

Personal Statements

Sample #1

I still remember the strange looks the locals gave me when I would go running by them on the streets of Kyiv- women running outdoors in Ukraine is not exactly a common activity. Little did they know they were looking at a future US naval ensign, or at least that's what I thought. It was the summer before my senior year at XYZ, and for the past several years my plan for after college began with the Navy's Officer Candidate School (OCS). I was determined to serve my country, a country that embodies the values of equality, freedom, and sacrifice that my grandmother, herself an immigrant, always reminds me distinguishes her "true home" America, and her birthplace Cuba.

Driven to put on the uniform and lead against whatever dangers threatened America or its people, I developed a particular interest in military strategy and doctrine, as well as a desire to learn Russian. While at XYZ, I focused my academics on Russia's geopolitical resurgence and its military engagements in the last two decades. I was fascinated in particular by the Law of Armed Conflict and how Russia manipulated international legal rhetoric to justify its military engagements to an international audience. I studied both the U.S. and Russian militaries feverishly, convinced that I could contribute to creating more effective U.S. government policies and a sharper understanding of Russia's approach to warfare by joining the military myself.

I returned from my summer in Kyiv, and began the OCS process. And that is when it happened. While my mind was ready to join the military, my body was not. A series of tests and biopsies after a routine checkup quickly confirmed that I had thyroid cancer. Through a combination of surgery, radiation treatments, and medication, I was victorious against the cancer, but the enduring impact lingered. With the removal of my thyroid and some additional medical concerns, becoming a naval officer was no longer an option. I had been so convinced that military service would be my path; to learn that it was not an option felt like a personal failure. What was an unwavering sense of purpose and direction was gone, and I did not know where to go from there.

Despite what felt like a devastating setback, I found a position at the XXX. I threw myself into learning about everything from nuclear politics to biosecurity, and I came to terms with the reality that the military was out of reach for me. During this time, I was exposed to facets of national security and public service I had not previously considered but had tremendous potential for impact.

After a year at the XXX I was asked to become the project coordinator for a new, high impact initiative the Center was launching: the YYY Project. Focused on protecting democratic elections and processes in the United States and by partnering with people across the technology industry, academia, the Department of Defense, and other government agencies, this initiative and its approach to election security was truly groundbreaking. I had no background in cybersecurity and my knowledge of election systems and processes was even more limited, but

this was an opportunity to do what I had always yearned to do: defend my country and its values from those who looked to do it harm. Evidence of Russia's malign influence campaign against the United States can be seen across the globe, but nowhere more audaciously than its interference in our free and fair democratic elections process. So this was game on. Helping guide a team of several dozen graduate students, technical experts, and policy veterans, we took on the malicious actors looking to undermine the public faith in American elections by increasing the awareness and preparedness of campaigns and election officials--American democracy's true frontline defenders. Seeing hundreds of election officials put politics aside to protect the integrity of our elections reinvigorated my call to public service. While the military was still out, my experiences with YYY opened my eyes to how law is a cornerstone in national security. I found my new calling.

My work with elections, my interest in national security and my personal conviction lead me directly to believe that a career in law is the ideal way for me to serve the United States. Through law, I can best apply creative thinking and problem solving to the most important functions of the U.S. government. My health setback gave me the opportunity to reevaluate my definition of what it means to serve and allowed me to explore new career avenues. Whether my law school path takes me into the election security field or towards working in national security or defense policy, I am confident that the study of law is the best foundation for me to pursue a career as a public servant. Life is short--I intend to do something that matters.

Sample #2

The first songs I ever memorized were tracks from *Barney's Favorites Volume 1*. As a toddler, I would listen to the album in its entirety and immediately press rewind when the last song ended. I would repeat this process until I learned every word to every song, refusing to let go of the cassette player until I accomplished my mission. My childhood obsession gradually developed into an intense curiosity that inspired me to explore different musical periods and genres. As I rode the school bus in [REDACTED], I imagined scenes of dimly lit jazz bars in New York and Chicago set to the vocals of Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra. I experienced the stadium concerts of Queen and U2 as I navigated my father's extensive collection of rock music. The raw allure of Amy Winehouse and Thom Yorke of Radiohead captivated and confounded me, and I carefully studied their song lyrics that revealed the truth of their distinctive realities.

