

Marshall Proposed Academic Program (499 words)

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that 25 percent of all traffic accidents can be attributed to driver distraction. This testifies to the fact that of all the information that enters our eyes at any given moment, only a fraction enters our awareness. What neural mechanisms underlie this phenomenon? I want to study how the brain creates subjective visual awareness. In this area of research, the need to move from looking at isolated brain regions to understanding distributed networks of brain activity is becoming increasingly clear. Doing so will, I believe, require scientists to have a variety of research tools at their disposal, each of which has unique applications in the study of neural events.

In order to gain this kind of broad practical education, I would like to spend the first year of my academic program in the Oxford Neuroscience MSc program, a one-year taught course, and to follow that with a second year conducting research in the lab of Geraint Rees at University College London, a leader in the cognitive neuroscience of visual awareness. As a Cognitive Science major at Yale, I have prepared myself for future interdisciplinary study in cognitive science through coursework in psychology, neuroscience, computer science, and linguistics. I have significant research experience, having worked in labs on issues of attention, memory, and language in older adults, the neuroanatomy of Alzheimer's disease, attention and cognitive control, and the development of attention to eye-gaze in infants. Until now, however, my research experience has been primarily in the area of cognitive psychology, and I have limited practical experience in the techniques of neuroscience research. I wish to enter the Oxford Neuroscience MSc program in order to gain the skills that will allow me to build on my previous work, with a focus on neural mechanisms.

The Oxford program is unique in both the breadth of the topics it covers and its focus on the acquisition of technical skills. These enable students to approach problems in neuroscience using the most relevant research tools available, including single-cell recording, transcranial magnetic stimulation, event-related potentials, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), studies of neuropsychological patients, and computer modeling. In a traditional graduate program, I would be unlikely to have the opportunity for formal training in this range of laboratory techniques.

In my second year, doing research in Dr. Rees's lab at UCL's Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience would give me training in cutting-edge fMRI techniques that can be used to study networks of brain activity. The scientists in this lab are pioneers in the study of visual attention and awareness and are using fMRI in new ways to study the neural mechanisms of visual awareness. I would especially like to learn their method of multivariate analysis. I have contacted Dr. Rees, and he has offered to work with me to create a project proposal for work in his lab.

My second choice academic program is simply to begin at UCL with Dr. Rees working toward the MPhil degree for two years.

Describe an academic program you might apply to.

In the categories below, list personal characteristics that qualify you for the program you described on the previous page.

Your Background	Your Character	Your Future Goals	Things Others Can Say about You

Rhodes Personal Statement (997 words)

I learned three things in my first hour at the Orleans Public Defender's Office: the directions to the Iberville housing project, the importance of reading statements aloud to our often-illiterate clients, and the fact that everyone wants their day in court. Although going to trial wasn't a secure avenue to justice for my clients—the poorest residents of New Orleans—it offered a rare opportunity to feel control over their own lives. My experience advocating for clients victimized by economic deprivation, political disenfranchisement and social exclusion revealed to me the profound injustice of poverty in a land of plenty. More importantly, it showed me the vital role social policy plays in building stable communities. As a child, my experience with domestic violence showed me how injustice feels and taught me the power of individuals to advocate for those in need. As a college student, working with indigent clients in a combative legal system demonstrated how poverty perpetuates injustice on a systemic scale. And by working in social policy as a practitioner, I hope to craft needed reforms to U.S. benefit programs, providing Americans experiencing poverty with resources that empower them to lead fulfilling, productive lives.

My public defense clients were trapped in the criminal justice system, but their stories demonstrated how crime is deeply intertwined with poverty. Often, the system locked up the most visible victims of social disrepair. My client "Sam" was repeatedly failed by the social contract before being incarcerated. I met Sam, a middle-aged black man, in a cramped cubicle inside the Orleans Parish Prison. He was accused of selling drugs. Visiting Sam's home in the 8th Ward, I saw broken sidewalks, abandoned businesses, and school windows hidden behind iron bars. His parents showed me high school graduation photos while sharing stories of police harassment and employment discrimination. Sam may have been guilty, but it was clear to me that inherited poverty and entrenched racism had crippled his opportunities for fulfilling employment. Sam illustrated the immense difficulty of breaking cycles of poverty, especially in an era (and region) of retrenched welfare benefits. As my clients—all repeat defendants, many younger than myself—and the persistence of New Orleans poverty made clear, my legal work empowered individuals in crisis but direct service is an incomplete tool for creating systemic change.

To improve lives sustainably in poor communities, we need welfare, education, and housing reforms that enable people like Sam to pursue self-directed goals—studying for a GED or completing an apprenticeship—that increase social mobility. Oxford’s multidisciplinary education in social policy will build on my real-world understanding of the multifaceted experience of poverty, providing a strong vantage point to engage with the ethical, economic, and design details of policies across nations. American programs take a primarily economics-based approach to policy, but Oxford’s emphasis on ethics will enable me to question assumptions about the role of government and the impact of capitalism. In Oxford’s unique program, I will evaluate poverty policy around the world while mastering sophisticated research methodologies. Pursuing an MPhil in Comparative Social Policy positions me to learn strategically from Britain’s inclusive welfare policies and craft structural interventions in U.S. poverty that increase autonomy and quality of life for poor Americans.

My New Orleans clients taught me that system-level changes are important to ending generational poverty—but of all the things poor people can’t afford, control over one’s own future is hardest to go without. I’ve seen through my work in electoral politics that the lack of political clout available to lower-income citizens further blocks avenues for change. As Fellowship Director for Students for a New American Politics (SNAP-PAC), a student-run political action committee, I work to increase these citizens’ access to politics. By providing paid campaign work to poor and minority students, SNAP-PAC empowers people traditionally underrepresented in politics to hold their government accountable. Although diversifying political activism is important long-term, electoral politics are a slow road to systemic change.

