

Applying to Graduate Schools in the U.S.: Tools and Strategies

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Researching and Selecting Graduate Programs

Finding the right match or right fit

**Key to a successful graduate school
application**

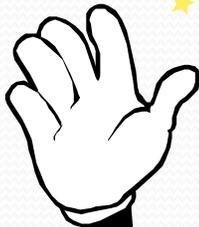
The key to a successful graduate school application is:

Finding the right match or right fit

- Doing thorough initial research
- Selecting the best graduate program that fits you:
 - A **program in the required field** that best matches your research interests and career goals
 - Finding the **right advisor/mentor** in the field of study/area of specialization you wish to pursue. Align your interests with faculty interests when making graduate school choices. Review the research areas of the faculty (very important); look at the courses offered
 - **A program that best matches your preparation and your qualifications**
 - Review the **admission criteria** carefully – do you have what they are looking for?
 - Aim high - do not underestimate your competitiveness
 - But be realistic

The Professorial Link

- **Finding the right fit** in terms of a program **and** an **advisor/mentor**
- From departmental website: Learn about professors and their research, then write to them about your academic interests
- **Communication is the key**
- They should know you before they receive your application!
- Professors control teaching and research assistantships (**\$**)
- Therefore, you need to communicate with them, make them understand how you will contribute to their research and be an invaluable addition to the program/graduate group





Some Other Considerations

- Accreditation & recognition of university and degree program
- Ranking
- Funding
- Opportunities for training and internships
- Student services
- Location

How many universities do you apply to?

- Must apply to the schools recommended by the VEF interview panel (unless there is a legitimate misfit)
- Applying to graduate schools is not an inexpensive exercise – VEF only pays for a certain number of applications
- However, you can apply to as many as you like
- Apply to a wide variety of schools
- Be strategic in your choices and how many universities
- **Have a safety net. Have some safety schools**



Criteria for Admission

- **Your Preparation and Promise**
- Past academic performance
- Test scores
- Statement of purpose
- Letters of reference
- Experience – particularly research and teaching experience. Work experience
- Match between academic goals and university program and availability of resources and mentors

What is an outstanding application?

- What makes your application stand out?
 - What makes you different from the average applicant?
 - Why should the university pick you?
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- **Original, unique and personalized statement**
 - **Potential and promise for graduate study**
 - **Motivation**
 - **Significant research/teaching or work experience**
 - **Awards and recognitions**
 - **Demonstrated ability to take on challenges**
 - **Understanding of what graduate studies would involve**
 - **Well written (includes grammar and composition) application**

Letters of Recommendation:

What makes a good letter of recommendation?

- **There is no substitute for great letters of recommendation**
- The writer must be someone who really knows you and your work well. The title of the person is less important than the depth of what is written
- Letters for graduate applications cannot be general recommendations but must contain details of your preparation and your promise
- It is sometimes useful to have letters of recommendation that demonstrate your breadth
- Provide information to the person who is writing your information: Program you are applying to; field/area of study/research; future goals, etc.



Enhancing the Application

- Select departments where there are professors who will be interested in supporting your research and being your mentor
- Learn to write a superior Statement of Purpose
- Cultivate effective recommendations
- Be meticulous and meet all requirements and deadlines
- Be strategic as to where you apply – dream school/s **and** a safe school/s
- Be proactive: Follow up on the status of your application



You have an exciting journey ahead of you.
Applying to graduate school in the U.S. is not a simple task, you have to put a great deal of effort in to it and be strategic.

Good luck!

I look forward to talking to you at our monthly advising sessions.

Questions

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