My passion for music prompted me to focus my extracurricular efforts on researching and booking the talent for concerts sponsored by [REDACTED]. I embraced opportunities to better understand the performers as individuals, whether those possibilities emerged en route to the show or in the months before. I recall conversing with Baauer, the DJ behind the "Harlem Shake" craze, about his career beginnings and misfortunes during a hurried drive from [REDACTED] Airport to the campus performance on the S [REDACTED]. As [REDACTED] Chair, I was personally responsible for ensuring that the visiting artists felt comfortable throughout their time on campus. My team spent months exploring each musician's catalogue and reviewing interviews in search of clues about the person behind the music. Our efforts were rewarded by warm smiles from the artists as we greeted them with personalized gifts, ranging from a basket of [REDACTED]'s best fried chicken to a hand-knit scarf. The artists immediately felt at home, and this fostered the energy necessary for them to successfully deliver their stories through their performances – stories that continue to fascinate me to this day.

My experience with [REDACTED] taught me to appreciate the small details that provide a gateway to greater understanding. As an Analyst at [REDACTED] LLP, I work closely with attorneys to search for points in the factual record that are fundamental to crafting persuasive legal strategies for our clients. One case required me to sort through hundreds of pages of medical records in order to authenticate our pro bono client's accusations against the health office of a major prison facility. I read every line of every document we had received from the opposing parties. I eventually located a crucial piece of evidence, a short handwritten doctor's note, that would ultimately lead to a favorable settlement for our client. Other cases have challenged me to trace complex financial transactions across borders and to learn the complicated process of adjudicating a prescription claim at the pharmacy counter. Much like a single line in a song can reveal important characteristics of the authoring musician, sometimes one document or factual detail can determine what story prevails in the litigation context.

I plan to utilize my legal education to effectively represent clients in the music industry. I am intrigued by the nuances of the law governing the distribution of music across platforms and the legal remedies available to artists in the digital music landscape. I seek to leverage my passion for music and my enthusiasm for the intellectual exercise of the law to protect the interests of performers whose work reveals intricacies of our shared humanity across time and space. I am excited by the opportunity to engage with the NYU Law curriculum and to participate in groups such as the Intellectual Property and Entertainment Law Society to equip me with the skills I need to succeed in my future career.

I was sitting on a beach in Rio de Janeiro during my final week of a study abroad program when I connected my phone to the public WiFi. I anxiously waited for it to load the news story I had been following for years: the Supreme Court ruled that bans on same-sex marriage were unconstitutional. In an instant, the country moved one step closer to respecting the rights of all its citizens. I cried as I thought about how this ruling would have altered the way I saw myself when I was a closeted child growing up in ██████████. I was overwhelmed by the idea of a future where my relationships would no longer be seen as second-class.

This was not the first time I felt so personally affected by a court's decision or the way a law was implemented. I think of my tía who could not leave the country to say goodbye to her dying parents in Guatemala because of her undocumented status. I think of my father becoming a citizen and teaching him the pledge of allegiance for his swearing-in ceremony—a pledge I had only recently learned in my pre-K classroom. I think of family friends who were deported and forced to leave their children. And I think of the millions of others kept in the shadows as undocumented immigrants. All are important reminders of the ways in which the law can be used as a tool to both oppress and uplift.

As a son of immigrants and a queer person, I decided early on that I wanted to give back to the communities in which I grew up. I was determined to one day use any privileges I possessed to help immigrants, people of color, LGBTQ people, and other marginalized communities. At first, I wasn't sure of how I could best accomplish these ambitious goals—how I could be the most impactful. But these personal moments of witnessing the law at work showed me a pathway—in the simplest of terms, I now believe that my life's calling is to use the law to promote social justice.

Following that summer in Rio, I dedicated my remaining two college years to exploring the intersection of the law and social justice movements. For my junior year independent research, I analyzed how the federal judiciary shaped the modern LGBTQ rights movement. I went on to intern for ██████████, an organization that helps LGBTQ asylum seekers stay in the U.S. after escaping persecution. This internship then inspired my senior thesis, which analyzed the United States' moral and legal responsibilities in accepting asylum seekers, with a specific focus on unaccompanied minors and LGBTQ individuals from Central America.

I studied the conditions that forced these vulnerable populations to flee and connected them to American interventions as well as the statutes, court rulings, and international agreements that formed asylum law in the U.S. This analysis led to policy recommendations aimed at resolving the moral and legal failings of our current asylum system. Once again, I was able to see the life-or-death impact of the law.

