

General Guide to Grad School

Know What You Are Interested In

It helps to know what “specialty” field you are interested in.

- Find a specific part of what you are interested in to study
 - Ex: Broadly interested in sociology but focus on Race/Ethnicity/Class issues
 - Ex: Broadly interested in biology but focus on marine biology
- Narrow it down as much as possible
 - Ex: History→American History→20th century
- Passion is a big factor in this. You don’t want to go into a field for 7-8 years of your life for something that you think is “alright”.

Start Searching for Potential Grad Schools

Give yourself time.

- Start looking casually
- The more time you have, the less stressed you’ll be.

Just start looking.

- Look at any school in any part of the country that interests you.
- Look at schools even if you think you won’t realistically get into them or not in your ideal location.

Start researching schools suggested by professors.

At the beginning of your search, you’ll find helpful information just by glancing at the department’s webpage.

What type of research is typically conducted by the faculty (quantitative or qualitative)?

- This is important to know because if you dislike fieldwork and interviews, then a qualitative program would not be appropriate
- There are many schools that balance the two but some are known for being strictly quantitative or qualitative.

Cohort size – the average number of student accepted each year.

- Find out approximately how many they accept.
- Generally, one would like to be part of a smaller cohort—15 or 20—this means greater chances of interactions with professors, and greater chances to getting funded.

Average GRE scores

- Find out what the Department’s “cut-off point” is

- But remember, it is still possible to get into a grad school that has a higher GRE score than what you made
- The GRE is not the only factor that determines whether you get accepted. Grad school committees look at everything: grades, letters of recommendations, essays, etc.
- Many schools accept scores lower than their average GRE.

What type of money they offer

- Teaching Assistant, Graduate Research Assistant, fellowships, etc.
- Generally, the presence of these programs means a tuition waiver and stipend (varies by schools)

Application Due Date

- Most schools have two deadlines (1) One for financial support and another for final application deadline, and (2) Financial support applications are generally due by between December 31 and January 1

Learn who the Professors are in the Department!

- Read their biography and academic vita. Just because they are specialized in one field does not mean they are not interested in other fields.
- If possible read one of their publications
- Contact a professor if you are interested in working with him/her, since some professors only accept students if there is a “spot” open

Contact the current grad students in the program

- Email them to find out: (1) what it is like? (2) How is the interaction between students and faculty? (3) Is it competitive?
- They can give you information that no one else, such as what professors to avoid, and what classes are the hardest

Visit the schools you are interested in

- Set up meetings with the chair of the department, the graduate chairperson, and the professors whom you are interested in.
- This makes a good impression
- You get a feel for the town and the campus first hand

Remember, it shouldn't be about the name of the University anymore. It should be more about the graduate program and what they can offer you in the long run. Remember, you could spend anywhere from 2-6 years in a graduate program, so you want to make sure that it is the right one for you!

The Graduate Records Examination (GRE)

The GRE is a standardized, computer-based test used as one of the admissions factors for graduate school

The GRE consists of three sections: verbal (antonyms, reading comprehension, analogies), quantitative (algebra, geometry) and a writing section.

- Verbal and quantitative section scores range from 130-170 with one point increments
- The writing section scores from 0-6 with half a point increments
- The test can take up to 4 hours to complete (breaks are provided)

Scores are immediately available

- See your scores: this is the score that universities and colleges will receive (writing scores will be mailed)
- Decline seeing your scores: no one will see your scores
- You can take the test over again.

When to take the GRE:

- Best to take the test at least two month before application deadlines
- Schedule early: weekends in October and November will be busy

The GRE is not cheap.

- \$195 for the test
- Scores can be sent up to 4 schools for free; so make sure to have an idea of which schools you want to apply to
- After that, it costs \$27 (per school) to send your GRE scores

The Graduate School Application Process

Apply to 3 different types of grad schools

- Schools you don't think you could reasonably get into (Harvard, Yale)
- Schools you want to go to
- Schools you know you'll get into but might not be the best

Ask yourself if you could live in these areas. If you don't like a certain part of the country, don't go there. It will be easier to be productive and focus on your schoolwork if you are happy.

Most of the schools use an online application process.

- Some schools may want you to send an application and supplemental materials (essays, letters of recommendation, etc.) to different addresses
- Identify the chairperson and graduate chairperson's contact information
- Keep an unofficial transcript handy to calculate your GPA

Applying to graduate school costs money:

- Remember to set aside money for the GRE.
- There is usually a \$50-125 fee (per school) for applying to graduate school
- Money for printing and mailing the application packet
- Money for requesting transcripts to be mailed to the universities

Official Transcripts

- You must request and send an official transcript from each and every school that you attended (even if you only took one summer course from that school)
- Request transcripts at least 3 weeks before the application deadline.
- Remember, some schools charge a fee (\$5-10) for requesting and sending transcripts

Sample Paper(s)

- Preferably, you should submit a paper written in the field you want to study
- For research-focused programs, you will ideally want to submit a research paper or critical literature review (not a creative essay, for example).
- Some schools may request two written samples
- A great way to develop a research paper/critical literature review is during an independent study where you work 1-on-1 with a faculty member

Create an Academic Vita (called a Curriculum Vita or CV)

- Everything you have accomplished—no matter how stupid and pointless you think it is—use it. By including clubs/volunteer time, it shows that you were involved in campus and able to multitask and manage your time.
 - Clubs
 - Volunteer time
 - Honors
 - Scholarships
 - Teaching/research experience (even if not paid)
 - Paid and unpaid internships
 - Certifications
- Your CV should include:
 - Your name
 - Contact information (mailing address, university email)
 - GPA (cumulative)
 - Major(s)/minor(s)
 - Expected graduation date
 - Degree you want to pursue (“objective”)
 - Also list your references at the end of the CV (Name, Title, Contact Info for each reference)
- You will need to give your CV to each professor who is writing a recommendation letter for you. It will help your letter be more personalized.

Statement of Purpose or Personal Statement Letter

- You will have to write a personal essay about yourself and your future career goals.
- The letters are usually 500 words (or 1-2 pages).
- In this letter, you may have to address specific questions:
 - Why you want to attend?
 - What sets you apart from other students?
 - Why are you an ideal candidate?
 - What are your strengths and weaknesses (and make those weaknesses sound like strengths)!

Letters of Recommendation

- You will need 3 letters of recommendation
 - Ideally, these letters should be written by tenured-track professors
 - 2 of the 3 letters should be from professors in your specialty area
 - I do not recommend getting a letter from a “boss” or “supervisor”. Universities will give more weight to letters written by professors.
 - This is why it is so important to get to know your professors!
- These letters are confidential and you will not be able to read them before they are submitted, so ask the professor if he/she will write you a good letter!!! They will be honest.
- Give the professors at least 2 weeks to write the letter (some professors require a month’s notice)
- Make sure to give the professor EVERYTHING he/she will need to write a letter:
 - CV
 - Personal statement
 - Transcript
 - University, program, and degree you are applying to
 - Info about the University program and/or the professor you want to work with (tell the professor why you want to go to this school)
 - Who to address the letter to
 - Stamped envelope (already addressed) if the letter is to be sent via postal mail

Have Valuable Professors

- Have professors you trust review your personal statement essay, CV, and sample paper(s)
- Know their contact information, and their position—associate, assistant, full, senior lecture