

Path to Graduate School

The background features abstract geometric shapes in shades of orange, dark grey, and light grey, creating a modern and dynamic visual effect. The shapes are layered and overlapping, with some appearing as thin lines and others as larger, semi-transparent areas.



Getting to Grad School



Accepted

How does Grad School work?

How do I apply?

How do I write a successful application?

How do I find the right opportunity?



How does grad school work?

- ▶ *Most* PhD programs, and *some* MS* programs are funded
- ▶ Find a professor or research group who will hire you for the next 2-5 years
 - ▶ You will get “paid” to work for your professor as you take classes and conduct research
- ▶ Most professional programs are not funded (ex: M-Eng)
 - ▶ They offer specific skills development and a project while not necessarily research opportunity

Funded Graduate Programs

- ▶ This means you'll receive a stipend for your living expenses and a tuition waiver
- ▶ These programs pay you to work for them: teaching, research, etc. You get to take classes and earn a degree. Make sure you know the contract.
- ▶ The amount of funding varies by university, program and professor, so you may still have to take pay a portion

Graduate Program vs Specific Professor

- ▶ In most cases, you will identify specific professors with whom you might want to go work
- ▶ But in some cases you may identify a specific program that offers training or degree that you wish to achieve
- ▶ Either way you will also need to consider the school, program and place as well as advisor/professor

How do I find the right opportunity?

- ▶ Step 1: Determine your career goals
- ▶ Step 2: Explore your research interests
- ▶ Step 3: Reach out to potential mentors

Step 1. Determine your Career Goals

1. Determine your career goals and the degree you need to meet them -- MS, PhD etc.
2. Determine your research interests
3. Make sure step 1 and 2 converge. (If they don't reconsider what is more compelling, your research interests or career goals and adjust accordingly).

Step 2. Explore your Research Interests

1. Talk with your professors and mentors
2. Read papers
3. Visit the websites of faculty you might be interested in working for
4. Go to conferences
5. Find specific professors and programs whose research aligns with your interests and goal
6. Make a list of professors and programs. You'll always apply to a program, but in most cases, a professor identifies you as a student they will take on (in other cases you'll find a mentor your first year)

Step 3. Reach out

1. Read the website and recent publications of the professor you like. Get familiar with their work.
2. Check out the graduate programs at their universities.
3. Start contacting specific professors. Mention your research interests and tell them how their work will connect.
 - a) Start with e-mails follow up with phone calls
 - b) Personal visits are also great, if they are feasible
 - c) If you are able to attend conferences, this is also a great place to meet potential graduate advisors
 - d) You may want to start with contacting their graduate students

Tips for contacting potential graduate mentors

- ▶ Keep your e-mail short and to the point
- ▶ Make sure to personalize the e-mail, demonstrate briefly that you have done research about their programs
- ▶ Tell them what sort of degree you wish to pursue
- ▶ Ask if they are looking for students
- ▶ Ask if you can speak to them briefly
- ▶ Point to your Linked in profile or professional website (make sure that is up to date and polished)

Pitfalls to avoid when contacting potential graduate mentors

- ▶ Long descriptions of your experiences (this why you added your LinkedIn profile)
- ▶ Attaching your CV/Resume/photos
- ▶ Sending form e-mails “Dear Professors” with out personalization
- ▶ Hero worship
- ▶ Typos or errors that make you look less professional
- ▶ Asking if they can admit you to the program (they can't)

