

Ideas for Preparing Your Doctoral Application

At Dakota State University, we design our doctoral programs to prepare leaders, problem-solvers, and researchers to address the most complex challenges in computing, cyber and information sciences fields. The application process into these programs encourages you to reflect on how your past work and future goals intersect with DSU's mission for our doctoral programs. Here are several considerations as you prepare to submit your application.

Know DSU.

Be familiar enough with the focus and goals of Dakota State University Graduate Education, as well as the degree program to which you are applying, that you can speak confidently about your role in them.

Degree Background

Make sure your undergraduate, and/or your master's degree programs align with the doctoral degree of your interest. Our doctoral degrees require that you have a strong skill set in the discipline. For example, when applying for Ph.D. degrees in Computer Science and Cyber Operations, undergraduate and/or MS training should include a computer science degree. Though the Cyber Defense and Information Systems programs may draw from a slightly wider spectrum of backgrounds, help us see the connections and continuity between your completed degree programs and the doctoral degree you seek.

Also, we are looking for candidates with degree experiences (B.S., M.S.,) that are more than a list of accumulated proficiencies. Help us understand how your educational experiences have promoted skills in finding creative solutions, strengthened critical thinking, and/or required you to draw on other disciplines to frame a problem and seek a solution.

Professional Experience

Details about your employment history help tell the story about your professional pursuits and your accumulated competencies. Submit an employment history focusing only on work related to cybersecurity, IT systems, data analytics, or related areas that you can claim as your own. Contextual information on how and where that experience emerged (government, military, healthcare, private industry, consulting, et. al) is especially valued. Certificate work will usually show up on your transcripts. But if you have meaningful vendor or industry certifications such as CISSP, CEH, Security+, OSCP, or GCIH, list them.

Personal Professional Statement

You have only 300 words to explain how the program will help you address your career objectives. In that space, you should tackle this main question, how does your current professional work relate to the doctoral program? Highlight your long-term goals in computer science, cyber, or information systems leadership, research or national service. To use broad aspirational statements like “I’ve always had a goal to complete a doctoral degree . . .” would be sacrificing valuable space where you could show how your interests align with DSU’s mission and strengths. Use a conversational tone in your writing but impress us with your immersion in the field.

Research Readiness

The quality that distinguishes a Ph.D. degree from all other doctoral degrees (J.D., Ed.D., PharmD.) is its focus on empirical research. If you are an applicant who has taken a step in that direction, we want to hear about it in your purpose statement. Tell us about the applied research you’ve done in your work setting, or the faculty guided research you did as an undergraduate or master’s student, or your participation as a poster or paper presenter at a research conference. Include any previous research experience (thesis, publications, or technical work).

Letters of Recommendation (Ph.D.IS only)

Your letters of recommendation should come from academic or professional references who can speak about your academic ability, research or technical skills, your work ethic, and potential for doctoral-level work. When you request a reference, send a description of the task along with a clearly marked due date and a copy of your resume. Avoid character references. Peers and colleagues would not be appropriate for this task. A letter from a supervisor indicating their or the institutions’ level of support and encouragement is always a good inclusion. Use the recommendation system in the application portal.

Your Story

Your educational and work history, and your personal professional statement will tell a story of your preparation, vision, and capacity to thrive and grow in doctoral-level training. As you review your application, make sure it reflects the story you want to share. Be honest and thoughtful in identifying what you hope to gain—and how a DSU doctoral degree program helps you get there.

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DSU Graduate Studies

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