

Personal Statement for Law School Admissions: An Activist's Foundation

Prompt: Please submit a personal statement of not more than three typewritten pages. You may choose to write about any topic(s) that you believe would be most helpful to the Admissions Committee as they review your application for admission. Potential topics include, but are not limited to, the following: your motivation for the study of law and entrance into the legal profession; professional goals you have established for yourself; leadership goals you have established for yourself; particular challenges and obstacles you have confronted and which you believe are relevant to your past academic performance and/or to your potential for success in law school.

Flyers of old rallies and posters promoting activist theater troupes line the walls of our living room like photographed ancestors of our current political causes. Those more precariously hung flutter softly as my fifteen housemates and I shift positions on the furniture, trying to get comfortable for our yearly interview process. As members of the House of Peace and Justice at Ohio Wesleyan, we choose new members via house interviews, and in 15-minute segments we attempt to identify a new generation of social justice activists and advocates. We look for students who possess as much character as the pre-Civil War building that houses us, and questions range from the practical, "Are you comfortable with sharing a communal bathroom?," to the philosophical, "What does social justice mean to you?"

"What does social justice mean to you?" A heritage question for our house, it is asked of every applicant who has ever taken interest in our shabby safe haven for the politically relentless. It is one I responded to myself. However, the answer that I'm sure I stumbled through as an eager freshman is not nearly as important as the answer I would give today. After living in this intentional community for three years, social justice has become a part of almost every aspect of my college experience. It is embodied within my academic pursuits, the work I've done both on and off campus, and the extracurriculars in which I have been involved. It is the sum of my college career, as well as the foundation for my future work.

Finding a way to constructively direct my interest in activism began in the classroom, which eventually led me to declare my major in Women's and Gender Studies. It is a field that is rich with opportunities to explore contemporary social issues in both historical and theoretical contexts. It has provided me a academic background, and often a political fire, for my more practical work. Because of this, I have been able to critically examine social problems outside of the classroom, shaping my definition of social justice as well as my career plans.

Working for social justice through the legal system is something I hope to achieve in two ways. The first is through policymaking, and the second is non-profit work. Past internships with organizations that serve marginalized populations have helped apply my interest in activism to my career path.

The Spectrum Resource Center is an entirely student-run office from which the majority of LGBTIQ programming on Ohio Wesleyan's campus originates. In my four years as an intern here, I have booked speakers and poets, organized National Coming Out Days and pride weeks, and trained students, faculty, and staff to be better equipped to support LGBTIQ peers. However, the most impactful work I have done as an intern has been in conjunction with the Residential

Life office. In trying to create a safe and inclusive environment for students of all gender identities, I have worked to develop an all-gender housing option. Beginning in 2015, it will allow students of any gender identity to apply to live together. Creating this policy has been a tangible sign of progress for the Ohio Wesleyan community, but it has also solidified my interest in doing this work after law school.

Additionally, my interest in non-profit law is rooted in my work with Family Promise of Delaware County, a homeless shelter located two blocks from Ohio Wesleyan's campus. I began working with Family Promise as a freshman, volunteering for two to three hours per week, often doing odds and ends of office work. This volunteer position evolved into a paid one, which culminated in an immersion-based summer internship. The shelter was making significant changes, opting to house families in the facility rather than bus them to local churches each evening. During this period, I coordinated and trained volunteers, worked in the office, and was the on-call staff member at night. This meant that I lived in the shelter alongside homeless families throughout this three-month experience. A hybrid immersion program and administrative internship, my summer at Family Promise renewed my belief that I could pursue social justice through law.

During my primary school years, there was not a career fair or middle school essay that did not reassert my plan to go to law school. However, that is not to say that I had a plan for my anticipated degree. I began my undergraduate career with an interest in five or six potential majors, knowing only that I was eager to begin college. My choice of major, the internship opportunities I have had, and even my chosen housing, have helped me convert this childhood dream into an attainable goal. My interest in law has survived long after middle school, and will become the way in which I can use my career to live out what social justice means to me.

When we ask hopeful underclassmen this question, "What does social justice mean to you?" my housemates and I are not expecting polished responses. Instead, we are looking for a spark of motivation in each applicant, a sign that our intentional living community could foster in them a sense of greater responsibility. A desire to pursue justice. Throughout my college career, the House of Peace and Justice has been both my greatest support system and a significant source of personal growth. Because of it, I have not only found ways to pursue activism, but also to translate these passions into career goals. To me, social justice means continuing to positively impact my community. This is something that I plan to achieve through a career in law.