

Guidelines for Personal Statement – Master of Arts Degree

Our Master of Arts Degree application asks for a typed personal statement of three-to-four pages in length. The statement should reflect on:

- 1) your goals in seeking theological education and the experiences that have led you to do so;
- 2) the reasons you have chosen Hartford Seminary, in particular, and your educational/ vocational goals;
- 3) the life experiences that have most significantly shaped your values and who you are as a person.

Following is a sample personal statement for those of you who may be unsure of where to start or of how to write about your relevant experiences.

All personal statements are, however, unique and are meant to be expressions of the individuals that write them. The personal statement is to tell us about the aspects of your character and experience that are not reflected in the rest of your application. We want to know what is important to you, what has shaped you, and, ultimately, who you are. We also want to know how you would both gain from and contribute to our unique environment. As personal statements can be quite difficult to write, we have provided a sample statement below as a guideline.

If you have any further questions about what should be in your statement, please contact the Admissions Office at (860) 509-9512.

The statement following happens to have been written by a prospective student of the Jewish faith. The textboxes to the right of the statement explain what the intent of each paragraph is.

Sample Personal Statement for Master of Arts Degree

There is a tenet of the Jewish faith called *tikkun olam*—the “repair of the world”. It is a Jewish duty to make an individual effort to better the world in which we live, and to leave it, in so far as is possible, just a little bit more compassionate, a little bit more loving, and a little bit more just for our children. We don’t expect to solve the problems of the world, but we must nonetheless make the effort.

Tikkun olam is a Jewish duty, and it is also my personal duty. For the past two years, I have been involved in teaching and consulting on interreligious issues, and it is in this particular arena that I try, to the best of my ability, to make a difference. It is my intention to attain my Master of Arts degree at Hartford Seminary to empower my personal efforts at facilitating interreligious understanding and peace.

Initially, I was more a thinker than a doer. I engaged in disembodied scholarly pursuits—ivory tower intellectualisms—studying first comparative religion at General University, then Biblical Studies at General Graduate University. It was while I was at General Graduate that something shifted in me, though, and I became interested not only in theoretical knowledge, but how this knowledge needed to be applied in one’s experience. I took a few courses on Religious Pluralism and my interest in interfaith understanding and participatory dialogue became poignant, gradually overtaking me.

My experience as one of only two Jewish students at a Christian seminary also shaped my education and my interests. I found myself to be representative of the Jewish faith for other students. I remember one class that used to begin in prayer. As the only Jew in this class, I found myself struggling which prayers made me comfortable, which ones did not, and why. My classmates seemed to struggle with these questions as well. Important issues were raised: Can a Jew feel comfortable participating in Christ-centered prayer? How does one lead an interfaith prayer?

Participating in purely academic exercises was no longer enough for me; I wanted to put my knowledge to work.

After General Graduate, I again found myself a Jew in a Christian world—this time as a Bible Study leader at Catholic Church. I have been teaching biblical

Introductory paragraph. You can be creative here or you can simply state your reason for pursuing graduate study. In this statement, the applicant tied their desire for graduate study to a guiding religious principle and personal value.

Statement of Purpose/ Goal in seeking theological education

Personal background and formative experiences.

State past events that have shaped you and led you to pursue graduate study.

Related life/work experience

scriptures and workshops Catholic Church for two years now, and I am immensely satisfied by the opportunity to elucidate the beginnings of Judaism and Christianity, and the relationship between the two religions, for my students. The courses I teach are varied: Biblical Texts; Introduction to Religion; Religion and Leadership; and World Religions. Regardless of the title of the course, though, my teaching is always grounded in how to deepen and transform relationships, whether it is with oneself, the biblical texts, God or others. Though I do teach from an academic point of view, I am always moved when my students report, for example, that they called their grandmother for the first time in five years, or they attended Sunday mass with renewed vigor, as the result of my course.

May include a description of what drives you, what you are moved by, what you care about.

Another life path that I've followed is volunteering my time to an educational company. I took a course with Corporate University in 1998, and the result their practical education had on my life was without equal. For the past five years since I took their first workshop, I have volunteered an average of 10 hours per week to assist in their programs. I have been trained in all aspects of their business from recruiting, to sales, to public speaking, to teaching their course designs. What is most truly profound about their education, however, is that it is all grounded in how to listen and communicate effectively. No matter what varied skill I was learning, what I was really learning was how to relate to people. This training has become invaluable in all of my endeavors, and it is something I would like to integrate into my study of interreligious Understanding at Hartford Seminary.

Further relevant background and experience.

I feel that it is now time to establish higher credentials so that I can move up to the next level in my career. I find my strengths to be in my ability to teach, empathize with others and avoid being judgmental. I am also highly trained as a group facilitator and public speaker. What under girds all that I do in this field, however, is my passion for it. There is nothing I enjoy more than facilitating understanding.

Perceived Strengths

Though I have been teaching and leading educational seminars for several years, however, my practical experience in facilitating specifically interreligious dialogue has been sporadic and limited. In this way, a Master of Arts in this field will speak directly to where my experience falls short. I am confident that

Perceived Weaknesses

this degree will give me the educational experience I need to boost my career forward.

I would also like to use the degree study period to conduct research and (God willing) publish the results. The art of publishing has eluded me thus far and I believe the support of an institution will help create a breakthrough in this area.

Hartford Seminary is, for me, the obvious vehicle for following my calling as it has an undeniably strong reputation for work in the field of interreligious understanding. Not only do I look forward to learning from the Seminary's faculty and student body, but I feel that I would also be able to make an important contribution to the school's mission, opening the doors wider to Judaism as one of the Abrahamic "trinity". Building a peaceful community of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the middle of Connecticut will be a living symbol for what is possible in other areas of the world. I am sincerely inspired by the thought of participating in this microcosm. I would be grateful and delighted to be part of your community.

Why Hartford Seminary is the place for you.
--