



# **University of South Carolina Post-baccalaureate Research Education Program USC PREP**

## **Handbook for PREP Scholars**



Challenge the conventional. Create the exceptional. No Limits.

Updated December 2022

# Welcome PREP Scholars

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The purpose of this handbook is to orient you to the goals of SC- PREP and to your own roles and responsibilities as a scholar.

As a PREP Scholar, you will:

- Spend a year working in a biomedical research laboratory to learn the nature of research in general and specific biomedical techniques in particular. You will receive research and academic guidance from faculty mentors as well as advanced graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. As a result, you will have the opportunity to demonstrate your aptitude for research and determine whether biomedical research is the right career choice.
- Take a graduate level course this summer and one additional graduate level course in the biomedical sciences per semester to demonstrate your ability to handle the intellectual requirements of graduate education. These courses should also give you a good start in your future formal graduate education since graduate credits obtained as PREP Scholars often are transferable.
- Have the opportunity to correct deficiencies in your undergraduate education (if needed) through tutorials or appropriate coursework.
- Learn about the ethics and responsibilities of biomedical research.
- Have an opportunity to present your research at local and national meetings and ultimately publish it in peer-reviewed journals.

You have been matched with a member of the faculty who has an excellent reputation as a mentor and who has a well-respected biomedical research program. Besides participating in your mentor's research and taking graduate courses, you will have the opportunity to attend departmental seminars and journal clubs to help prepare you for success in graduate school. In addition, most of you will be paired with a senior graduate student so that you can see research from a graduate student's perspective. We expect that PREP will enable you to apply successfully to the Graduate Schools of your choice. Your mentoring committee will be continually involved in advising you on your progress in the PREP program and on career choices.

PREP scholars who demonstrate the potential to excel at biomedical research and who have a strong recommendation from their research advisory committee will be excellent candidates for acceptance into one of USC's Ph.D. programs (regardless of your GRE score) and encouraged to apply for admittance to other Ph.D. programs as well. Furthermore, we anticipate that your laboratory research experience and graduate coursework will not only ensure your acceptance into a graduate program, but also will shorten the time needed to complete the Ph.D. degree by about a year.

## **CONTACT AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION**

### **Direction of the PREP program**

Drs. Bert Ely, Alissa Armstrong and Richard Hunt are the directors of PREP.

Dr. Bert Ely	<a href="mailto:ely@sc.edu">ely@sc.edu</a>	803 777-2768 Main Campus
Dr. Richard Hunt	<a href="mailto:richard.hunt@uscmed.sc.edu">richard.hunt@uscmed.sc.edu</a>	
Dr. Alissa Armstrong	<a href="mailto:ararmstrong@sc.edu">ararmstrong@sc.edu</a>	803-777-9621 Main Campus

### **Stipend**

As a PREP scholar, you will receive an annual salary that is paid at the rate of \$560 per 40 hour week. USC PREP will pay your tuition and provide optional medical insurance. Paychecks are issued twice per month on the 15<sup>th</sup> and the last day of the month. This year your first check will be on July 13<sup>th</sup> (since the 15<sup>th</sup> is a Sunday) and will cover your first 6 days of work (June 22-29). The second check will be on July 31 and will cover the first two weeks of July.

In addition to your salary, money from SC PREP will be deposited in your USC account to cancel out the tuition charge. However, you will be responsible for some additional fees each term (usually less than \$100). If you find that tuition is much more than has been deposited in your account leading to a deficit, this is possibly due to your being charged out-of-state tuition rates. Please inform the PREP Directors of this immediately so that the error can be rectified.

## **PROGRAM COMPONENTS**

### **YOUR ADVISORY COMMITTEE/EVALUATION OF YOUR PERFORMANCE**

You will have an advisory committee consisting of your mentor and Drs. Ely, Armstrong and Hunt who will evaluate your strengths and weaknesses and guide the progress of your apprenticeship. Your committee will meet with you regularly (at least once per semester) to evaluate progress. During these informal meetings, you will start by giving a short presentation on your research progress, followed by any questions and suggestions from the committee.