For the past year and a half I have worked for ██████████'s litigation department. My team's legal work keeps health centers open and ensures that underserved, low-income Americans retain access to life-saving reproductive healthcare. Our work not only helps individual patients and health centers, but also advances social justice. When I think of the positive impact I want to have on our society, I think of how my team uses legal strategies to correct unfair restrictions imposed on people who simply want to have control over their own bodies.

However, in the fight for equal rights we still face major setbacks. States continue to pass overly restrictive laws, the federal government does little to stop them, and some judges, unfortunately, turn the other way when confronted with these unconstitutional attempts to restrict access to basic rights. I constantly worry that in our political climate we will see courts chip away at the rights we hold so dear, and I become incredibly frustrated with how people in our government use the law to exclude people like immigrants, refugees, women, and other minorities from equal dignity. But then I think of that moment on the beach in Rio. I think of how the law can still be used for good, and that gives me the hope to continue. I am certain that my academic, personal, and work experiences have prepared me for the next step in my education and I am confident in a future where I can use my law degree from the NYU School of Law to help make our society more just.

Sample #4

Dodging an errant pass while simultaneously watching a shot fall through the net and another swatted out of the air, I realized my fifth graders were playing three separate games of basketball on one court. I stood there in awe, bracing the cold April air, as I observed the passes, the friendly celebrations, and the occasional angry walk-off. Most of my time as a middle school teacher is spent creating and maintaining school-wide and classroom-specific systems to produce a productive learning environment. Yet, here were ten-year-old kids operating an unspoken and incredibly effective system that governed their only free time of the day. But while this basketball system was voluntary, as a teacher in an under-resourced charter school in [REDACTED], I knew many of the systems my students were subjected to were not. The social, economic, and legal systems beyond the school walls—and many within them—dictated my students' lives. As a Teach for America corps member, my job was to advocate for my students as they unwittingly participated in this complex web of systems.

If it had been that September, I would have intervened. I had spent my first month in the fog of our “Week 6 Arc,” with aims of keeping students on task and ensuring systems were implemented with fidelity. Initially forgoing my own agency, I memorized the scripts and how to give consequences and rewards, believing that our behavior management system and its correct implementation would propel our students to college. In our children's pursuit of higher education, there was no time to waste, leading to an overreliance on systems focused on control, rather than purpose. Silence was the uncomfortable sound that echoed throughout our halls and classrooms, with social time being minimized for the sake of pencils-to-paper and students on task. As I grappled with meeting high expectations and the all-consuming workload, I failed to adequately question this approach. Instead, I did my best to uphold the systems that had been presented to me as the only way to produce quality academic results.

When the whistle blew, the three games came to an abrupt halt as my students made their way into line. I had not intervened. At this point in my first year of teaching, I recognized that the best thing I could do was remain an outsider, someone who did not interfere with their system by imposing my expectations. I could not shake the feeling that many of our school systems were without purpose. “Teaching students” had turned into “keeping students silent and on task,” inhibiting my ability as a

teacher to engage my students and their voices. When I entered Teach for America, I did so because I thought I understood how all types of systems affected students and in turn, what my role in the education system would be for at least the next two years. I wanted to be a champion inside the classroom, a teacher who put the needs of her students above anything else. And yet, I found myself putting systems first—acting instead as an enforcer of silence and procedural productivity rather than an advocate for authentic learning. Out of fear of a chaotic classroom, I allowed school expectations to supersede my own ideas about what a classroom should look and sound like. In our attempts to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, my colleagues and I had bought into a system of power over purpose and on-task ratings, letting our classrooms become inundated by silence and superficial learning.

It was with this uncomfortable feeling I entered year two, questioning how the role I thought would lead me to become an advocate instead led me to become an enforcer. As I excitedly prepared for my new students, I realized an effective educator in a school like mine is not one who was satisfied meeting a status quo set by others, losing sight of personal beliefs to work in a rigid system. Rather, an effective educator is one who grounds his or her aims in purpose and is willing to seek collective solutions. As my second year began, I had the confidence to advocate for more social and fair school practices, as well as restructure my classroom to elevate genuine learning over procedures.

