

Planning and the Black Community Division of the APA Robert A. Catlin/David W. Long Memorial Scholarship

Excerpts from Scholarship Applications

Introduction

The samples below are excerpts from applications for the Robert A. Catlin/David W. Long Memorial Scholarship. The excerpts and comments should be useful as you prepare your personal statement and seek letters of recommendation. The following are merely guidelines; they are not meant to be an exhaustive or complete description of personal statements and letters of recommendation that are award winning. The Research and Education Standing Committee evaluates these documents and the other parts of the application on a case-by-case basis. In other words, complying with these guidelines alone does not guarantee that the applicant will receive the scholarship.

Excerpts from Personal Statements

A Good Example

The rise of industrial out- migration and the growth of suburbia over the last fifty years have led to the decentralization of nearly all of America's central cities. These sweeping changes in urban demography, in conjunction with restrictive covenants, redlining, socio-economically motivated politics, and collusion between developers and neighborhood associations have created the dire state of the modern inner-city neighborhood. Having lived in Houston, Texas my whole life, I have observed the decline of the city's African American neighborhoods. Because Houston lacks zoning, organized neighborhood codes have been key to creating sustainable communities and keeping residential economies active and healthy. From a planning standpoint, Houston's African American neighborhoods need to adopt the neighborhood association model of community development for their benefit--using the techniques used against them for decades to combat gentrification, jumpstart business growth, and preserve architecture in their own districts.

(Comment: Encapsulates major urban changes, e.g., out migration, suburban growth, and redlining, which have affected cities and African Americans specifically. The applicant also makes reference to a planning technique, i.e., the neighborhood association model)

Many of my fondest childhood memories are of accompanying my mother to the neighborhood beauty shop in a 1940's Craftsman in the old Fifth Ward or going with my father to the *This Is It* soul food restaurant downtown. As recently as five years ago, the restaurant was surrounded by historical white tract homes. Like most businesses in Houston's African American neighborhoods, the beauty shop has closed down. The rows of white tract homes around *This Is It* have been bulldozed, and the renters evicted to

make room for luxury town homes. This scene is all too familiar in America's cities. The last remnants of healthy neighborhood identity that managed to survive the destructive urban renewal programs of the 1960s and 70s are under fire again as developers seek to take advantage of low property values in the inner city. Stadiums replace historic homes, businesses close, schools decline, and our neighborhoods lose more ground every day.

(Comment: Uses knowledge of planning policy/history, in this case, urban renewal, to describe the reality of community life; thereby, showing an ability to connect classroom theory to practical consequence; each sentence is a part of a well connected and developed paragraph)

The first phase of my revitalization would include a community meeting to educate locals and encourage a town hall approach to planning. Once we'd agreed on the problem areas and solutions, I would encourage cooperation with Houston's City Council and Planning Commission, prioritization of minority and local contracts, and iterative input from the community. Because Houston lacks zoning to protect residential areas, I would push for the use of aesthetic-, use-, and preservation-based building codes. The key to redevelopment in any old neighborhood is preserving historic structures. I conducted a study of Houston Community College Central Campus to investigate the degree to which colleges built in refurbished historic structures could rehabilitate downtown districts. Finding new, perhaps light commercial uses, for old warehouses, storefronts, and homes is the key to keeping the neighborhood current and sustainable but true to its roots.

(Comment: Lays out a specific plan of action describing how the student plans to make a contribution through planning to the African American community. References are made to research that the student has conducted.)

A Poor Example

Urban planning serves to the interest of the public by bestowing their welfare, well-being, and safety. Over the years and presently, urban planning obtains this goal. In the African American community, urban planning has rendered many opportunities. A few of the opportunities are affordable housing, educational opportunities, and job employment. Succeeding beyond affordable housing, African Americans now reside in nice and safe suburbia areas. Within suburbia areas, urban planning has enhanced the well-being of African Americans neighborhoods by instituting good schools to improve educational opportunities. Urban planning has increased the opportunity for African Americans to attend college. Presently, African Americans are excelling beyond the Bachelor's degree level and receiving Master's and Doctoral Degrees.

(Comment: Too general, grammatical errors, needs to be more specific. Statement needs to connect to topic of urban planning and African American communities)

Excerpts from Reference Letters

A Good Example

Pam grew up, like many students, with few resources. With the support of her mother, grandmother, and church she was able to secure a scholarship to an outstanding Philadelphia prep school where she was introduced to the work planners do in economically-distressed communities. Since that moment, she has been on a mission to acquire the knowledge, skills, and competencies to be an outstanding community development professional serving low-income communities of color.

(Comment: Shows in depth knowledge of the student)

During the past three years, Pam completed a summer of public service activities with the Public Service Foundation in Seattle through our highly-competitive Urban Scholars Program (We only accept 1 out of 6 students) where her work earned high praise. In addition, she took advantage of our Study Abroad Program emerging as the key leader of a student team that prepared a very thoughtful and exciting revitalization plan for one of Rome's poorest residential neighborhoods. Currently, Pam is spending a semester working in a Turkish section of Cyprus where residents and local officials are trying to formulate and implement an ecologically-sensitive economic revitalization strategy.

(Comment: Again, this letter shows that the recommender has an in-depth knowledge of the student and the student's activities beyond the classroom. First, the recommender gives data that shows how competitive the program is that the student participated in. Second, the recommender makes specific reference to the student's extra curricular planning activities, e.g. the applicant's field work experience.)

Pam is simply one of the brightest, most committed, and hardest working undergraduate students with whom I have ever worked. She is absolutely committed to pursuing a career as a professional planner. She wants to devote her future to promoting resident-led economic and community development efforts in severely-distressed communities of color. She has taken advantage of every community development educational experience which we have to offer.

(Comment: Recommender knows student's future plans for professional practice)

Poor Example

To Whom It May Concern: **(Comment: Needs better salutation)**

I am writing to recommend Louisa Doe. I have known Ms. Doe for a period of two years. During this time she has demonstrated excellent academic moral as well as organizational skills in the two courses she took under me. It's no wonder she is an honor student.

(Comment: Too general- needs to be more specific and define assertions that the student possesses the qualities described by the recommender.)

Ms. Doe is very serious about her studies. As a result, she never missed class, was never late, and she enthusiastically took part in all class activities. Because she was always prepared, she was able to contribute to the discussion of any complex issue raised in class.

(Comment: Again, the recommender needs to cite reasons why the student is excellent beyond being punctual)