### **YOUR RESEARCH LAB**

The core of the PREP Scholar program is a 37.5 hour per week experience carrying out independent research in the mentor's laboratory. It is intended that you envisage yourself as an essential part of your home laboratory's research effort. You are expected to attend and participate in lab meetings. You will be given your own space in the laboratory or a nearby office, and access to computers. By the middle of the first semester, you should have learned basic laboratory techniques and be engaged actively in a research project. By the end of your PREP experience, you should have some significant research accomplishments. Many PREP scholars have been co-authors on research publications.

### **YOUR GRADUATE STUDENT MENTOR**

You will be assigned a "research buddy" who will help guide you as you conduct your research. It is anticipated that your research buddy will be able to answer most of your questions as you learn new techniques and acquire research skills.

### **PREP MEETINGS**

All PREP Scholars will attend meetings every two weeks. These meetings will serve four purposes:

- To provide opportunities for PREP scholars to talk about their research
- To provide opportunities to PREP scholars to interact and establish networking relationships
- To provide a forum where students can learn about graduate school and strategies for success in PhD programs
- To provide a structure that adds cohesion to the PREP program and a forum for dealing with issues as they arise.

We also have guest speakers at these meetings who talk about their careers in the biomedical sciences.

## **OTHER RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

### **Meetings**

Like regular graduate students, you are encouraged to attend and present at local and national meetings and workshops in order to convey your findings to your academic colleagues and gain visibility in the biomedical sciences job market. Funds are available to cover the costs of travel to one scientific meeting per year. Your mentor may support your attendance at another meeting if he/she so wishes.

The choice of the PREP-supported meeting is up to you and your mentor. Many PREP Scholars have chosen to attend the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minoritized Students (ABRCMS) which is held annually in November. At this meeting you can interact with the many graduate programs that exhibit there. Other PREP Scholars have attended a more specialized meeting such as the annual Neuroscience meeting.

It is not necessary to present at a meeting to receive support for attendance from USC PREP.

### **Travel**

Once you and your mentor have settled on a meeting that you should attend, you will need to get a travel authorization (TA). This can be obtained from Garrett Faulk ([FAULKGD@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:FAULKGD@mailbox.sc.edu)), the Biology Department Business Manager. You will need to give Garrett an estimated cost of your travel and a fund number to which the travel may be charged. The latter can be obtained from Dr Ely. You will need to make your own hotel reservations and also register for the meeting. The university travel agent can make your flight bookings so that you do not have to pay the flight costs yourself. Please contact Garrett concerning how to do this. You will need to use a personal credit card to guarantee your hotel booking and to pay the cost of registration. If you have any problem with this (e.g. not enough in your bank account), please see Dr Ely. You may also claim a \$32 per day subsistence allowance after you return to Columbia for meetings that do not include food in the costs of registration. Normally, travel reimbursements are made within a few weeks although this can vary. Again, if any problems arise, please see Garrett or Dr Ely.

### **Seminars**

The Biology Department and the School of Medicine have weekly seminar series (plus additional seminars). In addition, there are seminar series presented by the Graduate Students on their work. PREP scholars are encouraged to attend these seminars.

## **COURSEWORK**

Each scholar will have his or her PREP program tailored to their individual needs. After the summer Biotechnology course, it is expected that each scholar will enroll in a 3 credit hour course each semester. In addition, there will be a 1 credit research ethics course in the Fall.

In discussion with their supervisory committee, PREP scholars will indicate where their own interests lie, but it is essential that you have a basic grounding in biomedical science. It is expected that you will earn a B or better in each of your courses. If you are concerned about your coursework, please inform your faculty advisor, Dr. Ely, and/or graduate student mentor immediately so that they can assist you before you start getting low grades.

### **Biotechnology course**

This will be your first course as a PREP Scholar. It is given shortly after your arrival in Columbia, during the second summer session. It is a three credit course and runs Monday through Thursday. Each session is 1.5 hours. The course culminates in the writing and presentation of a short research proposal on your intended PREP research. You should consult with your research mentor while preparing your written proposal. The grade for this course is based on homework, the quality of your research proposal and its presentation, and class participation.