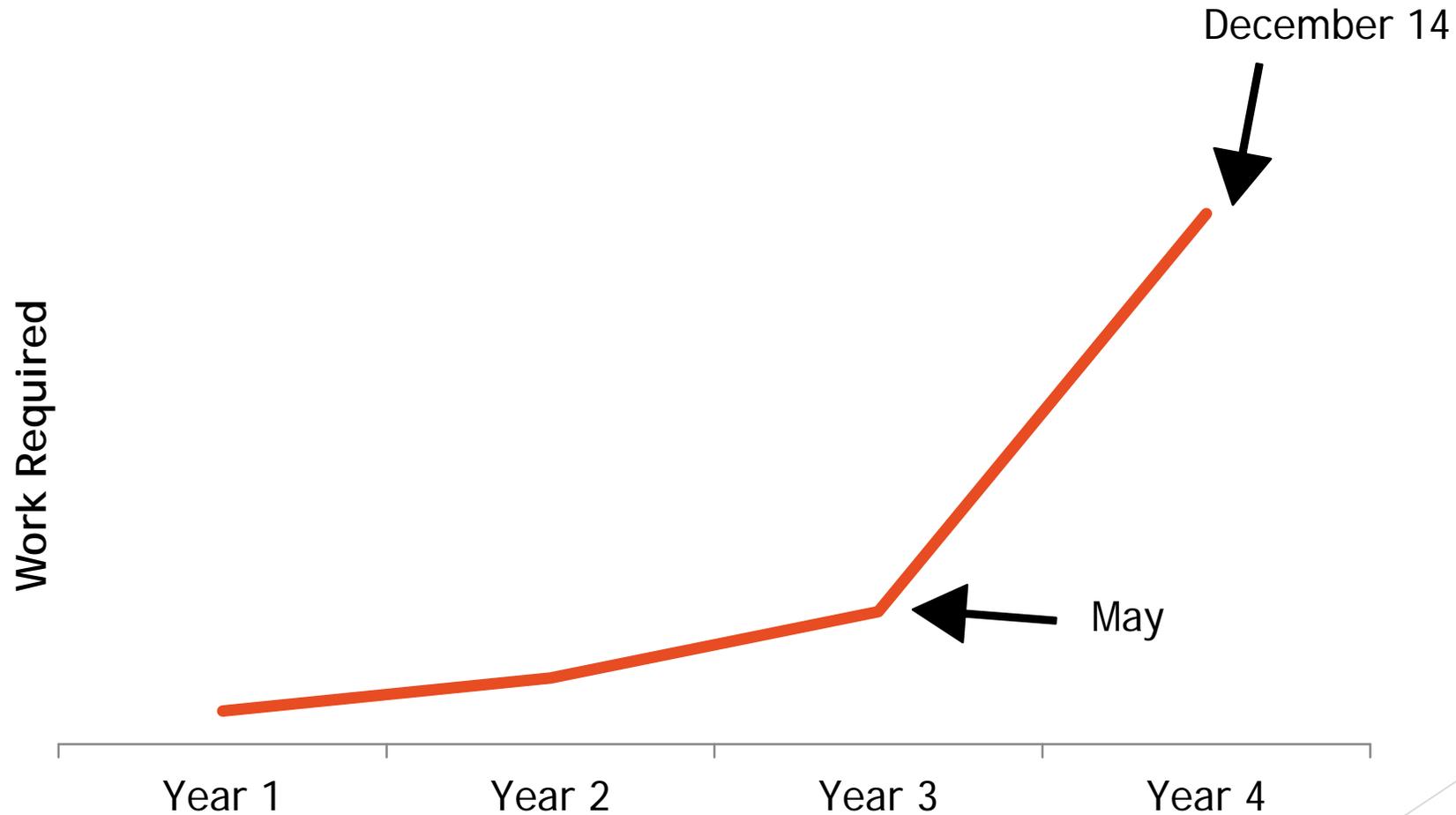
Things to consider beyond research

- ▶ You will be working for your mentor for 2-5 years - so make sure you feel you can be compatible (talk to their graduate students)
- ▶ Will the program provide enough course work in topics relevant/interesting to your field?
- ▶ Is the location livable/affordable for the duration of your graduate program?

External Graduate Funding

- ▶ Graduate fellowships fund YOU wherever you go. They create opportunities and provide flexibility in your graduate education.
- ▶ NSF Graduate Fellowships are the most prestigious funding you can get and they often allow you to work with anyone you want
 - ▶ http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=6201
- ▶ Pathways to Science offers a large list of portable funding for both MS and PhD students.
 - ▶ <http://www.pathwaystoscience.org/Grad.aspx>

How do I apply? The Timeline.



