

Personal Statement Workshop

CJ Sarabia and Luis Santiago
October 19 and 20 , 2023



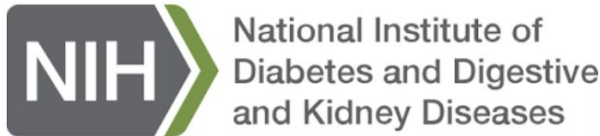
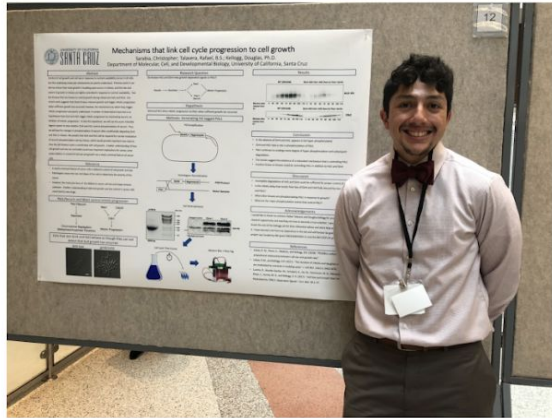
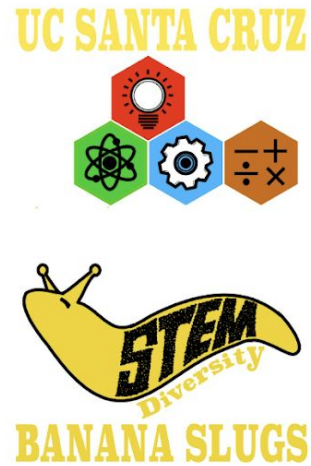
Outline

- Introductions
- Graduate School Application
 - Application Fees
 - Letters of Recommendation
 - Application essays
 - CV
 - Interviews
- Q&A with Luis and CJ

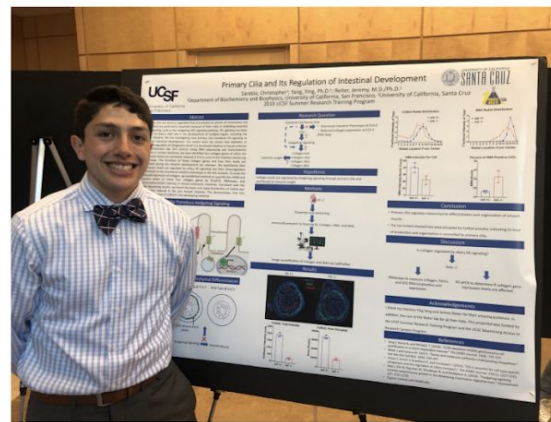
My journey to graduate school



San Jose, CA



National Institute of
Diabetes and Digestive
and Kidney Diseases



Irannejad lab, UCSF Tetrad

UCSF Summer Research Training Program (S RTP)

My Journey to graduate school



Graduate School Application Overview

- Application Fees – Fee waivers
- Letters of Recommendation
- Personal, Research and Diversity Statements
- Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- List of faculty or research interests
- Interviews

Application Fees

Check fee waivers before applying

- Grad school applications are expensive, but most programs offer **fee waivers**



[Programs](#)

[Career](#)

[Comm](#)

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Application Fee Waivers

Some applicants may qualify to have their application fee waived. Although some applicants receive automatic waivers based on prior program participation, waivers must still be processed manually in our system; therefore, requesting a waiver **well in advance** of the application deadline is necessary. **Applicants will NOT be able to submit their application for program review until the waiver has been processed; however, they still have the option to pay the fee.**

Check fee waivers before applying

- Grad school applications are expensive, but most programs offer **fee waivers**
- Search through the program website to find their requirements for a fee waiver

Eligible Applicants

I. U.S. citizens or permanent residents participating in any of the following programs may request these application fee waivers via a drop-down menu in the application portal. ▾