The limitations of direct service and the protracted timeline of electoral politics as strategies for alleviating poverty drew me to social policy. As a 2013 Yale Law School Liman Public Interest Fellow, I worked closely with Roosevelt Institute Fellow and Columbia Professor Georgia Keohane to research and analyze poverty policy, from socially-responsible business models to public-private financing tools for nonprofit work. Drafting policy papers for White House briefings and international conferences with

Professor Keohane, I focused specifically on incentive-based human development initiatives known as “conditional cash transfers” which promise to reimagine cities’ approach to poverty.

At Roosevelt, I grappled with an ethical dilemma policymakers have struggled to solve: balancing a nation’s obligation to provide for its citizens against concerns about overreaching state power. I’ve engaged this question at Yale, particularly through my senior thesis, which assesses the use of disciplinary governmental power in U.S. welfare reform and the Affordable Care Act. As an activist and Women’s Studies major, I’ve worked across disciplines to develop a nuanced perspective on the state’s power to shape behavior, identity and values through social policy: for example studying the GI Bill’s influence on post-war gender roles. Oxford’s Social Policy and Intervention Department, with its strong faculty focus on gender, provides an unparalleled environment to extend this analysis. I hope to work closely with Professor Mary Daly, who specializes in gendered components of the welfare state, social exclusion, and the politics of care, as her research is parallel to both my thesis and my planned dissertation topic: the relationship between identity and social exclusion in the U.S. and U.K.

To ensure that choosing a jury trial isn’t the only way the poor have a voice in their futures, I want to craft innovations in welfare policy that equip all Americans with the resources to pursue their goals. Prepared by the MPhil in Comparative Social Policy at Oxford, I will apply my knowledge of structural anti-poverty interventions while working as a U.S. policymaker in a government agency, challenging institutionalized inequality and securing a future where justice and opportunity do not depend upon privilege.

EDITING PERSONAL STATEMENTS FOR STYLE

Style allows you to manage the effect your writing has on the people who read it. You want your words to feel forceful, and you want the way you write to convey a positive impression of you, the writer. (Rhetoricians call this your *ethos*.) The content is the most important part of your statement, as your character and experience are the most compelling indicators of your promise as a professional in your chosen field. But your style can help you manage how the reviewers of your application experience that content. While far from comprehensive, the list below offers some strategies for making your writing feel clear, lively, and forceful.

1. **Use verbs to express the action in a sentence.** Gerunds and suffixes like *-ment*, *-tion*, and *-ence* turn verbs into nouns (called nominalizations). Though you won't be able to eliminate all nominalizations in your sentences, your writing is typically clearer, livelier, and more concise when these concepts are expressed as actions rather than things. This is especially true in sentences where nominalizations are the subjects of verbs.

As you edit: Circle the nominalizations in your paper (note that not all *-ing* words are gerunds). Work through them one at a time, checking to see if your sentence can be revised to feature the verb form of the nominalization.

2. **Replace forms of *to be* with more active verbs.** Action makes prose feel lively, and verbs are the site of action in a sentence. Because some things just *are*, you won't be able to replace every form of *to be*. But in sentences that aren't making a claim about how something *is*, strive to convey the action with a strong verb.

As you edit: Circle all forms of *to be* in your paper (*is, are, was, were, be, been, being*), and see if you can replace each with an active verb.

3. **Limit your use of adjectives and adverbs.** Writing tends to feel more vivid when it uses actions and details (verbs and nouns) to convey information instead of description (adjectives and adverbs). Be especially suspicious of adjectives and adverbs whose primary use is to intensify the thing they're describing (e.g. devastating loss, ran quickly). A powerful adjective or adverb typically generates some tension with the word it modifies. Compare "killing me softly" with "killing me fiercely."

As you edit: Circle the adjectives and adverbs in your essay. Delete the ones that are doing the least work; revise others to make your description more surprising or imagistic.

4. **Be concise.** Expressing the same information in fewer words can often make your writing feel more forceful.

As you edit: Work through each paragraph and sentence, asking yourself: "If I deleted this, what would be lost?" More specific concision strategies include:

- i. Delete words that mean little or nothing. (*kind of, really, actually, in order to . . .*)
- ii. Delete words that repeat the meaning of other words. (*true and accurate, each and every, first and foremost . . .*)
- iii. Delete words implied by other words. (*terrible tragedy, final outcome, period of time, accurate manner . . .*)
- iv. Replace a phrase with a word. (*in the event that/if, are in a position to/can, an increase in the number of/more . . .*)

- v. Change negatives to affirmatives. (*not different/similar, not often/rarely, not allow/prevent . . .*)
- vi. Delete useless adjectives and adverbs. (*very, absolutely, interesting . . .*)
- vii. Replace words with punctuation. (*"for example," "that is," "therefore" &c. can be replaced with a colon; a semicolon can replace "and" between two independent clauses*)

5. **Proofread!** You are a hard worker and a careful scholar who pays attention to detail. Your writing should reflect this. Typos can make you come across as sloppy or less invested in the application than you really are.

As you edit: Read your statement aloud. Perform it slowly, enunciating every word. This intense focus on the written text can help you catch typos and awkward phrasings. When we read, we hear the words of a text in our head (called subvocalization). Reading your statement aloud can help you experience it as your readers will.

Also try: Have the computer read your text back to you. On a Mac, highlight the section of text you'd like read back and hit ⌘+ESC. The website naturalreaders.com will read back any text that you paste into its textbox.

Write down one thing you're still wondering about writing national fellowship essays. (Please hand in your response as you leave.)