Frequent Comments/Feedback from Udall Foundation & Selection Committee Readers

The most common questions in our readers' minds are HOW and WHY. For example:

- How will the student reach that goal?
- Why is the student so motivated for this project?
- How did she come to this conclusion?
- Why was there a slight dip in his grades freshman year?
- How will her research benefit her career goals?

The best applications answer the reader's questions. This includes letters of recommendation, which should provide evidence/examples to back up any claims made in the letters or in the application: the more specific, the better.

- How does the applicant demonstrate commitment?
- How does s/he exhibit leadership? What instance comes to mind?
- What makes you say that the applicant is uniquely motivated?

Goal statement: The most common problem is that the career goal is too broad; aspirations are admirable but aren't yet well-defined. Juniors often have an advantage, as they've tried a few more options and ruled them out as they go along. This is also a good place to mention that in the environmental category, applicants should be very focused on an environmental career. A health care career with environmental undertones does not meet our eligibility requirements. Social justice does not meet our eligibility requirements, but environmental justice does. In the tribal policy and health care categories, a member of a tribe who is destined for success as a doctor but isn't motivated to give back to her or his tribe or Indian Country overall will not be competitive. These are fine lines.

Career aspirations: Applicants often describe a problem they've identified, without hinting at the solution they've come up with and how their studies and career will help to solve the problem. If they intend further study after receiving a baccalaureate degree, this is the place to describe why and, if they know, which school and what expert they might hope to work with. Not many students can be this specific, but the best applications will demonstrate that the student has made concrete plans to educate him/herself in his or her field (and/or in his or her cultural practices), even if that field does not require additional schoolwork; after all, there are many paths they might take to reach their goals.

Programs and activities (This section of the application sets the stage for the specific examples in essays that follow): Particularly for many sophomores, showing commitment to their field of interest through research, activities, and service can be difficult. This is the first place readers learn how long-standing a student's commitment to the environment or their tribal community is. "Dates participated" often indicate to the reader a recent interest in environmental or tribal issues. There is nothing an individual student can do to change this, but it is why many juniors are able to score higher points in this area. Although there's no hard and fast rule regarding activities and jobs, a strong Programs and Activities section would show environmental applicants' diversity of interests, with one or two activities showing longer involvement and increasing leadership.
responsibility. Tribal policy and health care applicants should also show diverse interests and one or two activities with longer involvement and more responsibility. They should also demonstrate tribal community involvement and/or interest in American Indian issues, and leadership.

Research: Research is not required. Each year, we may have one or two Scholars who did not provide information in this section of the application. For applicants who have done research, there are some rules of thumb. If the applicant describes a lab or field research experience, it is important to give readers a very short impression of the context of the research if it isn't obvious ("This chemical compound is important for understanding genetic diversity in endangered species populations"), and then move into the applicant's individual responsibilities and findings.

Research can take many forms. A "review of the literature," common in the humanities and social sciences, counts as research (context matters here as well). It is okay to describe research that is required by a job or internship. It is okay to describe future plans for research ("This summer I will work with Dr. Such-n-Such examining patterns of energy usage in developing economies..."). And it is okay to describe research conducted in preparation for a project proposal. ("Before beginning my food waste audit of the university cafeteria, I looked into other college food waste audits and discovered...") The best research examples describe the applicant's initiative, personal responsibilities, and, if possible, connection to larger career goals. Again, it's not required!

Leadership: The best leadership examples are recent (in the past year) and are related to the applicant's interests and career goals. "I" statements are important. Most leadership essays fall short by describing what the club or group does, not what the individual accomplished. Students do not need to be president or founder of a club to write a great leadership response. If the club runs the college's annual pow wow and it was the best one ever, how did the student's contributions lead to success of the event overall? What resulted from her extraordinary efforts? How did he help the group change course when the project was floundering? How did she exceed the expectations of administrators who didn't understand why coal divestment is important on campus? How did he lead his dormitory in making such strides in waste management? Back to that question of HOW: How is the applicant a leader?