- Active U.S. military or U.S. veteran
- Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity (BUILD) Initiative participant
- CA State University Sally Casanova predoctoral scholars
- CAMP (California Alliance for Minority Participation in STEM)
- Graduate from HBCU's (historically black colleges and institutions)
- HHMI EXROP
- LS-AMP (Louis-Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation in STEM - National counterpart to CAMP)
- MARC (Maximizing Access to Research Careers)
- MBRS-IMSD (Minority Biomedical Research Support - Initiative for Maximizing Student Development)
- Postbaccalaureate Research Education Program (PREP)
- Research Training Initiative for Student Enhancement (RISE) Program
- Ronald McNair scholars
- UC LEADS (Leadership Excellence through Advanced Degrees)
- UCOP-Tuskegee Partnership Interns/Alumni
- UCSF Summer Research Training Program alumni
- I spoke with a UCSF staff/faculty/student at the ABRCMS conference
- I spoke with a UCSF staff/faculty/student at the SACNAS conference

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- Most fee waivers have their own application or require a statement to submit. **Follow the deadlines!**

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- Contact the program admin if you need more info!

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Letters of Recommendation

5 steps to a strong LOR

1. Deciding whom to ask
2. Picking the right time
3. Requesting LOR
4. Providing the right information
5. Following up



1. Decide whom to ask

One-on-one relationships!

Someone who can talk about...

Academic performance

=

Course professor

Career aspirations

=

Research mentor

Who you are as a person

=

Volunteer work

2. Pick the right time

- Give yourself time to prepare your application materials!
- Be ready to share drafts with your letter writers
- *Ask for LOR 1 month* before the deadline
 - Aim for November 1st!

Remember:

**They are happy to do it,
but they also need time!**



3. Requesting LOR

Email

Gives the reference time to think and respond to your request
Use it to schedule a time to meet

Request a meeting to discuss

Your research interests
The programs you are applying to

4. Provide the right information

Your recommendation is only as good as the information you provide

- What schools you are applying to?
- What degree are you pursuing?
- Why do you want to attend graduate school?
- Do you have any extracurricular interests?
- A resume
- Awards and Honors

Tell **YOUR** story!



Email outline requesting a LOR

1. Introduce yourself

I had the pleasure of taking your course in Spring 2019.

2. Explain the application(s)

I am applying for Biomedical Sciences PhD Program at UCSF. Research Interest(s)

I am interested in continuing researching the role of regulatory elements in development.

4. Ask if they are willing to write you a **strong LOR**

*Would you be comfortable writing a **strong letter of recommendation** for me?*

5. Offer to send a spreadsheet with due dates and contact information

May I send you a spreadsheet with due dates? What materials would you like from me?

TIP: Ask somebody to read the email before you send it!

How to provide detailed information to LOR writers?

| Name of School | Due Date | Graduate Program | Research Interest at that School | Method of Submission |
|---|----------------------------|---------------------|---|---|
| University of Washington | Dec 1 st , 2023 | Genome Sciences | Role of regulatory elements in neurodevelopment. | Submit via online application: link |
| University of California, San Francisco | Dec 1 st , 2023 | Biomedical Sciences | Exploring novel therapeutics for neurodevelopmental disorders by targeting regulatory elements. | Submit via online application: link |
| University of California, San Diego | Dec 1 st , 2023 | Biomedical Sciences | How do gene regulatory elements contribute to disease and development? | Submit via online application: link |

How to close the email for a response?

Close by proposing next contact and/or preferred method of communication.

If you are willing to write a letter for me, I would happy to come to your office hours this week or set up a Zoom meeting? If you are too busy to meet I can email you my materials right away.

5. Reminders and post LOR contact

Didn't hear back after asking for a LOR? Resend the email

Hello Professor X,

I know you are busy so I just wanted to bring my message back to the top of your email.

They haven't submitted your letter? Send them a polite reminder

Thank you again for writing my LOR, and I just wanted to remind you of the deadline this Friday...

