Information for CAHE GA Interview Day Candidates

Preparing Your Generic Cover Letter and Resume

- We ask that you create one generic cover letter and resume, geared toward all assistantships, rather than individual cover letters for each position.
- Rather than indicating an interest in a specific position, indicate your interest in the type of experiences or the broader areas of counseling, higher education and student affairs that you would like to gain experience in.
  - For example, start with something like, “I am interested in an assistantship that will prepare me for a career in higher education and student affairs”.
  - You may also be more specific by indicating several areas within our field that you are interested in (e.g., “I am interested in assistantships that will allow me to gain experience in fostering students’ development, supporting minoritized student populations, and/or advising student organizations.”)
  - If there are specific positions you are interested in, you may indicate that as well (e.g., “I am particularly interested in positions related to residence life and student activities.”).
  - Remember, the broader the interests you indicate the better your chances of securing an assistantship!
- Highlight skills and experiences you have had that apply to a variety of positions.
  - For example, many graduate assistantships look for leadership and communication skills.
- Provide specific examples. Your resume already highlights general experiences; in the cover letter, you want to share details about those experiences, highlight unique things that you have done or specific skills that you have gained. This is particularly important for related experiences that employers may not be familiar with (e.g., engagement in community activism, community-based groups, etc.).
  - For example, instead of saying, “I have experience working with diverse student populations”, share what you have done (e.g., “I have served as an executive board member of the Asian American Student Association. In this role, I have... Through these experiences, I have learned...”).
- Secure your references. Some employers will ask you to provide names and contact information of up to three references. Talk to supervisors, faculty, and mentors about serving as a reference for you.

Frequently Asked Questions

I’m only seeing a few positions I am qualified for but others that I am interested in. Should I only apply for those? We encourage you to apply for all positions you are interested in, even if you don’t think you are qualified for the position, to increase your chances of securing an assistantship. Please keep an open mind about different opportunities; you will be able to ask questions and learn more about the positions, should the employer invite you to an interview. Many positions can also be tailored toward your interests, so please do not limit yourself by applying only to your top choices.

I do not have experiences related to a specific position. Does this mean I'm not qualified? No, not at all. These are graduate assistantships. The expectation is that you are willing to learn and bring passion and excitement to the position but many graduate assistants do not have related experiences prior to taking on an assistantship. Think about transferable skills you may have gained in your coursework or other experiences that you can highlight in your cover letter and during the interview.

I’m nervous about creating my resume and writing the generic cover letter. Where can I find additional resources and support? Examples of a resume and a cover letter are attached to this informational sheet. We also encourage you to work with our Career Services office to ensure that your cover letter and resume are in good shape.

I have additional questions. Who do I contact? E-mail CAHEGAInterviews@niu.edu.
Generic Cover Letter for GSARP Applications

Your Name
Street Address
City, State Zip Code
Phone Number
E-mail Address

Today’s Date

Dear Search Committee:

Your opening paragraph should indicate your interest in the type of experiences or broader areas of counseling, higher education and student affairs that you would like to gain experience in. You may be more specific about naming several areas you are interested in or keep it more open to the field you are interested in. Remember, the broader the interests you indicate the better your chances of securing an assistantship!

It is also helpful to share what graduate program you have applied to and why you are interested in gaining a graduate assistantship at Northern Illinois University.

Some sentence starters might be....

• “I am interested in an assistantship that will prepare me for a career in higher education and student affairs”.
• “I am interested in assistantships that will allow me to gain experience in fostering students’ development, supporting minoritized student populations, and/or advising student organizations.”
• “I am particularly interested in positions related to residence life and student activities.”
• “I have applied for the M.S.Ed. in Counseling OR I have applied for the M.S.Ed. in Higher Education and Student Affairs because....”
• “I am excited about the opportunity to apply to graduate assistantships at NIU because....”
• “I am passionate about a career in counseling or student affairs because...”

Your middle paragraph(s) should address the skills and responsibilities that you have seen presented in the graduate assistant job descriptions. This is your opportunity to share more about your experiences and highlight any direct experience or transferable/related skills that you have. Keep in mind, this is a generic letter and will be going to multiple employers, however, you can still share your specific experiences here. Also, remember that our employers are looking for well-rounded candidates and do NOT require that you have direct experience in the area of the graduate assistantship that you are applying for. So feel confident in talking about all of your experiences even if they are outside of the counseling or higher education and student affairs area. Try to connect your relevant qualifications and skills to the what graduate assistant job descriptions have outlined.

Some tips for your middle paragraph(s).....

• Highlight unique things that you have done or specific skills that you have gained.
• Talk about specific things you have done and give concrete examples of times you’ve demonstrated the skills you are showcasing.
• Consider transferable skills that you have gained in various positions including communication skills, leadership, writing skills, social media skills, etc.
• Be proud of your experiences! Customer service experience, retail experience, technology, volunteering in your community, etc. can all be valuable to careers within counseling and higher education.

In your closing paragraph, refer the audience to your enclosed resume and thank them for taking the time to review your materials. This paragraph can also include a “wrap up” sentence that highlights your overall skills and interests.

Sincerely,
Your Name
Victor E. Huskie  
Email@yourschool.edu

**Education**  
Northern Illinois University  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
*Bachelors of Arts: Psychology*  
GPA: 3.25/4.0  
May 2022

**Work Experience**  
Community Advisor, Stevenson Hall  
Northern Illinois University  
DeKalb, IL  
August 2019 – Present  
- Oversee a residence hall floor of about 40 students  
- Meet individually with residents about personal concerns, roommate issues, and academic strategies  
- Plan, promote, and organize residence hall entertainment and educational programs  
- Create marketing materials to help students engage in residence hall events  
- Enforce residence hall rules using direct, open communications with residents

Barista  
Starbucks  
Joliet, IL  
Summers 2020, 2021  
- Provided excellent customer service to customers in a fast-paced environment  
- Assisted with inventory of coffee and other products in retail store  
- Contributed to a strong team environment by supporting coworkers and covering extra shifts

**Leadership and Volunteer Experience**  
Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated Member  
Northern Illinois University  
DeKalb, IL  
Fall 2018-Present  
- Attend general meetings and participate in chapter philanthropic events since fall 2018  
- Conduct more than 15 hours of community service each semester at sites within DeKalb community  
- Ensure that all chapter officers discharge their duties efficiently and promptly  
*Recruitment Committee Chair (Fall 2021-Present)*  
- Create event fliers to generate greater audiences and distribute recruitment materials to various groups  
- Update all social media accounts, post reminders and maintain recruitment calendar

Animal Rescue Volunteer  
Hopeful Tails Animal Rescue  
Joliet, IL  
Fall 2016-Present  
- Volunteer to walk and groom homeless animals at the rescue  
- Work special events in offsite locations to showcase the opportunities to adopt pets  
- Complete reports on tasks performed during volunteer session through Microsoft Access