Clarifying experience: This doesn't have to be recent, but it should be active. Good responses here will show the applicant in a period of growth, and actively pursuing that growth. Being inspired by a mountain vista is not a strong clarifying experience. The death of a loved one can be, but it takes work and a serious self-interpretation of the experience. Study abroad experiences are acceptable, but aren't automatically clarifying experiences. Again, HOW did the event/experience clarify the applicant’s goals?

Public service: Often, the public service essay better answers the leadership essay prompt and vice versa. Would a reader learn more about the applicant if the answers were switched? Public service can be paid or unpaid. The best responses show initiative and humility. What the applicant accomplished and WHY should be clear, as well as HOW the experience encouraged the applicant’s future plans in public service.
**Additional information:** Although the application can be submitted with this question blank, applicants *should always answer it.* Always. Leaving it blank sends a message to readers that everything about the applicant that matters to the selection committee has already been conveyed. This space is for one of several topics.

1. *The best answers will explain another of the applicant's extraordinary accomplishments, providing additional evidence of his or her commitment to environmental issues, community, etc. and providing another opportunity for the student's story to leap off the page.* If applicable, describing other impressive and difficult things like working full- or part-time while in school, single-parent status, veteran status, returning to school after a long hiatus, overcoming illness or injury, first generation college student, etc. is also encouraged.

2. *If there is a question in the reader's mind about any part of the application, this is the applicant's one chance to answer that question and set the reader's mind at ease,* explaining a semester's worth of poor grades, or a decade's worth of different transcripts (family illness, personal issues, bad roommate, job loss, whatever the case). It should be kept short and sweet and positive – no excuses, just reasons.

3. *It's okay to explain something personal that the applicant doesn't need to explain, but wants to.* The loss of a loved one doesn't need to be explained if it hasn't affected grades or raised other questions in the mind of the reader, but many students use this opportunity to get personal. In this vein, it's also okay to explain something awesome that the applicant loves, or is part of his or her identity. (Tribal dance competitions, language study, inter-generational mentorship, suicide hotlines, cross-country bike trips for charity, surfing, poetry, training guide dogs, etc.)

In the process of being personal in this short response, many of the instances described above will allow the applicant to hint at the fact that s/he "really needs the money." I recommend discouraging your student from spelling this out. *The Udall Scholarship is a merit-based award. Points may be optionally awarded by the reader for the applicant overcoming some difficulty, but financial need is not considered.*

**Udall Essay:** ah, the elusive essay.

What Works:

- Critical analysis (applicant thought critically about Mo or Stewart Udall's message, then applied it to contemporary issues)
- Fresh perspective on a familiar topic
- Chosen topic appropriate to and well integrated with applicant's goals and interests
- Unique approach to the material
- Well written

What Doesn't:

- Glorified "personal statement"
- Didn't take the time to analyze the topic
• Didn't get deeper than "Udall said this...and then he said this...and I think this is good."
• Doesn't connect to career goal
• Poorly written

An excellent essay won't make up for an applicant who lacks "demonstrated commitment" but a poorly done essay can cost an otherwise solid applicant the scholarship. A good essay will do more than summarize a Udall speech or legislative act. The student will engage with it, fix on some aspect of it, and in doing so, demonstrate that he or she is well informed about past and/or present environmental or American Indian issues, and familiar with Mo Udall or Stewart Udall's legacy. Relating the analysis to the applicant's goals and interests is one more way of engaging with the text of the speech or the intent and/or impact of the legislation.

Here are some common mistakes applicants make:

• Choosing a speech or legislative act that has no connection to the student's interests or goals; for example, Alaska Lands Act when goals relate to water conservation.
• Little to no mention of Udall; refers to speech/legislation once or twice before transitioning to a glorified personal statement
• Not doing more than "Udall said this . . . and then Udall said that . . . and I agree; no evidence of critical engagement with topic
• Not integrating their analysis with their goals and interests
• "Senator" Udall
• Superficial understanding of environmental issues
• No sense that they have any concept of who Mo Udall or Stewart Udall was