After they have submitted the letter or once you've heard back from schools

Handwritten thank you note! or at least an email

Let them know what happened!

Summary

1. Deciding whom to ask

Most schools request **3** LOR

Make a list of **4-5** potential LOR writers

2. Picking the right time

Request at least **1 month** in advance (November 1st)

3. Requesting LOR

Send email and request a time to meet

4. Providing the right information

Meet in person / over Zoom

Make a spreadsheet with all information needed

5. Following up

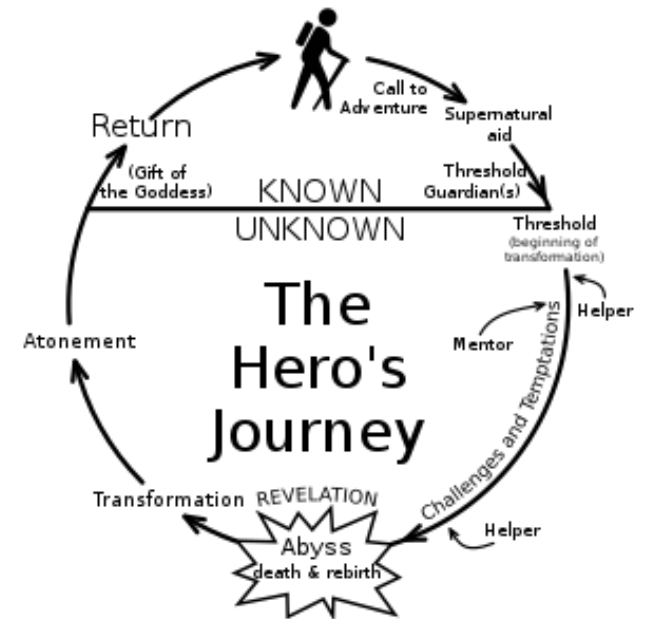
Don't be afraid to send follow-up and reminder emails!

Thank your LOR writer with a handwritten note or email

Application essays

Personal Statement

- This is your “personal story”
- Your statement *might* include:
 - Your background (race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status) and how it has shaped who you are
 - Outreach or extracurricular activities: why you participated in them and how they have impacted you
 - Restate career goals: you can go more in-depth about why you want to go into a certain profession



Statement of Purpose

- This is your “professional story”, but make sure it’s somewhat fun (faculty will be reading through lots of these, keep them interested)
- Your statement should include:
 - How you got interested in science or your discipline
 - Brief research experience(s) statement
 - Fellowships, conferences/presentations
 - Why you are interested in a specific program (tailored statement - feel free to name drop labs you’re interested in here)
 - Career goals (why you want and/or need a PhD for this)



