Applying to Graduate School

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Graduate school is training in research

- Research = discovery of the unknown
- Are you an explorer?
- Do you like to think creatively?
- Are you eager to make a unique contribution to the world during your lifetime?
- Are these things as important to you as a high salary?
  - A career in research can be very profitable, but if that is the only motivation it is likely to be disastrous
  - Do what you love. The rest will take care of itself.
What is Graduate School?

Graduate school is the pursuit of a Master’s or Doctoral Degree

- **Master of Science (M.S.)**
  - 2 year commitment
  - Research & writing
  - Industry or research technician, high school education,

- **Doctor of Philosophy in Science (Ph.D.)**
  - 4–6 year commitment
  - Extensive research & writing
  - Industry, academics, research

- **Post-Doctoral Position**
Why Graduate School?

- Envision your long-term career goals
  - Industry or national laboratory
    - Researcher, product developer, management
  - Academia
    - Professor and/or researcher at a research institution,
      Professor at a primarily teaching institution, university administration

- Career goals drive your near-term degree objectives
  - Master’s degree only
  - Ph.D. degree (can earn a Master’s along the way)

- Good reasons to apply:
  - Professional development/career goals
  - Intellectual curiosity

- Bad reasons to apply:
  - Not sure what else to do
  - Don’t feel ready for a job
  - Looking for expanded undergraduate education
Preparing for Graduate School

- Envision your long-term career goals
  - Industry or National Laboratory
    - Researcher
    - Product Developer
    - Management
  - Academia
    - Professor and/or researcher at a research institution
    - Professor at a primarily teaching institution
    - University Administration

- Career goals drive your near-term degree objectives
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Finding a Good Match

Consider the following questions to see if you are a good match for a prospective program:

◦ Which faculty are conducting research in areas related to your interests?
◦ What is it about their work that is meaningful, interesting, or appealing to you?
◦ Does the program offer specialized training or course sequences that fit with your goals?
◦ Are there specialized research centers or facilities that support the areas of investigation you wish to pursue?
Junior Year and Summer (15–18+ months before you want to begin school)

- Explore graduate programs, become familiar with faculty interests, entrance requirements and deadlines
- Begin to draft a personal statement of your academic and professional goals
- Research sources of financial aid (fellowships, scholarships)
  - [http://www.gdnet.ucla.edu/asis/grapes/search.asp](http://www.gdnet.ucla.edu/asis/grapes/search.asp)
  - [http://www.gradschools.com/article-detail/graduate-fellowships-1676](http://www.gradschools.com/article-detail/graduate-fellowships-1676)
  - [http://www.gradschool.purdue.edu/funding/](http://www.gradschool.purdue.edu/funding/)
  - [www.pathwaystoscience.org](http://www.pathwaystoscience.org)
- Register for any admissions–related exams
Junior Year and Summer (15–18+ months before you want to begin school)

- Take a practice test(s) and use a study guide
  - GRE (Graduate School), MCAT (Medical School), GMAT (Business School), LSAT (Law School), DAT (Dental School)
- Write a rough draft(s) of your statement of purpose that outlines your academic and professional goals
- Decide on recommendation writers
- Check your unofficial transcript to make sure everything is in order
Fall of Senior Year
(9–12 months before you want to begin school)

- Meet with faculty to request letters of recommendation
  - Have a rough draft of your statement of purpose and resume to give to recommender.

- Share personal statement with others (mentors, faculty, staff)
  - Ask their advice about other grad programs to consider

- Use the Campus Writing Center to review personal statements

- Register to take the GRE in October
Fall of Senior Year
(9–12 months before you want to begin school)

- Send official transcripts
- Send official test score reports
- Complete online applications
  - Most deadlines will be in December
- If necessary, complete additional applications for fellowships or assistantships
  - Most deadlines will be in December, and your entire application must be completed
- Check with programs to make sure your applications are complete
Spring of senior year
(or 6–9 months before you want to begin school)

- Complete FAFSA and any other required financial aid documents
- Update your contact information
- Visit campuses, if feasible
  - Talk to faculty and students to help make your final decision about institution/lab fit
- Once formally accepted by the program of your choice, contact other schools to decline acceptances by April 15th
- Celebrate!
Grades and GRE (or other entrance exam)
- Minimum 3.0 gpa
- Score well on the entrance exam

Official Transcripts (all institutions attended)

3 strong letters of recommendation
- List of trusted recommenders
- Should be tenure-track faculty (not lecturers or employers)
- Best if faculty with whom you did research, did very well in courses they taught, or otherwise had meaningful interactions
- Should write confidently, persuasively about your qualifications

Statement of Purpose

Curriculum Vitae/Resume

Deadlines: Most are December 1st to be consider for financial support