

“What shared information makes a Statement of Interest Letter effective?”

Graduate student applications to Plant Sciences contain GRE scores, reference letters, and academic transcripts that can be informative about the capabilities of potential students for the Plant Sciences Department. However, the Graduate Applicant Review Committee is looking for more specific information about your personal drive, intellectual curiosity, and aspirational goals. Unless our faculty and instructors are fortunate to already know you or have met you during a visit that you made to campus, the Departmental Admissions Committee is likely to struggle to gain insight into what can be expected from you as a productive student and departmental team member. Within our degree programs, admission to graduate school and your access to limited financial resource support is an extremely competitive process. Successful applicants are often those who use their *Statement of Interest* letter to showcase examples of their **creativity, intellectual curiosity, work ethic, research and teaching interests, academic and professional career goals, or writing competency**. Even if we do know you, an effective graduate student must be a capable communicator; able to convey their research interests and explain why people who are unfamiliar with their work should care.

Faculty on the Departmental Admissions Committee who review your application will be more favorably impressed if you directly address examples about yourself in a clear and concise letter, which need not exceed 1000 words. In your submission, help us to understand: what makes *you* a good candidate to receive financial and/or time support from one of our faculty mentors? Why should we invest our time and money in *you*?

- Why UT? Why *our* Department of Plant Sciences?
- With which of our individual faculty would you like to study...and why? If you have *already identified* one of our faculty members who has discussed with you a project and/or funds available for graduate studies, it would be important to state why you are a good match with their interests.
 - Please be aware that stated interest by our faculty in just reviewing your credentials does not indicate that an offer of a graduate research or graduate teaching assistantship has been made, nor does it guarantee that a future offer will be made.
 - *If your application is successful, following the Department Graduate Applicant Review Committee decision, you will be advised in writing by the Plant Sciences' Department Head. You must formally accept any acceptance or tendered offer to become eligible to receive assistantship support.*
- What intellectual aspect of Plant Sciences interests you enough to *want* to apply to Graduate School...why *this* field of science? Be as specific as you can.
- What experiences *have you had* with past (high school or) undergraduate research or teaching?
- What contribution do *you* believe *you* can make to support our research, teaching, and extension missions? What do you intend to contribute to the future of Plant Science or agriculture?
- Do you have grades/issues in your past you're not content that your transcripts or references will address? Discuss them here.
- *What are* your long-term professional and life goals? What is *your* “dream job” (and what evidence can you share that you are willing to work to achieve it)? How might a UT Plant Sciences' MS or PhD degree can prepare you to achieve your goals?

What **not** to include in your letter (keep in mind that applicants have only one opportunity to make a good first impression).

- Typos, misspelled words, and slang.
- Excess informality.
- Generalities. We want to know (with specific examples when possible) what you want to do and why.