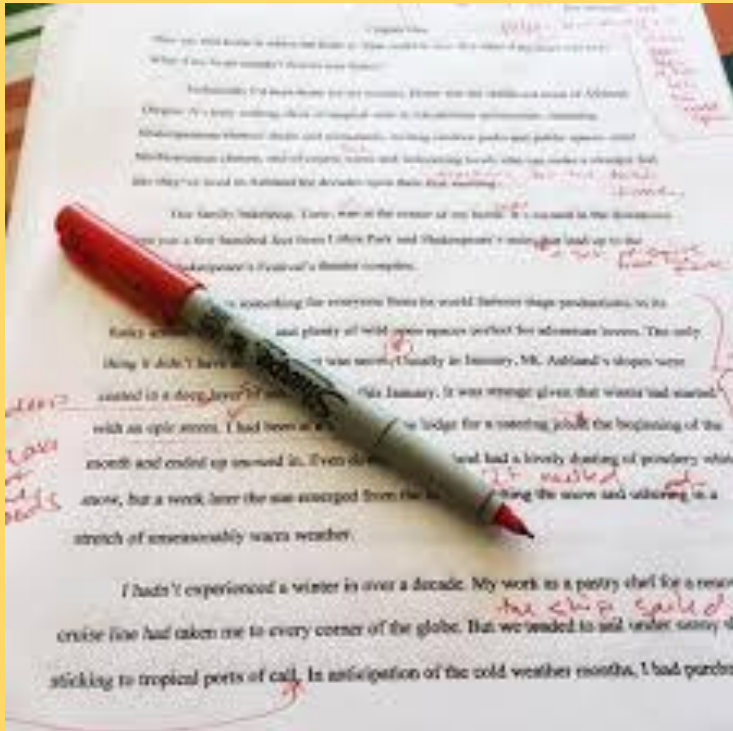
Research Statement

- Write about significant projects you have worked on and your contribution to them
- Include some background, your question, your hypothesis, methods, and conclusion.
- When writing about the methods, do not provide too much technical detail. Describe the purpose of the technique you used and the bigger picture.
- Briefly mention faculty who you are interested in working and describe why you are interested in their work.



DO NOT DO THIS ALONE!

Get as many qualified people to look over and edit your essays as you can!



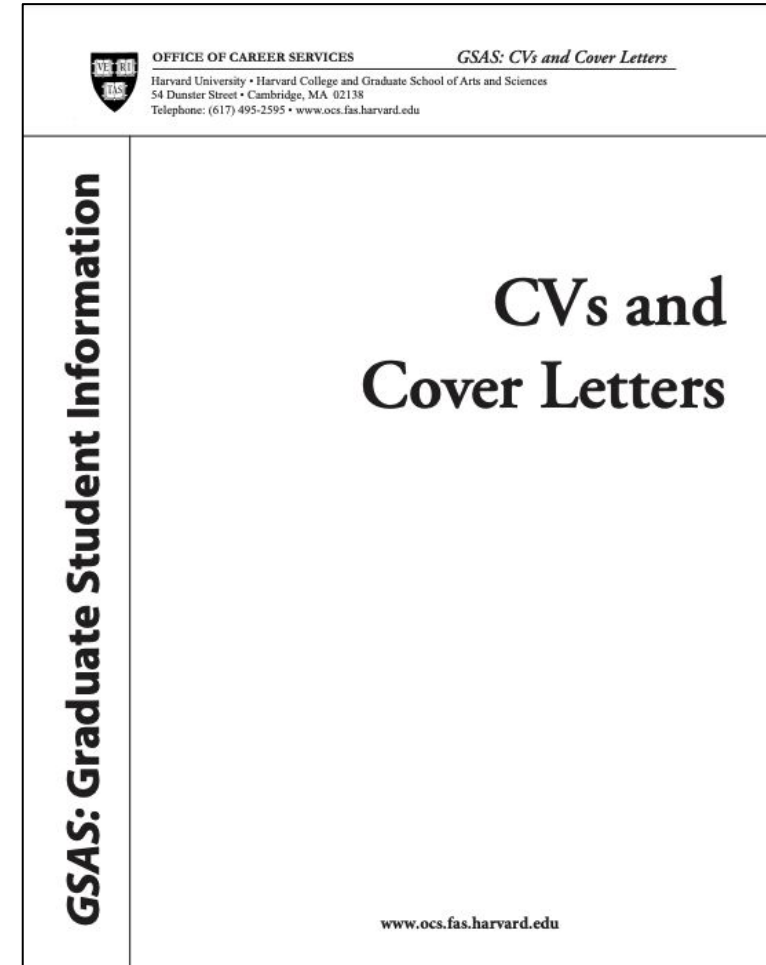
CV

CV Resources

Lots of resources online!

Recommend the Harvard CV and Cover Letters Resource:

<https://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/ocs/files/gsas-cvs-and-cover-letters.pdf>



CV Resources

Ask for examples from mentors!