### **Ethics course**

The National Institutes of Health mandate that all PREP Scholars take a course on scientific ethics. You will take this course along with the incoming PhD students. It is a one credit course given on the medical school campus. Details of time and exact location will be sent later.

## **GETTING SITUATED AT USC AND IN COLUMBIA**

### **THINGS TO DO**

#### **New employee checklist**

[https://www.sc.edu/about/offices\\_and\\_divisions/human\\_resources/new\\_employee/checklist/](https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/human_resources/new_employee/checklist/)

### **IMMUNIZATIONS**

You cannot do much at USC (no registration, no student I.D and no money) until you have met the immunization requirements for measles and rubella. If you have already have received these shots, you will need to bring a photo copy of your medical record to the Thompson Student Health Center (right behind the Russell House) and fill out a simple form. If you are not immunized, you will need to set up a time to do so. For more information call 803-777-9511 or go to:

<http://www.sa.sc.edu/shs/tshc/immunizations.shtml>

### **CITIZENSHIP VERIFICATION - ONLY APPLICABLE TO US CITIZENS**

US Citizens: You will have no money, ID, or classes without first verifying your citizenship with the university. In 2008, the South Carolina Legislature passed a law requiring "...that lawful presence in the United States is verified before enrollment at any public institution of higher education." So if you are a US citizen or permanent resident, please bring your official US birth certificate, US passport, or other approved document with you when you move to Columbia and be prepared to present it for verification either in person or via fax. For a full list of appropriate documents and more information about the verification process, please go to the following website:

[http://www.sc.edu/about/offices\\_and\\_divisions/registrar/residency\\_and\\_citizenship/citizenship/index.php](http://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/registrar/residency_and_citizenship/citizenship/index.php)

### **SELF SEVRICE CAROLINA REGISTRATION**

Self Service Carolina, our online system, will become your new best friend! You will use it to register for your courses, check your grades, update your W-4, check your upcoming paychecks, and much, much more. To access Self Service Carolina, please follow all the directions below!

First time student users should go here and follow the directions:

<https://my.sc.edu/>

You will log in using your VIP ID. You should be able to find your VIP ID in your graduate school acceptance letter.

### **BANKING SERVICES**

Membership at Carolina Collegiate Federal Credit Union (CARO) is available to all students of the University of South Carolina.

For more information, go to <http://www.carolina.org>.

There are also other banks in the area such as Wells Fargo, Bank of America, etc. which you can find by doing an Internet search or looking in a Columbia area phonebook.

### **STUDENT IDENTIFICATION CARD**

One of the first things you should do is get your South Carolina ID. These can be obtained at the Carolina Mall, which is located on the bottom floor of Russell House (the Student Union). You will need your ID to check out library books, attend athletic events, and other university functions, etc.

Medical School ID tags and parking permits can be obtained from the Auxiliary Services Department in the basement of building 3 of the Medical School.

### **PARKING/VEHICLE REGISTRATION**

It currently costs between \$280 and \$340 per semester to park in one of the garages but many consider it to be well worth the money. If your finances are really tight you can pay \$75 a year to park in designated student parking lots, which fill up VERY QUICKLY. There are outlying lots from which shuttle buses bring students onto the main parts of campus. The Parking Services Office is located on the bottom floor of the Pendleton Street garage and you can get information about parking here. For more information call 803-777-5160 or go to:

<http://www.sc.edu/vmps/park.html>

Parking at the Medical School is free PREP Scholars should park only in certain lots. As you enter the Medical School from Garner's Ferry Road, go across the four way stop and park in the lots in front of you. Do not park in the VA visitors parking lots that are adjacent to Garner's Ferry Road even though the signs say visitor parking.

### **MAIN CAMPUS SHUTTLES – Day and evening**

Shuttles only run when class is in session and do not run to the Medical School (but see below)



Parking and Shuttle map is found here:

[http://www.sc.edu/about/offices\\_and\\_divisions/parking/documents/usc\\_shuttle\\_parking\\_map.pdf](http://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/parking/documents/usc_shuttle_parking_map.pdf)

### **Day Shuttle Route**

Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Arrival times of each shuttle are displayed in real time at [uscvmcs.transloc.com](http://uscvmcs.transloc.com)

### **Evening Shuttle Route**

Monday through Friday, 5:30 p.m. - 12:30 a.m.

