

A Guide to Scholarship Applications for Latinos

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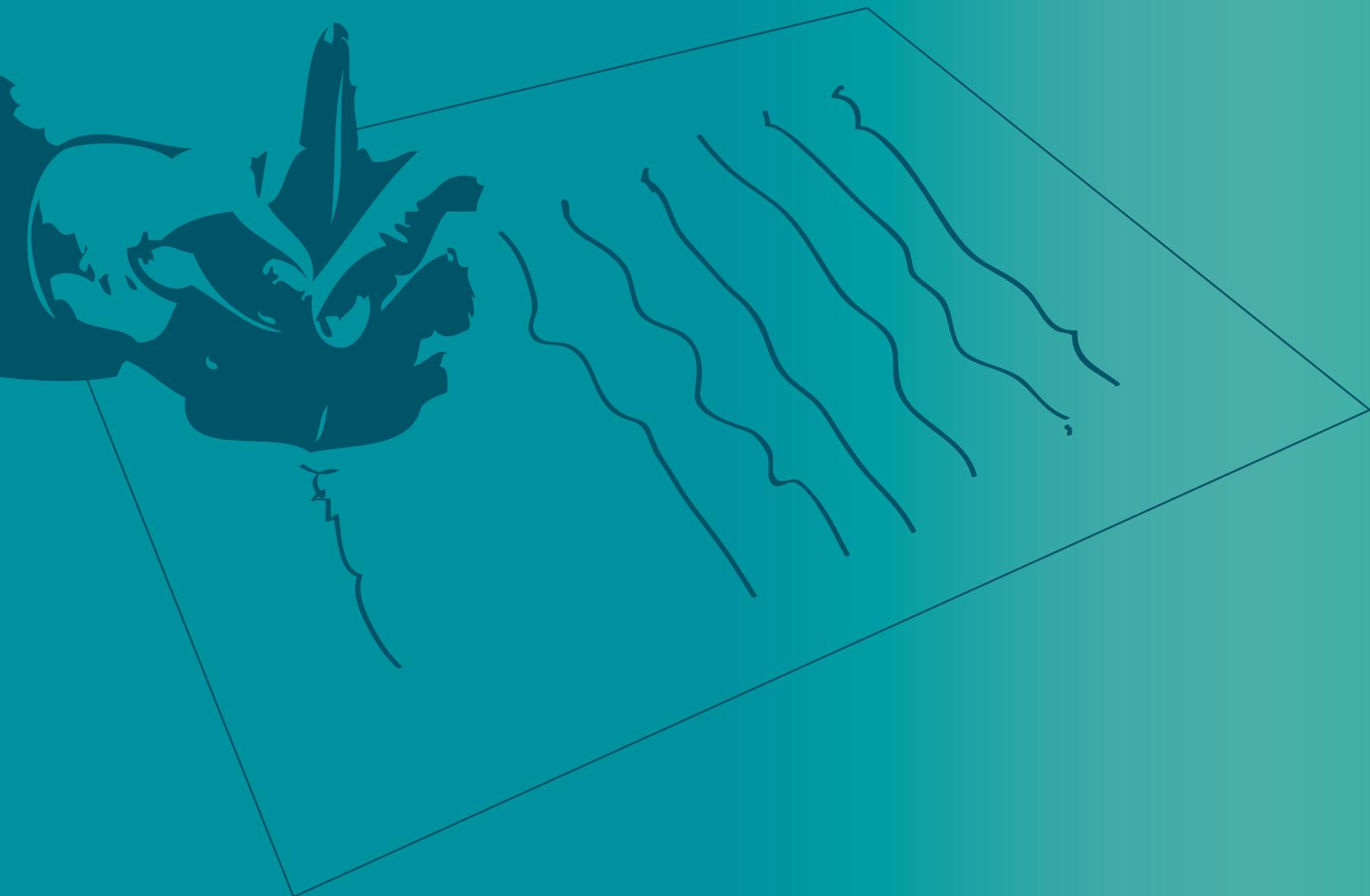


GENERAL STATEMENT

First step to finding scholarships is becoming aware and taking advantage of the resources available to you. Talk to your teachers or advisors about scholarships. They will be able to tell you about certain scholarships that are available through their department. Also do not forget to visit your school's Scholarship Office and Resource Centers. These places will have a number of resources and scholarships available.

As soon as you obtain applications, read the instructions carefully. Before filling out any application forms, make sure to look over the application and gather all the information needed. Fill out the application and then proofread your application. Have at least two other people review your applica-

tion, including your essays. Check and review your completed application for errors. To be resourceful save all your completed and revised written work for future use.



LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

Ask Early

The first and most important detail in asking for letters of recommendation is asking early. Ask for letters of recommendation in advance of your deadline to give the person(s) time to write a profound and strong letter that will help you in decision process. Notify them of your deadlines, content that you believe is necessary and ask if they need additional information to write a better letter. Be prepared and responsible in contacting them a couple of times as a reminder. If the scholarship you are applying for asks for specific requirements, make sure you let the person you are asking to write you a letter know those specific requirements. This way, they will have a better idea of what to include in the letter.

Choose Wisely

Many applications require letters of recommendation from faculty. Ideally, you already know or have formed relationships with faculty members or advisors. They would be well-equipped to write informed and specific letters about you. A concrete, detailed letter from a faculty member or advisor who has had the opportunity to get to know you personally and academically is more than likely going to work in your favor rather than someone who has not had that opportunity. If you don't feel any faculty knows you well enough, make an appointment with some of the professors or T.A.s whose courses you have taken or advisors that you have been acquainted with. Even if you don't know them personally, talk to them about your plans and see if

they would be comfortable writing a letter for you. It never hurts to ask!

