Personal Statement

Emily E. Russell

Desired Field of Interest:

Quantitative Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience

A study published by the Council of Graduate Schools found completion of doctoral degrees were best determined by fortitude, perseverance, motivation, resiliency, and experience rather than GPA or test scores (Grasso, Valentine, & Barry, 2009). My educational experiences highlight each of these values: (a) resiliency even as my career goals changed, (b) fortitude which improved as I learned to separate personal business from academic matters, (c) dedication to higher education through my sought out opportunities for advancement in research, (d) exposure to graduate work beyond one degree or institution (from independent studies at the graduate level on statistics through Honors College, to a Human Brain Stimulation course through George Mason University), and (e) priorities of progression in academia to equip me for my next step in graduate school.

My interest of a career in research was sparked when I studied Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) at Eastern Virginia Medical School. The apprenticeship required extensive reading in areas outside of psychiatry, such as clinical research in ethics, physiological and cognitive readings in stimulation techniques, psychophysics research on procedure orientation, and neuroanatomy for focalization. I found myself curious about electromagnetism in the brain and pathways of perception, but I prioritized my career goal of dance therapy for two more semesters.

The time between my apprenticeship and pursuit of research included some of the most trying times in my academic career: a hospitalization for 10 days, two jobs that required a combined time of 30+ hours a week, additional tutoring for peers in statistics, multiple dance performances, and a new role in extracurricular engagements as I joined a sorority, an honors fraternity, a dance crew, the Filipino American Student Association, and the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society. Needless to say, I struggled with balancing my responsibilities but found resilience when I found a passion in my Honors Human Cognition and Research Methods courses.

I enjoyed reading every assignment given in my courses even as my time was strained and raised my most challenging courses to a B and B+ as my lowest grades for the semester.

The amount of enthusiasm I felt towards research in cognition grew as I worked with a graduate student on evaluating Aha! Ratings as a measure of insight and restructuring in problem solving, and then work in the Honors Departmental Program to immerse myself in research at the University. Adaptability and perseverance became essential when measures in my experiments required creativity in design and large portions of trial and error. Graduate students were no longer present in the lab, software of E Prime 3 had not been used by the University Department previously, and resources through the software program provided little assistance. I practically memorized the manual provided and developed an eye-tracking study to quantify eye fixations as a possible measure of impasse.

The possibility of a career in research became more real to me when I began applying for research grants and learned to emphasize the implications and importance of my work, which inspired me to work harder. My fondest memory of my Undergraduate Research Career was the recognition of my studies at the Undergraduate Research Symposium, when I earned an overall prize for my work. Judges of the Symposium mentioned my ability to enthusiastically communicate my work to a diverse audience and commented on my apparent passion for my research.

My goal in my higher education is to understand both Quantitative Methods and Cognitive Science to the fullest. I aim to emphasize research and absorb information from professors in both areas to accomplish my goal, which can best be provided by the variety of staff at the University of Washington. My objectives for graduate school are to understand publication processes, establish credibility in my research, understand trends in Cognitive Science and Quantitative

Methods, and have more opportunities to attend seminars pertaining to cognitive studies and quantitative methods.

Cognition and Quantitative Methods are fields that not only require extensive knowledge of human behavior and the brain, they require the ability to think in an interdisciplinary way and consider all aspects of a topic. My majors in college varied from chemistry, to therapeutic recreation, to dance, to cognition. At first glance they may seem very different, but my favorite aspect of each major is the need for creativity within a patterned structure to optimize results. By studying each area, I have been able to pick up physiological and psychophysics quickly, increase time management and leadership abilities, creatively adapt to the needs of an experiment, and analyze published research with a critical eye.

I have prepared for success in graduate school by combining my natural abilities with intentional strengthening of my weaknesses. I am naturally goal-oriented and relate most to people who prioritize education. My experiences have given me skills to be more flexible and disciplined in my pursuits, as well as balance work, school, and my personal life. I look forward to the journey ahead and working with my academic advisor on invigorating research.

References

Grasso, M., Valentine, T., & Berry, M. (2009). Chapter 5: Attracting the Right Students. Retrieved October 16, 2020, from https://cgsnet.org/cgs-occasional-paper-series/university-georgia/chapter-5