

Preparing for Graduate School

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GETTING STARTED

- Identify your goals—Think about your long term goals and what you hope to accomplish by attending grad school.
- Take the GRE *early* so you can compare your scores to those required by the schools you are considering.
- Select a variety of schools (1-2 schools that are sure to admit you, 1-2 dream schools, and a couple in between)
- Seek a school that will fund your graduate program.
- Understand the differences between MS and PhD as well as the changes to expect between your undergrad experience and a graduate experience.
- Understand that grad schools seek students who will be successful and who will contribute to their department's research and reputation. Are you that student?

HOW WILL YOUR ACADEMIC LIFE CHANGE?

- You can no longer cram at the last minute, skip class, or fail to do your homework.
- Emphasis is placed *more* on learning and *less* on grades.
- You can't do poorly on an exam with the hope of making it up on the next.
- Expect late hours requiring a high level of motivation and personal discipline.
- Work in study groups is important.
- It is up to you to assess your progress, participate in class, and visit the professor during office hours. Class sizes are typically small; so expect to be noticed in class.

SELECTING PROSPECTIVE UNIVERSITIES

Web searches are quite effective in locating universities offering graduate study in your area of interest. One well respected site is Peterson's at <http://www.petersons.com>. Contact the graduate studies area of the department of interest to check deadlines and availability of financial aid (assistantships, fellowships, tuition waivers).

APPLY EARLY

- Contact the academic department to confirm deadlines for applications and financial aid (assistantships, fellowships, and waivers). There may be two separate deadlines for admission and for aid. The academic department may have an earlier deadline than the university.
- If you are a domestic student, ask if the financial aid is *need based* and if you need to file a FAFSA.
- Deadlines may occur as early as 9 months in advance of the term that you wish to begin your studies. Make sure your entire application is received safely before the stated deadline.

YOUR APPLICATION PACKET AND FEE

- Do NOT cut corners on the application; submit ALL requested materials including the application fee.
- Proofread your application before sending.
- Don't omit parts of the application or make substitutions for requested items.
- Apply electronically when possible.
- Keep copies of all your application materials, in the event that your materials get lost in the mail or in cyberspace.

- Keep canceled checks and credit card statements showing that you paid the application fee.

TRANSCRIPTS

Keep several sealed, official copies of transcripts from each school you have attended. It is not uncommon for transcripts to get lost in the mail, so you may need a back-up. Send copies to the Admissions office and to the department you are applying to.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

- Select 3-4 professors who can write "strong" letters attesting to your ability to succeed in a graduate program.
- Allow several weeks for the professor to write the letter and be prepared to remind them of critical deadlines.
- Waive your right to view the letter. Ask the professor to seal the letter in an envelope before returning to you.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Write a personal statement that describes your past work in your chosen field of study. Include non-course related experiences, teaching, relevant employment, publications, and your plans for graduate study and your future career.

- Have someone review your personal statement for content and errors – ask the reviewer what message the personal statement sends to them.
- Don't expect a *generic* personal statement to fit each institution.
- Be careful if you write a personal statement mentioning the name of the institution; proofread to ensure that you are sending the correct statement to the matching institution.
- Strive for *quality*, not *quantity* in your personal statement.
- Remember, graduate schools seek students who are organized and serious about the field of study. Make sure your personal statement reflects this.

EXAMS YOU MAY NEED

Contact the academic department to determine which exams are required (GRE, GMAT, etc.). Don't take the wrong exam and expect the grad school to accept the score. Take the exam well in advance of the application deadline; use this information to select possible grad schools.

VISITING THE CAMPUS

- Make an appointment well in advance of the visit. Don't just show up.
- Be flexible and select a date when school is in session.
- Work with the Director of Graduate Studies (in the academic department) to arrange meetings with students and faculty in your area of interest. If possible, attend a seminar or course during your visit.
- During the visit, evaluate the social aspects as well as the living and academic environments.
- Gather information you can use to compare the various stipends offered by institutions. Determine the teaching load; identify which charges the tuition waiver covers.
- Ask about partial or full reimbursement for your travel expenses.

FOLLOW UP

- Wait a week to 10 days and follow up with the academic department's graduate studies staff to confirm receipt of your application materials and determine if any additional materials are needed.
- Contact the Director of Graduate Studies to see when a decision will be made.
- Check periodically on the progress of your application.