Evening Shuttle stops include: Coker Life Sciences

Please note that the Medical School is not on the shuttle route. However, there is a shuttle to take students from the Medical School to certain classes on the main campus and back again. Further information may be obtained from the graduate program administrator at the Medical School.

### **COLUMBIA CITY BUSES**

The city of Columbia and Central Midlands Transit operate a somewhat meager bus service (most routes are only hourly). Further information can be found here: <http://catchthecomet.org/>

First year students often qualify for a free pass. Please check with us to see if this is available.

### **ESTABLISHING SC RESIDENCY**

Details can be found here:

[http://www.sc.edu/about/offices\\_and\\_divisions/registrar/residency\\_and\\_citizenship/residency/index.php.shtml](http://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/registrar/residency_and_citizenship/residency/index.php.shtml)

For tuition purposes, you qualify for in-state tuition since you are a full time USC employee. If you think you have been charged out-of-state tuition, please inform Dr. Ely immediately.

### **LOCAL UTILITY INFORMATION**

If you plan to live off campus, you may need to contact the appropriate utility companies to turn on your service. (Please note that these are not the only utility companies available in Columbia, rather just a sampling, and USC does not endorse any particular company. For a more comprehensive list of companies, please check a Columbia area phonebook or search the internet)

Electric and Gas

Dominion Energy - 1-800-251-7234 or <https://www.dominionenergy.com/south-carolina>

Water

Columbia Water Department- 803-545-3300 or <http://www.columbiasc.net/waterservices>

Cable

Spectrum Cable 803-252-2253 or <https://www.spectrum.com/?cmp=TWC>

## **GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE CITY OF COLUMBIA**

For information about Columbia neighborhoods, city history, area attractions, arts and culture, bike paths, parks, etc. go to:

<http://www.columbiasc.net/>

## **WHERE TO GO WITH SPECIFIC COMPLAINTS**

There is no one designated way to handle every request or complaint. Your options include talking with your graduate student buddy, your faculty mentor, the steering committee, or other members of your lab. For most situations, your faculty mentor is a good place to start. The PREP meetings are also a good forum for asking questions and discussing issues.

## **EVALUATION OF THE PREP PROGRAM**

Dr. Abe Wandersman and his associate, Dr. Brittany Cook ([bikimonkey@yahoo.com](mailto:bikimonkey@yahoo.com)), will conduct evaluations of all aspects of the PREP. Evaluations will be carried out each semester and will be reported to the USC PREP Steering Committee. PREP scholars are expected to fill out evaluation forms as requested.

## **AFTER PREP**

Your advisory committee will discuss career options with you and provide advice and assistance. You will be advised on your choice of graduate programs and guided through the application process. Should you choose to apply to one of the USC Graduate Programs in biomedical sciences, you will be guaranteed an interview.

Once you complete PREP and enter a graduate program, it is important that you keep in touch with Dr. Ely, Dr. Armstrong and Dr. Hunt. We want to know your success stories and we are required by

NIH to keep track of your progress through the completion of your PhD, any postdoctoral program, and your first job. Your continued success helps ensure that USC PREP will be able to renew its funding.

## **CAMPUS SAFETY**

The USC campus is relatively safe but, as anywhere else, things can happen. The University encourages the use of several available shuttle services for transportation to and around campus such as the Evening Shuttle, Late Night Shuttle, APO, and others.

### **SHUTTLES**

#### **Important phone numbers:**

Late Night Shuttle: 803-777-3351

Evening Van Rides: 803-777-3825

#### Safe Evening Rides

In the evening there is an on-demand shuttle service on the main campus that will take you to another part of the campus. This shuttle is also available to pick up PREP Scholars from the Medical School and transport them to the main campus. If you need transport to an apartment complex in central Columbia from the main campus, a free shuttle is often provided by the apartments. If you have missed the last shuttle to your apartment, it is recommended that you take a ride service (Uber/Lyft).