Look at examples to learn the formatting and learn to emphasize your strengths

Luis Jaimes Santiago

(000)000-0000 | Luis.Santiago@UCSF.edu

EDUCATION

University of California San Francisco (July 2021-current)

- Pharmaceutical Sciences/Pharmacogenomics PhD. Program

California State University, Northridge (May 2019)

- Bachelor of Science in Biotechnology/Cell and Molecular Biology; Minor in Chemistry

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

University of California San Francisco – Mission Bay, San Francisco, CA (June 2022-current)
Dr. Aashish Manglik, Dr. Mark Von Zastrow (co-mentorship)

My project focuses on cell regulation of G protein-coupled receptor by endocytosis. Laboratory skills: Molecular biology for making recombinant DNA constructs; Western blot; Protein purification; flow-cytometry assays: In vitro biochemical assays; Microscopy (Confocal, TIRF, fixed-cell imaging).

Labcorp Drug Development (formerly Covance Laboratories Inc.) (August 2019-May 2021)
Madison, WI

Department: Drug Metabolism **Position:** Research Analyst II

In vitro assays on investigational new drugs to study potential drug-drug interactions. Laboratory skills: Cell and tissue culture of transgenic HEK293 and Caco2 cell lines; Liver and hepatic fraction assays to measure drug metabolism; Assessment of xenobiotic stability in whole blood, plasma, and serum; Liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry method development; Radioligand binding and transporter efflux assays; Assay development based on client needs; Data analysis programming in VBA and C++; Programming for Hamilton liquid handlers.

NIH Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (RISE) Fellowship (May 2016-May 2019)

California State University Northridge - Northridge, CA

Dr. Ravinder Abrol, Dr. Maria-Elena Zavala (Program supervisor)

Computational simulation studies to investigate receptor selectivity of G protein subtypes. Laboratory skills: Programming in matlab, c++, python, and bash; Protein sequence alignment and homology model building; Protein structure refinement of sidechains, energy minimization, receptor protein alignment to membranes; Molecular docking; Molecular dynamics system preparation and simulation using CHARMM, AMBER, GROMACS; Structural and energy analysis using VMD, MMPBSA, CPPTRAJ.]

REU program on Next Generation Plant Cell Biology at UC Riverside (June 2018-August 2018)

University of California Riverside - Riverside, CA

Dr. Isgouhi Kaloshian

I assisted in characterization of novel aphid-derived proteins. Laboratory skills: Molecular biology techniques for transient transfection in plants and protein expression in *E. coli*; In vitro assays to characterize protein function.

PUBLICATIONS

Abrol R., Serrano E., Santiago LJ., Development of Enhanced Conformational Sampling Methods to Probe the Activation Landscape of GPCRs. *Adv. Prot. Chem. Struct. Biol.* **2021**, *128*, 325-359.

Santiago LJ., Abrol R., Understanding G Protein Selectivity of Muscarinic Acetylcholine Receptors Using Computational Methods. *Int. J. Mol. Sci.* **2019**, *20*, 5290.

While you are working on grad apps...

- **Reach out to the graduate programs you are interested in!**
 - Email professors you are interested in working with
 - Reach out to students in their labs, even if they're in other programs
- **Use your connections!**
 - Check your Linked-in for connections in those grad programs
 - Reach out to students from similar backgrounds as yourself and ask them how they like it there.
- Couldn't find some info on the program website? **Email and ask their program administrators!**
 - Programs usually don't list all their classes, so email and ask to introduce yourself!

These efforts stand out when programs are discussing your application!

Grad School Interviews

General Timeline

- Notified late December the earliest, but more likely sometime in January
- Interview will be 2-3 days in January to March
- Post-interview results are usually within a few weeks,
- Universal deadline to accept or reject is April 15

Logistics

- Some kind of virtual interview that is followed by campus visit
- All expenses are PAID
- The program will arrange lodging and food, usually air travel too

General Etiquette

- The obvious stuff: be the best version of yourself!
- Dress business casual (no need for a suit)
- Don't speak negatively about other institutions
- Have fun, but don't over-do it
- Ask questions! You are evaluating them just as much as they are evaluating you.

Q & A