URAP: The Personal Statement

This post is based on my experience as a 4x interviewee, 6x apprentice, 2x interviewer, and program advisor of 4 years.

Read below for my application recommendations and tips.

1 What is URAP about?

1. Becoming involved in the research community at Berkeley
2. Building connection and collaboration between apprentices and faculty mentors
3. Offering opportunities for all undergraduates to participate in research

As part of the application process, you have answered the following questions (taken from the URAP application instructions) for your projects of interest.

1. Why are you interested in this particular project? [para 1]
2. Why are you qualified? [para 2]
3. What skills can you bring to the project, how can you contribute? [para 2]
4. What classes have you taken that relate to the project? [para 2]
5. What do you hope to get out of this research experience? [para 3]

2 Five URAP Statement Tips

1. Follow the application guidelines
   - The project description may list additional guidelines for your statement
   - Doing this shows that you are detail-oriented (actually read the application guidelines) and can communicate concisely and effectively

   Example. Your statement should be within the suggested word count (about 450-500 words)

2. Clearly list your project/role of interest at the top of your statement
   - If the lab has multiple open projects or roles, list the ones that you are interested in (1) a separate paragraph on the top of the page or (2) bolded or underlined in the introduction
   - Doing this helps your potential mentor determine your interests immediately, a major organizational plus after reading many applications

3. Address all project requirements

- Mention your soft skills like teamwork, creativity, and leadership even if the project description does not

Example. The project description states that "there is no possibility for virtual work, all work will be done in our lab." Mention that you will be on campus for the entirety of your apprenticeship.

4. Specify your commitment timeline to find the lab that's the best fit for you

   - Preference is sometimes given to students who plan to commit long term
   - This is because onboarding and generating meaningful results typically take a while
   - Although you don't have to mention that you want to stay long term, since the expected URAP commitment is only a single semester

Example. The project states "hours negotiable." In the statement: "I plan to commit an average of 9-12 hours a week to the project for at least two semesters and to full-time research during the summer."

5. Spell out course titles

   - Many mentors are not familiar with or have forgotten the specific course numbers corresponding to particular courses

Example. "I have taken upper-division courses in CS 188 Artificial Intelligence, CS 170 Algorithms, and CS 189 Machine Learning."

Note. Try not to use valuable space to talk about AP courses. Minimize talking about high school, if at all, regardless of your year. (For transfer students, talking about your CC classes and experiences is ok!)

3   FAQ

- **Should I still apply for a project where I don't meet some of the listed qualifications?**

  - Yes, apply! You don't need to meet all qualifications (I didn't)
  - It is expected that apprentices will require some amount of training, so you do not have to meet all of the project qualifications to be a successful applicant.
  - For example, if the project states that "experience with [skill] is recommended or preferred" and you are not familiar with it, then apply.
  - It may be helpful to mention when applying if you are currently learning that skill.

- **Does the application require a CV/Resume?**

  - No. URAP is one of the few programs that does not require CV/Resume.
  - But having yours prepared may come in handy for the interview

- **What happens when I continue with URAP across multiple next semesters?**

- If you stay with the same lab, there's no need to apply again. A learning contract just need to be signed again for each semester that you would like to receive units
- If you wish to change labs, then you will need go through the application process again

- **What if I did not get matched with a lab?**

  - Apply again next semester!
  - Get feedback on how you can improve your application
  - Try other ways to find research opportunities! See my suggestions here.

- **More FAQ**

4 My Two Cents

- It is not always the case that the most accomplished 4.0 GPA national award-winning applicant gets the position
- It is more about whether the applicant is a good fit with the project and team
- A good fit can be defined as the lab and applicant's interests, availability, and long-term goals align
- There's also a sprinkling of luck in it sometimes

5 Final Note

- Projects with hot topic buzzwords like cancer or machine learning typically have more student applications
- But don't let this discourage you from applying if you are interested in that kind of research area
- The application webpage says that you can apply to up to three projects. A little loophole, or more accurately, you can have up to three active project applications.

  Example. You apply to project A, B, and C on Jan 1st. You are rejected from project C on Jan 10th. Since the extended URAP application deadline is Jan 20th and project D is still open, you can apply to project D as well.

Remember to ask for help!

- Meet with an OURS peer advisor
- Attend some information sessions
- Explore the step-by-step guide for applying
- See Part II: my guide on the URAP Interview

Best of luck!