#### Late Night Shuttle

Phone:

803-777-3351

Shuttle Hours:

12:30 a.m. to 6:30 a.m.

Monday - Friday (while classes are in session)

The shuttle will pick up USC students, faculty and staff from your location and take you anywhere you need to go on campus free of charge.

You will be able to distinguish the shuttle by its white strobe light and a color scheme related to the Carolina Shuttle System.

Wait in a secure area until it arrives.

#### Evening Van Rides

Phone:

803-777-3825

or call 803-777-3351 to reach the Late Night Shuttle if the van is not available.

Shuttle Hours:

8 p.m. to 12 midnight

Monday - Friday (while classes are in session)

The Iota Mu Chapter of Alpha Phi Omega National Service Fraternity sponsors this free service to safely transport faculty, staff and students of USC.

The van will pick you up and take you to any destination on campus. This shuttle will come to the Medical School and transport you to the main campus. It will not, however, take you to an off-campus apartment complex. It is recommended that you use Uber/Lyft to your apartment from the campus drop off point (e.g. Russell House) or that you take a Uber/Lyft directly from the Medical School to your apartment.

**For more information see the shuttle section above**

### **Safety App**

USC offers the free RAVE Guardian Safety App which turns any cell phone into a personalized protection network, connecting with University Police during an emergency and giving them important information they need instantly.

Have a plan before going out. Make sure your friends know not to leave you alone or let you leave anywhere with someone other than the friends you came with. Stay in a group as much as possible.

Be aware of your surroundings and trust your instincts. If a place or situation doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.

### **GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS**

Often PREP Scholars arrange trips and social activities together. In addition, you might be interested in joining current biomedical graduate student activities. We will send your contact information to the Biomedical Graduate Student Association at the School of Medicine and the Graduate Association of Biology Students on the main campus so that you will be informed of their activities.

# PREP SCHOLAR TOOLKIT

## INTRODUCTION

The following section of the handbook includes tools designed to help you to set a timeline for your completion of the PREP and to meet goals you have for yourself while in the program. These tools can help facilitate communication between you and your faculty mentor, as well as with the PREP directors. The tools are designed to lead the PREP scholars in a more proactive direction about planning for your time in PREP. The tools should make the time during your mentor meetings more efficient and direct discussion of your progress between you and your faculty mentor. Each tool will be prefaced by directions about how the tool is to be used.

## PROGRAM COMPLETION TIMELINE CHECKLIST DIRECTIONS

The major goal of PREP is to prepare you for graduate study in the field of biomedical sciences. The following timeline checklists are designed to help you keep on track of all the steps in the application process. ***A second year extension is only available in exceptional circumstances.***

It will be helpful to look at these timelines when you begin PREP and to decide your trajectory early. In order to complete your goals in PREP in just one year, many of the steps in the application process need to be started in your first semester. For example, taking the GRE includes allowing enough time to properly prepare. If you decide you want to take the GRE more than once, you must wait a month between each test.

The timeline will also help your faculty mentor see where you are in the process and help direct discussion you will have about your transition to graduate school and may bring up any questions you may have about the application process. Sharing your timeline with your mentor during meetings will help keep you on the same page and allow them time to help you in the process.

## GRADUATE RECORD EXAM (GRE)

Most biomedical graduate programs no longer require the GRE, but some do. You should check the web site of the programs to which you wish to apply to see if a GRE score is needed. If you attend the ABRCMS meeting you can find out about the latest requirements from the exhibitors representing the various programs at the meeting.

**PREP Scholar**  
**Individual Development Plan**  
**University of South Carolina**

The Individual Development Plan (IDP) is a mechanism for creating and accomplishing both long and short term goals in pursuit of a desired career goal. To receive maximum benefit from the IDP process, it is essential that both PREP Scholar and their faculty mentor participate in the process. The PREP Scholar should complete the initial draft of the IDP and then review it with their research mentor.

