

Applying to Graduate School

Tomiko Hale
School of Engineering, UC Merced

What is Graduate School?

- ▶ 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
 - Master's degree only
 - Ph.D. degree (possibly earn a Master's along the way)

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.gradschools.com/article-detail/graduate-fellowships-1676>
 - <http://www.gradschool.purdue.edu/funding/>
 - 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!

Recap: Application Process

- ▶ 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