
Statement of Purpose Sample

UCLA Master of Arts - Teaching English as a Second Language

One very late night in the law office where I worked as a paralegal, I was hunched over my laptop researching petitions for an F2B visa applicant, and I was trying desperately not to fall asleep. It was potentially important work, and I wanted to do my best for the firm, but I was on the back end of a ten-hour shift, it was late, and the visa information was incredibly dense. In my weakened state, my eyes were drawn to a pop-up ad. It showed some large green mountain and the text said, “Teach English in Peru.”

As part of some bizarre sort of work escape fantasy, I clicked on the ad, then entered my email for more information. I quickly snapped out of my daydream and got back to the visa research. I had never been outside the US. I couldn’t have pointed to Peru on a map. This was the kind of thing other people did, not me.

I got the job. We emailed back and forth for a while, then Zoomed, and despite my repeated insistence that I, a Criminal Justice major, was not actually a teacher, they offered me a one-year contract. They would train me, pair me with a partner teacher, show me the ropes. My boss at the law firm actually thought it was a fantastic idea, and saw it as forward-thinking. I would go, learn Spanish, and then come back and assist full-time in the immigration law department.

I felt a lot of things when I arrived in Lima, Peru – mostly fear and confusion – but what I felt most when I met my new sixth-grade students was guilt. They were there to learn. They had a clueless teacher who was there for his own self-serving purposes and to benefit his career. My fellow rookie teachers were ecstatic to be abroad and were celebrating each night. I felt like a fraud and was desperately Googling phrases like “how to make students stop talking” and “what is a helping verb.”

Google helped. The school and its experienced teachers helped more. The students helped the most. I fell in love with teaching. One year at the school turned into two, which then became four. I read everything I could find by linguists like Krashen and Larsen-Freeman. I learned all about Common Core in the US and the IGCSEs in the UK. I taught English, Math and Science from Primary to Secondary school, and yet I still never truly felt like I was doing as



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well as I could. I have continued trying to improve, and all of my research and efforts to become a better teacher have finally led me to the UCLA Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language program.

I understand the irony of seeing the value in education for my students and not pursuing my own beforehand. Like most teachers, I tend to put my students before myself, but that was short-sighted on my part. I want to do more for not just them, but for future students, and to do so, I need comprehensive, specialized education.

I believe not only that your program offers that, but that I in turn can contribute. I have in-class experience, as I'm sure most applicants do, but I have also done a tremendous amount of personal research and learning. When I say that I love teaching and education, I mean it, and I see the same in your faculty and program. I have read many of the articles on phonology and vowel harmony by Professor Hayes. I have watched videos discussing the findings on syntax and morphosyntax from Professor Hyams. I can see in their works a true love of language and education, and I share that.

That green mountain that I originally saw in the ad turned out to be Machu Pichu, and I got to go there before I moved back to the States. I work in the San Diego school system now, and even have some students from Peru. I don't miss being a paralegal at all. I am working hard to get better at teaching each day. I plan to work even harder, and I hope that I can do that in the UCLA Master of TESOL program.

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