The Timeline - Prior to Applying

First Year	Second Year	Third Year
Prepare a good resume/LinkedIn Profile	Maintain resume and LinkedIn profile	Maintain resume and LinkedIn profile
Explore clubs and extracurricular activities	Focus clubs and activities	Seek out leadership positions in clubs and activities
Get a job or seek internships	Seek internships or research	Complete research and/or internships
Keep your grades up	Keep your grades up	Keep your grades up
	Explore career options (use the career center)	Develop career goals and a path to attaining them
		Begin to develop strong relationships with professors/potential references

The Timeline: Fourth Year (Summer)

- ▶ May: Begin researching potential schools. Take a free GRE practice test. Your score will help you determine how much preparation you'll need.
- ▶ June: Start preparing for the GRE. Register for the exam.
- ▶ July: Request information from the schools that interest you. Ask your professors (especially your references!) for recommendations.
- ▶ August: Take the GRE. If need be, register for a second test (last test you can take is in November). Begin drafting your Personal Statement.

The Timeline: Fourth Year (Fall)

- ▶ September: Finalize your prospective school list, familiarize yourself with professors who share your research interest at each school. Contact your references. Keep polishing your Personal Statement.
- ▶ October: Request official transcripts. Send your references materials (personal statement, etc.). Make contact with students and professors at your prospective schools. Arrange a campus visit.
- ▶ November: Have someone in the field and a few smart (and honest) friends read over your personal statement. Take your personal statement to the writing center!!!
- ▶ December: Complete and submit applications (keep a copy). Verify your recommendations have been sent.

Note: This process is delayed for most international schools.

What if I want to take a GAP year??

- ▶ There are still a few steps you can take before your GAP year.
- ▶ Take your GRE's - they are good for 5 years
- ▶ Talk to your references tell them what you have planned, (work, travel, Peace Corps, AmeriCorps) ask them to be future references.
- ▶ Use the career center to get your resume in a good format
- ▶ Draft your personal statement and use the writing center and resources you have now to get that ready.
- ▶ Things will change during your time off, but if you have a packet prepared then it will be easier to apply when you are ready.

How do I write a successful application?

- ▶ Strong connections to potential faculty mentors
- ▶ High quality references from faculty/mentors who know you well
- ▶ Experience beyond course work
 - ▶ Undergraduate research
 - ▶ Involvement in clubs (leadership is best)
 - ▶ Mentoring/tutoring of other students
- ▶ Well-written personal statements that demonstrate your leadership, skills, interests and goals -customize this for each program/mentor to which you apply



Personal Statement tips

Interest

Explain why the specific program interests you

This might include

- Life experiences
- Courses you have taken
- Internships/work
- Things you have read or learned about
- Clubs

Experience

Connect your interest in the program to your experiences and academics.

- Demonstrate how you have already pursued this topic
- Use examples

Goals

How this program will support your long term professional goals



Personal Statement tips

- ▶ Specific interests and goals connected to mentor and program
- ▶ Focus on your accomplishments and experience, demonstrate you know how to get things done
- ▶ Keep your tone/voice simple and direct



References

- ▶ Who to choose
 - ▶ Professors/researchers who worked on projects with
 - ▶ Professors who you have taken multiple classes or small classes from
 - ▶ Academic Advisors
 - ▶ Supervisors from work or volunteer projects
- ▶ When to ask them
- ▶ Information to provide
- ▶ Follow-up



CV/Resume

- ▶ What is a CV - Curriculum Vitae
- ▶ Improve your resume - check out the career center
- ▶ Make sure to highlight work you have done, even volunteer.



Time

- ▶ Each step of the application process will require time and attention.
- ▶ Start you personal statements or essays early.
- ▶ Writing is often improved by letting time pass between drafts

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