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**Name of PREP Scholar** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Name of Primary Mentor** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Part I. Goals for The Year** (to be completed by the PREP Scholar)

**A. Research Goals**

Provide a timeline of research activities planned for this year.

**B. Training and Professional Goals and Progress**

List all planned activities for the rest of the year in the following categories. Provide as much detail as possible.

**Planned coursework**

**Graduate training research focus area**

**PhD program application process**

**Professional meeting attendance**

**Part II. Career Goals and Planning** (to be completed by the PREP Scholar)

**What is your current career goal?**

(Need ideas? Look here [http://sc.edu/about/offices\\_and\\_divisions/career\\_center/index.php](http://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/career_center/index.php))

**Why does this career appeal to you?**

**What other career path(s) interest(s) you?**

**Why does this / do these other career path(s) appeal to you?**

**In order to be competitive for your desired career path(s), what additional training or experience is needed prior to applying for positions?**

## **PROGRAM COMPLETION TIMELINE CHECKLIST DIRECTIONS**

The major goal of PREP is to prepare PREP scholars for graduate study in the field of biomedical sciences. The following timeline checklists are designed to help PREP scholars to keep track of all the steps in the application process.

The timeline will also help your faculty mentor to see where you are in the process and help direct discussion you may have about the transition to graduate school or any questions you may have about the application process. If you share your timeline with your mentor, it can help keep you both on the same page.



Task	Deadline	Completed	Notes
1. Start Studying for GRE if you plan to take or retake the test (See above)	August 1		Reviewing algebra and geometry is most important. If you decide to take a GRE class, PREP cannot cover the cost
2. Take GRE	October		
3. Review the web sites of schools to which you might want to apply for your graduate education.	October 1		Make a list of at least 3 potential research mentors at each school. You might want to contact potential PI's at graduate schools of your choice
4. Request letters of recommendation and give deadline to recommenders	October 15		
5. Submit your list of schools and potential mentors to Dr. Ely, Dr. Armstrong or Dr. Hunt.	October 15		Make checklist of submission dates and materials
6. Begin writing personal statement	October 15		
7. Have someone look over personal statement	November 15		Drs. Hunt and Ely are very willing to help you
8. Finalize personal statement	November 22		
9. Submit all application materials	Various		Many schools have an application deadline of <b>December 1</b> . If you attend the ABRCMS meeting, this allows you to interact with school representatives at that meeting before submitting your application. You may want to inquire about application fee waivers.
10. Request/Submit Transcripts			Online requests will be sent to designated institutions approximately five business days after your request
12. Check with school to make sure application is complete	2 weeks after deadline		The most difficult part to complete is the referees' recommendation letters. If the

			school says one or more are missing, immediately contact your referee.
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## **MAKING A STRONG APPLICATION TO GRADUATE SCHOOL**

### **1. Letters of recommendation**

You will be asked to name at least three referees. Before you supply that list as part of your application, you should contact each referee and ask: Can you give me a good letter of recommendation? If the answer is that the person can supply a letter but not necessarily a good one, get another referee. Indeed, if you have doubts, get another referee, if you can find one. It is polite to ask referees before you add them to the list on your application. When you have sent in your application, inform your referees that you have done so and ask them to send their letter as soon as they can and stress that the most important part of the letter is their evaluation of your research potential. It is important to check back from time to time to make sure that letters have been sent. Most people are very busy and often forget. If they are interested in your future, they should not be offended if you check back after a few weeks. You should also check with the administration of your chosen programs as to whether your application is complete. You are responsible for making the application complete and the most common omission from a file is one or more letters of recommendation. If one referee is persistently late in letters, you might want to find another referee. If you change the list of referees, an email to the program to explain that you have done this and why is often useful.

The most important referee is someone in whose lab you have worked successfully. If, in your personal statement, you describe your work in a summer program or with a faculty member at your undergraduate school, make sure that you get a letter from that person (or explain why you cannot get a letter from that person in your personal statement). You should also ask for a letter from your PREP mentor. The PREP directors can provide letters, but their letters are not as valuable as those from your research mentors.

The most impressive letters will come from:

- Research mentors (the most important by far), especially those with whom you have worked outside your own undergraduate institution such as in a summer program or PREP.
- Faculty members who have known you in an academic setting such as a professor whose class you have taken.

