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.
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
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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?
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!
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 considered for financial support