided me with the perspective necessary to grow from each of my research experiences and find my own path. I found myself drawn to cellular biology and biochemistry, fields I've explored through opportunities at the University of Michigan and UCSF. Working full-time in these labs has shaped my development as a young scientist by introducing me to different lab techniques as well as teaching me how to think critically about research. The excitement I feel while exploring biological problems in hopes of contributing to a growing body of knowledge compels me to pursue a PhD in Cellular and Molecular Biology at the University of Michigan.

My decision to pursue a PhD has been influenced by the mentors I've worked with thus far. Dr. Jennifer Britton was my first research mentor and the person who helped me start thinking about research problems critically. Over two years, I learned how to identify the purpose of distinct components in our research studies and how to internalize knowledge from articles in order to better understand research in our field. Dr. Britton also encouraged me to explore different fields after I explained to her my growing interest in cellular biology. Her desire to teach helped me develop skills as a researcher, and her encouragement to explore other interests allowed me to identify cellular biology as my field of interest. My interactions with Dr. Robert Fuller inspired my curiosity about cellular biology. Over the summer, I read several articles on the mechanisms of vesicular trafficking in chorea acanthocytosis. I'd explain my readings to Dr. Fuller and we'd apply concepts from the readings to my project. These conversations would sometimes go on for hours as we bounced ideas off one another and traveled further down the rabbit hole of literature. Working with Dr. Fuller showed me the importance of retaining a sense of curiosity and wonder in research. My most recent research experience with Dr. Peter Walter at UCSF taught me how to maintain a work-life balance, as well as how to incorporate creativity and art into science. Throughout my time in the lab, Dr. Walter would often inquire about how things were going. The first time I replied to this inquiry, I began to reply with a project update. He clarified that he wasn't inquiring about my project, but about my personal life. This interaction reminded me of the importance of balancing my time in the lab with time for myself. Throughout my time at UCSF, I encountered artistic representations of science, from mobiles of cellular organelles to hand drawn graphics of experimental designs. Working with Dr. Walter and

others in the lab who embraced their creativity and incorporated it into their science reinforced the significance of balance. Being reminded to maintain and nurture aspects of my life outside of the lab was a comforting experience that will resonate with me during my graduate studies. Each of these unique experiences has helped me develop new skills as a researcher while also providing me with valuable lessons that are applicable to life beyond research.