

## Early Career Members

# Creating a Research Statement: A Needed Document for Job Applicants

In many advertised academic positions, applicants are being asked to submit a research statement as part of their application packet. In perusing *CSA News* magazine over the past few months, I have found several examples in various job announcements. The announcement might not ask specifically for a research statement, but for something similarly titled such as a statement of research goals, a research plan, or a statement of research interests.



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In this article, I want to share my experience writing a research statement and some things that I learned along the way. First, let me start off by saying that I was unfamiliar with the concept of the research statement until more recently when I applied for a job at Purdue University in what is now my current position. Like any good researcher, I searched for articles on the subject but found only a few scant articles and presentations. However, I was able to piece together some good information and have learned more since. Now, I want to share my findings with you, but first let's define exactly what a research statement is and why you need to write one:

*Definition: A research statement is a brief narrative that summarizes your research achievements to date and the future goals for your research program.*

## Tips for Writing a Research Statement

Here are some tips to consider when writing your research statement:

1. Keep the document to two pages or less. One page is sufficient if you can concisely touch on the topic without seeming too vague or leaving out key points. My graduate adviser always encouraged me to "Be bright, be brief, and be gone" when giving a presentation, so I will encourage you to do the same with your research statement. Some recommend writing three-, four-, or five-page research statements, but I contend that members of the hiring committee are busy faculty members, and they don't have much time to review your document. They do, however, want to learn more about your research and how you might fit into their department.

2. Don't use small fonts. Use a font size of 11 or 12 with one-inch page margins, and consider using 1.5 or double-

spaced text. Make it easy for someone to read. Use bulleted lists if needed and section headings to make the document easy to navigate.

3. A research statement should be broken into three key sections including (a) background, (b) current research, and (c) research goals.

- a. The *background* should provide a short but focused narrative on why you do research in your particular field and why it is important (not just to your scientific field but also to the greater community).
- b. The *current research* section should provide the reader information about the research you have already done, where you published the research, your key findings, why your published work is important, and the impact of your research.
- c. In the *research goals* section, tell the hiring committee what kind of research you plan on doing for the next five years or so if you are hired. Provide information on the rationale for moving your research in this direction, your approach, and anticipated funding agencies. Clearly convey your vision and aspirations for your future research. When proposing research goals, make sure that these ideas logically flow from your previous research experience and findings. Hiring committees will be highly skeptical if you propose to do research in an area for which you have little experience. Although you are proposing future research goals in this section, no one at the hiring university will hold you to the exact ideas you propose in this document once you are hired.

4. All hiring committees want to know that you can be a team player and a valuable colleague and peer in their department. When possible, include information on who you want to collaborate with in their department should you be hired and how your research will benefit the team of researchers who are already there. If you have had previous discussions with faculty in their department on collaborative research, then it would be appropriate to indicate this information in your research statement. You should convey how your program will be a well-funded, productive, and valuable component of the department five years from now should they hire you.

5. Weave into the document information on how your research program fits the goals, grand challenges, or initiatives of the department and/or college. Spend time on their website and find this information. If not readily available, it is appropriate to ask for this information ahead of time.