Provide Resources

Provide a copy of your resume, writing samples, or other works that reveal your strengths and certain qualities that could strengthen a letter with personal details. Let the writer know the kind of information you would like the letter to convey. The more information given, the more likely the letter will be substantial and persuasive. Lastly, do not forget to write a thank-you letter to everyone who wrote your letters of recommendation. (NIU Career Services to proofread resume? Or at any community college, it's free!)



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The statement of purpose or personal statement can help make or break the readers' decision. This part of your essay/application is definitely one of the most important aspects. It is going to tell an audience who you are, what/who has influenced your academic path so far, your personal interests and where you plan to go for your future.

This is the one part of the application where the student or person applying has full control in presenting and having the ability to come alive through their statement of purpose. This particular writing sample will bring out your uniqueness and should be taken seriously while filling out applications. Be honest. Even if you think you are under qualified, you never know what will win them over.

Multiple drafts are going to make an enormous difference in the quality of your essay. Find a person to review your statement or essay, especially someone with experience reading or writing statements for scholarships. Try to avoid close family members and friends, they sometimes will avoid telling you the truth. Leave time for revision and consulting. Proofread your essay. Then proofread it again. Visit writing centers available and take advantage of the resources around you to improve and aid you in the application process!

Outline for a Statement of Purpose:

a) Introduction and thesis statement

- i. The thesis is the one statement that announces the central idea of the paper. It must be specific and sum up the basic meaning of the essay.
- ii. The first sentence is one of the most important. It should grab the readers' attention immediately.
- iii. The first paragraph, introduction, is also very important because it should persuade the reader to want to read more.
- iv. Briefly include what you will be talking about in the rest of the essay.
 - a. Summarize your main points.

b) The body of the paper

- i. Each paragraph should have a central idea with supporting details.
 - ii. Structure the sequence of ideas logically and carefully. You do not want to confuse the reader.
- ### c) Conclusion
- i. Restate the thesis and the main points throughout your essay.
 - ii. What can you bring the program/school/etc.

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ESSAY AND STATEMENT TIPS

Be sure to answer the essay's question(s). An exceptional essay that fails to address the main points of the question will not succeed. When writing about an experience, highlight what you accomplished through specific details and examples. For example, "I made a difference in people's lives" demonstrates much less than "I helped rebuild six homes, and through our teamwork, families moved back just three months after the hurricane." Be detailed but to the point in your writing!

Use clarity and structure in your essay/personal statement. Use paragraphs and transition words to signal a change in emphasis/ideas and paragraphs. Be cautious with the use of the words "I"

and "you." Use proper punctuation and spelling. Avoid repetition and unnecessary jargon. Make every word count toward overall clarity in answering the essays question for a stronger impact on the reader.

Multiple drafts are going to make an enormous difference in the quality of your essay. Find a person to review your statement or essay, especially someone with experience reading or writing statements for scholarships. Try to avoid close family members and friends, they sometimes will avoid telling you the truth. Leave time for revision and consulting. Proofread your essay. Then proofread it again. Visit writing centers available and take advantage of the resources around you to im-

An example of a Statement of Purpose

My interest in social work developed as I switched environments growing up. Emerging in an environment where poverty was prevalent and then shifting environments to a wealthier community, while I was young, opened up my reality to more than just my old neighborhood and made me question the reason that some people suffer and struggle to survive and others live comfortably. As my interest developed, I felt a need to adhere to helping those marginalized groups of people. This is the ‘work’ part of social work that came to fruition through social action. I never internally labeled my actions or interest as social work, but saw it as following what my conscious understood as just. The observations that I had made as a young adult and questioned

were later reinforced by my volunteer and community work.

I am now seeking a professional degree in social work because I am able to give the program the required attention without many other responsibilities playing a role to the amount of dedication that I can reserve for it. A master’s in social work is necessary in the fieldwork that I plan on going into, as well as a goal in my life that I am pursuing.

My special interests are in advocating for young adults who are conflicted by many problems left by past generations. I believe that the young people on this planet need attention and guidance by those of us who have already gone through many of the same experiences that they are or will be facing. I have

worked with youth who are associated and involved with gangs, lost in the criminal justice system, and many young Latino males, to whom I have presented possibilities that they never felt could manifest. During my time as an undergraduate, I have mainly trained and worked advocating for youth, families and communities. Much of this work came about as a volunteer and occupations that concentrated on social justice issues and mentoring young adults.

Submitted by NIU Graduate, 2009

“My interest in social work developed as I switched environments growing up.”



SEARCHING FOR SCHOLARSHIP ONLINE

The most efficient way is to have a connection with an advisor or professor who will be able to tell you which scholarships are available to you, specifically scholarships based on your background, interests, abilities, financial situations, etc. Another alternative towards looking for scholarships is using one of most known resources, the internet.

There are many scholarship search engines that could guide you to finding the scholarships you need. But when using the internet you do have to be persistent on your search for scholarships and be cautious. The internet has information from many different sources and you have to be careful while searching the web. The World Wide Web offers information and data from all over the world. Because

so much information is available, and because that information can appear to be fairly “anonymous”, it is necessary to develop skills to evaluate what you find.

A few steps will guide you on the validity on websites offering you information. You need to be able to know what is legitimate from what is not. Checking the authorship of the website and the internet document is a must before filling anything out. Be cautious of scholarship ads that offer to help you find the perfect scholarships for cash. Do not pay for any aid dealing with scholarships on the internet. Try to utilize a university or well known scholarly website/sources when looking for scholarship applications, such as Fastweb.com and Scholarships.com. When

using scholarship search engines, creating an email account solely for scholarships helps you organize your personal inbox as well as keep track on your scholarship documents/mail.



Try to utilize a university or well known scholarly website/sources when looking for scholarship applications, such as Fastweb.com and Scholarships.com.