

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

Sandarshi Gunawardena  
Senior Program Officer  
Vietnam Education Foundation



# **Researching and Selecting Graduate Programs**

# The key to a successful grad graduate school application is:

## Finding the right match or right fit

- Doing some thorough initial research
- Selecting the best graduate program that fits you
  - A program that best matches your research interests and career goals
  - Finding the right advisor/mentor in you're 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
  - Be realistic



# The Professorial Link

- Finding the right fit in terms of an advisor
- From departmental website, and, 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



# 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
- Apply to a wide variety of schools
- Be strategic in your choices and how many universities
- Have a safety net



# Criteria for Admission

- **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)**

# 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 knows you and your work well
- 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 strategic as to where you apply – dream school/s and a safe schools
- Follow up on the status of your application



# Questions

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