Graduate School Information Sheet

Things to Consider When Choosing a Graduate Program

The Program

- Are any specializations available?
- Does the program focus on theory and original research, or does it stress practical application? What is the program preparing you for?
- What kind of experience can you get while in the program? Will there be a practicum or internship?
- Is the curriculum structured or flexible? Face-to-face or online courses?
- Are there opportunities to work on research projects?
- Will you have to complete a thesis?

Faculty

- Who are they and what are their credentials?
- What research are they currently conducting, and what have they published in the past?
- Do their fields of study/interests match up with yours?
- Are they involved with the graduate students, or do they primarily do their own research?
- What is the faculty to student ratio?

Reputation

- Does your program of interest have all the necessary accreditations?
- Is the program nationally ranked?
- What is the attrition level?

Facilities and Resources

- Where is it located? Will you be comfortable in that environment?
- What resources, such as computers and laboratories, are available?
- Are there adequate study facilities?
- Will the library meet your research needs?

Cost

- What will be the cost of tuition and fees?
- Is financial aid available either through loans, grants, or scholarships?
- What is the cost of living in the particular location?
Types of Financial Aid

**Graduate Assistantships**
- Teaching Assistants
- Research Assistants
- Paid practicum

Depending on the program, a Resident Advisor (RA) or Teaching Assistant (TA) position might pay you in the form of tuition reduction. Rather than sending money to a bank account, the university will reduce your tuition as payment for the work you’ve put in. It could also be a combination of hourly pay and tuition reduction.

- Fellowships
- Loans, grants, scholarships

Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are very important! Usually written by professors, they let the university see your potential as a graduate student. They can inform admission boards about any positive (or negative) qualities that can’t be revealed through test scores alone. Letters of recommendation offer a “big picture” view of you as an applicant. Universities usually ask for 3 letters of recommendation.

Most of the time, but not always, letters of recommendation are written by professors that you have done research with. Start research EARLY. If you’re interested in the subject, ask the professor if they need help in their lab. If you start early, you can continue to help during multiple semesters. Being an undergraduate RA can also get you class credit!

Admission committees are looking for various pieces of information:

- Do you have experience with research, teaching, or any applied work?
- Do you have leadership skills?
- Do you have interpersonal skills that allow you to work well with others?

Give your professors plenty of time to write letters of recommendation. Provide them with any materials or information that will assist them in their writing, including transcripts, résumé, awards, work experience, professional goals, etc.
Your Personal Statement

Your personal statement is your introduction to a university’s admissions committee. As they say, “You can only have one first impression.” You want to portray all of your best qualities through your writing, communicating that you are intelligent, literate, and have interests and abilities that line up with the university’s program.

A few key points about your personal statement:

- Why do you want to study in this field?
- What experience do you already have with research in the field? Or discuss any other relevant experience.
- What traits do you have that will make you a success in the program?
- What research do you want to do within the program? Hint: Research what the professors are already doing! Do their interests match yours? Would you like to help them with their research? Say so! Tell them what you want to study, but be flexible. Let them know you want to study new things.
- What are your professional goals once you finish the program? What will the program help you achieve?
- Be creative, but not over-the-top. You want to stand out among all the other applicants, but not make the committee scratch their heads.
- Answer any other questions the program has indicated you need to answer.

When writing your personal statement, consider these other factors:

- Clarity - Use clear, direct phrasing. No one wants to be confused while reading your personal statement. Don’t use overly-sophisticated language. Convey your intelligence through what you say, not how you say it.
- Organization - The entire statement should flow properly. Make each paragraph about a single topic, and make sure one topic flows into the next. Put the most important paragraph first, while you have maximum attention.
- Mechanics - Use spell check! Reread your paper several times, or have someone else read it. Check for mistakes that spell check might miss (affect vs. effect, its vs. it’s).
- Stay within length requirements. Two pages (double-spaced) is usually sufficient.

Entrance Exams

Most admissions committees require the GRE, but depending on the program, there are several other tests that might be required (GMAT, LSAT, MCAT, and TOEFL). Like the SAT and ACT, these tests are designed to evaluate your intellectual ability as well as predict your success in graduate school. Take your test as early as possible so you can retake it if you need to. All of the scores need to be reported to the universities before admission deadlines. There is plenty of information available online, so take advantage!