While this changed approach positively influenced my classroom, I was still within a larger structure I was unable to change. With this practical understanding of interconnected systems I once thought beyond my control, I began to search for ways to better shape the systems that have historically and systemically silenced students like mine. Becoming a public interest lawyer will enable me to continue this advocacy work with the demonstrated will to always place purpose over power as I seek to enact change on behalf of those frequently unable to. As a first-year teacher, I allowed myself to be confined to systems that suppressed the voices and agency of my students. As a second-year teacher, I grounded my practice in purpose as I still struggled within complex and sometimes uncompromising systems. As a lawyer, I will advocate for students, families, and educators challenging policies in their pursuit of equitable education, amplifying their voices far beyond the basketball court.

Sample #5

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As a Jewish girl from a small German village, my grandmother had experienced firsthand how fear of the other could quickly erase her family's long established roots to their community. Neighbors walked past her in silence. Swastikas were painted on her family's general store. Teachers were so hostile that my grandmother quit school after the eighth grade. Although she could not have possibly known what would come next, my grandmother understood that staying in Germany was not an option. However, as the years passed and the tensions escalated, my grandmother found herself with nowhere to turn. In those years, many nations, including the United States, had no official refugee policy. Country after country denied her application, their restrictive immigration quotas filled. At long last, a lady in England, looking for a domestic, took a chance on my grandmother. She got out at the age of twenty-three in August of 1939, one month before Germany invaded Poland, and the borders closed for good. If it were not for that one English lady's sponsorship, my grandmother recalled, it is likely that my father would not have been born.

My mother came to America when she was twenty-five. It was one of the hardest choices of her life. Back in [REDACTED], moving far from home was unheard of, especially if you were a young woman. Children typically lived with their parents until they got married, at which point they moved to a place down the street. However, her family did not have a stable home. Her parents worked three jobs each, but with nine kids at home and tuition bills to consider, they simply could not make ends meet. The family moved every three to six months, as landlord after landlord kicked them out for not making rent. Jobs were hard to come by, and without any assets - a bank account, property ownership, a permanent source of income - my mother failed to qualify for a visa to the US. Worried that her parents would grow old without a permanent home, my mother chose to leave college and make her way to America sans documentation, determined to earn the money to purchase a small house in [REDACTED] within a few years' time. She worked with multiple families as a nanny and a housecleaner, taught herself English from scratch, split McDonalds burgers with her roommate, and slept about two hours each night. The sacrifice was worth it. After three years of hard work in

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America, my mother put the first deposit on her parents' house. She received her papers another three years later.

The stories of my mother and grandmother inspired my own exploration of the immigrant experience. My path was two-fold, weaving narrative and policy. In college, I majored in comparative literature, a field defined as the study of literature without borders. My texts and courses explored themes central to the immigrant experience, including post-colonialism, diaspora, transnational identity, generational narratives, social networks, history and memory, and the construction of Latinidad. Ultimately, I centered my departmental defense on border identity, with a focus on the construction of the post-diasporic Jewish identity in relation to tradition and the Israeli homeland.

Studying the cultural narrative of immigration reinforced my desire to help change the immigrant experience for the better. This had been important to me ever since I was a little girl, when I studied US government and history alongside my mother, helping her to prepare for her citizenship exam. At college, I joined the [REDACTED]' immigration policy group, where I interviewed undocumented [REDACTED] students about their experiences, and compared support programs for undocumented students put in place at universities across the nation. The recommendations in our policy paper, "[REDACTED] [REDACTED]," were later implemented by the university. Additionally, I interned for a year at the immigration unit of [REDACTED] Legal Services, where I worked with immigration attorneys on case preparation. There, I researched political conditions and human rights violations to supplement client testimonials, and gained a basic understanding of the laws that grant refugee status to asylum seekers.

Through these experiences, I began to realize that the opportunities for legal immigration are extremely limited. Most visas are earmarked for immigrants with resources: admission to an American university, employer sponsorship for a position requiring higher education, an American family member already across the border. For hardworking, everyday people in need of economic

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opportunity, the path to America is increasingly narrow. I strongly feel that people should not have to live in fear, without papers, in order to provide for their families. My goal in studying law is to learn how best to advise prospective immigrants who, like my mother and grandmother, were not fortunate enough to finish their education or become highly skilled, but who deserve a chance to economic opportunity nonetheless. Through a legal education, I hope to help others navigate our current immigration system, and ultimately draft policy designed to give everyday immigrants a path to citizenship.