Letters from administrators, laboratory technicians and post-docs are of much lesser value. Letters from family, priests or your supervisor at Walmart are inappropriate.

### **2. Personal statement**

The personal statement is, by far, the most important part of your application. You should write no more than two single-spaced pages as members of the selection committee will have to read dozens of them. Try to cover all the bases but be concise.

Avoid clichés such as “When you meet me, you will meet a person inspired” or “I have always wanted to bring better health to the world”. You should, however, mention particular circumstances that have brought you to a biomedical research career such as a relative who has suffered from a particular disease or coming from a background in which certain diseases are prevalent (racial disparities); for example, in South Carolina diabetes and heart disease are especially prevalent in minority populations.

A few general points:

- It is important that you “personalize” each essay for the particular school to which you are applying. Say why you are applying to this particular institution. Speak to the strengths of the institution for your particular career goals. Don’t just say that the institution is “world renowned”. All schools have their strengths and weakness. Also, name several faculty members in the program that you are applying to, whose research interests you.
- If you are applying to the University of South Carolina, do not call it The University of Southern California and be specific rather than general. Don’t scatter “your institution/university” throughout the document as it looks as if you sent the same thing to all universities (which you probably did!). Thus, personalize it for each institution.

Like all such documents, your statement should contain

- an introduction
- the main body of the text
- a conclusion.

### Introduction

In a few sentences tell the reader who you are and why you chose the path that you followed in undergraduate school. Perhaps you changed your major, explain why. Briefly, outline your career goals and motivations.

Now explain why you want to go to graduate school in the biomedical sciences: This could be as broad as just finding research fascinating or, more specifically having a family member stricken with certain disease etc. If you say: I love science, say why.

### The Main Statement

You want to embark on a research career and the committee wants to see that you know what you are getting into and that you have enthusiasm for research. You do not want to give the impression that you cannot think of anything else to do, so you will continue what you are now doing in graduate school. Passion for research needs to come through in this section.

First, clearly describe all of your research experience (but do not be too verbose, that can wait for an interview). Discuss your intellectual contribution to the project and describe your role in the team. Tell the reader about the lab techniques that you have used and about other relevant experience/skills. You can also talk about publications, awards, presentations (including those with your mentor or a graduate student/post-doc). If you have done a summer program at another school or at the NIH, this should be emphasized as it speaks to your more than passing interest in research and academics. Since you are in SC PREP, this should show that you have a strong interest in research. Indicate this and outline your most recent discoveries, mentioning the techniques that you are currently using. Additionally, the pursuit of travel funds to attend a major conference (and other scholarship funds) emphasizes your commitment to research. Again, this should be stated. This is where you should mention a few (not too many, perhaps two or three) professors at the school to which you are applying in whose laboratory you might be interested in working. Say why you find their research interesting and how their work fits in with your research interests.

If there are special circumstances that have affected your undergraduate career, address them. Without sounding whiny, address a low GPA or your failure to achieve a good grade in a certain course. Perhaps you come from a low income background that necessitated having a job while also studying for your undergraduate degree. Perhaps, you had an illness or someone in your family did. You should mention that although you do not have to go into too much detail. People tend to be very sympathetic to real problems that you may have encountered. You might explain, for example, that a relative had medical problems in a certain semester, necessitating your attention but point out that after the less-than-stellar grades in that semester, your grades rose again. Often people get off to a poor start when they go to college. The reviewers understand this but want to see that your grades improved and did not go in the opposite direction. If you have a Fail or a D in a certain science course, and then retook the course, explain the poor grade and point out that you did much better the second time around.

### Conclusion

Finally, sum up your essay with a few words about your hopes for your future education.

When you have finished your essay, put it on one side for a day or two and then reread it. During that period, you should, probably have someone else (e.g. Dr. Hunt, Dr. Armstrong or Dr. Ely) read it as well. You would be surprised how many spelling errors appear in these essays despite the existence of spell checkers. Note also that spell checkers can auto-correct leading to strange results!