



NO. 60 IN THE WRITING CENTER HANDOUT SERIES

Writing the Academic Statement of Purpose (ASP)

The time to determine and declare your major is upon you. But you have no clue about your final decision. You want to major in three fields or more. Or you want to major in music, even though your parents are expecting you to get a degree in astrophysics. Perhaps all of your courses interest you but none seems to be a logical choice for a major. An Academic Statement of Purpose is a short reflection paper that will allow you to think about, explore and determine the focus and aim of your undergraduate studies.

Understanding the Academic Statement of Purpose

An ASP is aimed to assist you in bringing direction and focus to your academic career as you ponder your choice of majors. The most important aspect of the ASP is simply to instigate a conscientious thought process and inquiry into the reasons why you may want to consider a particular academic concentration. As you write your ASP, you will discover that the process is a great help in organizing your academic career plans. The ASP will also provide you and your advisor with a better sense of your motivations, allowing you to get the most out of your academic advising sessions.

Ideas to ponder

Wondering where to start? Here are some possible questions to get you started. Remember: although the questions may seem pedantic, the answers you bring to them will be unique in every respect. Use these questions to engage in an internal dialogue:

- What kinds of topics engage you intellectually? Why?
- What area of study do you enjoy the most and feel most confident about?
- Is there a project, class, or professor at the college (irrespective of your personal academic preferences) that has inspired you? Why? How?
- Have any of your preconceived notions about a discipline been drastically altered as a result of your experiences in college? Have these changes been negative or positive?
- Do you observe a trend in your past or current extracurricular activities?
- What do you want to achieve in your area of interest by the end of your undergraduate career?
- Where do you see or want to see yourself in the next five years? Ten years?

Writing the ASP is an opportunity for you to explore your own academic goals and interests. As you work, feel free to consider multiple possibilities without being judged for indecisiveness.

Writing it

- Each person's ASP will be unique, reflecting her thoughts about choosing a major.
- You may want to start the process of writing the ASP by having a conversation with your current advisor and with a faculty member in the discipline you may choose as a major. Conversations with friends and Writing Center tutors can also be helpful.

(continued on reverse)



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Writing the Academic Statement of Purpose (ASP), continued

- Approach the ASP as you would any writing activity: make lists, brainstorm, draw diagrams, create outlines, ask yourself questions and answer them with writing.
- Your ASP should include (but is not limited to):
 - A. A statement of your intended major
 - B. Reasons why you've chosen the major
 - C. A discussion of any special focus within that major
 - D. Possible future direction related to the major
- It should be 300-500 words in length.
- The ASP could be compared to a response paper or think piece. It might begin with brainstorming or a journal entry but should ultimately go through a couple of revisions.
- The audience for your ASP is you and your advisor. The tone does not have to be formal. Discuss your reasoning in words that reflect what you really think.
- Bring your draft to the Writing Center. The tutors have been trained to help you with this type of writing. Additionally, the Writing Center has a notebook of sample ASPs for you to peruse.
- Revise your draft. Does it reflect your current thinking about this decision? It's okay to include your doubts and questions in the revised version.

When you're finished writing

- Turn your ASP in to the Office of Academic Advising when you turn in your request for an advisor in your chosen major.
- Majors can be changed! Use the same process of declaration if you do decide at some point to change (but you don't have to write another ASP).