
The Graduate School Process: Identifying, Selecting, Applying and Succeeding in Graduate School

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Why do you want to go to grad school?

- Bad reasons
 - You don't know what else to do
 - You're not ready to start working
 - So that mom and dad will continue paying your car note or car insurance
 - Everybody tells you that you should go
- Good reasons
 - You want to receive further education
 - You want to become an expert in a certain field
 - You need a higher degree to reach your career goals

Myths about grad school

- You need to know exactly what you want to study when you start
- You need to go directly from undergraduate school
- Students from “big” schools are better qualified

General facts about grad school

- In the sciences you just do a straight Ph.D. program
- Consolation Master's
- Stipend
- It's all about commitment

1. Identifying

- Educational considerations
 - What kind of research do I want to do? Which departments have this type of research going on?
 - Is there any particular professor(s) that I am interested in working with?
 - How are the schools/departments that I am interested in ranked nationally? What are the top-ranked schools/graduate programs in my field?
 - Will there be an opportunity for interdisciplinary work?
 - How many openings are there in the labs that you are interested in working in?

1. Identifying (cont'd)

- Personal considerations
 - How well are graduate students taken care of in this department? (i.e. what is the stipend, is it comparable to other schools, cost-of-living, do you get health benefits, etc.)
 - Location
 - Church
 - Opportunities for your spouse (if applicable)
 - Social/personal upkeep

Getting information on schools

- Interviews
- Web sites
 - <http://www.gradview.com/collegesearch/schooltype.jsp>
 - http://www.petersons.com/graduate_home.asp?path=gr.home
 - <http://education.yahoo.com/college/essentials/>
- Send in for information
- Cards from fliers
- Professors
- Students who have already graduated
- Books
 - Gourman's Guide, Peterson's Guide, US News and World Report

2. Selecting

- Become proactive
 - Draft an email stating your professional goals and research interests and attach a copy of your resume. Send this email to 3-5 professors that you may be interested in working with and to the graduate coordinators in the departments that you are interested in.
 - Observe
 - How quickly do they respond
 - Do they seem interested
 - Are they cordial
 - Do they encourage you to apply
 - Narrow down your list to 1-3 professors/departments and rank your choices
 - Continue to correspond with the professor/graduate coordinators
 - Visit the departments and speak with the professors and **ESPECIALLY** with the matriculating graduate students
 - Ask the right questions

3. Applying

- Apply online
- Paper applications
- Most are due in December or January
- Components
 - Transcript
 - GRE's
 - Recommendations
 - Statement of purpose

What schools look at on a transcript

- GPA – 3.2 or higher
- Grades in major subjects vs. non-major subjects
- Did you avoid unpleasant subjects? (P-chem, calculus)
- Hard sciences
- Did your grades improve in a two semester course?
 - C to an A or B is good

GRE's

- Prepare
 - Math is high school level
 - Vocabulary
- Subject exam
- Not as important as they used to be
- Are the scores consistent with your grades?
- High expectations in mathematical and analytical reasoning
- A low GRE will be taken into consideration if grades and recommendations are good
- Really study if you retake it

Recommendations

- Make or Break
- Who should you ask?
 - Research Advisors
 - Other professors who know your capabilities
- Who should you not ask?
 - People who do not know your science capabilities
 - A professor you do not know well and goofed off in their class

Statement of purpose

- Reasons
- Enthusiasm
- Experience
- Explanation of problems in application

Things they are looking for

- Commitment
- Informed decision
- Negative reasons
 - Didn't make it into med school
 - Didn't want to face the real world
 - Undergrad was easy so surely graduate school will be

Other Things Considered

- Experience
- School
- Outside considerations
 - Were you working?
 - Did you have a high GPA and did nothing else?

What do you need to do right now?

- GRE!!!!!!
- Get in a research program
- Research schools
- Start working on your statement of purpose

For more information

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