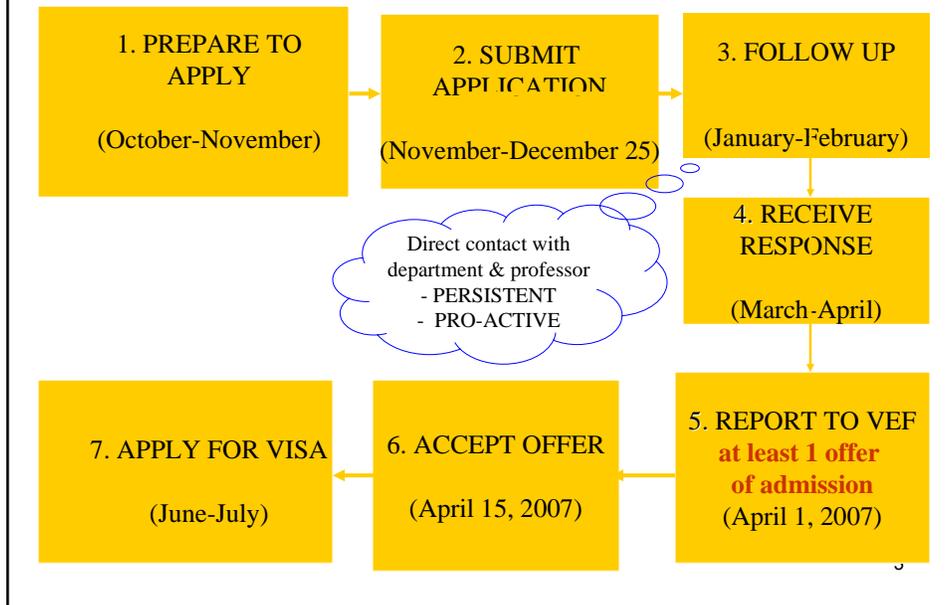




**U.S. University
Applications and Admissions:
Process and Procedures**
October, 2006

CONGRATULATIONS!

VEF Nominee Action Plan



GOAL

- Get admission, with financial aid, into top U.S. graduate schools.

How to achieve this goal?

- Be confident
- Know where the opportunities exist
- Know what the schools and professors want
- Prepare your applications tailored specifically for them.

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The U.S. graduate school system

Example: Electrical and Computer Engineering at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (ranked 3rd in Electrical Engineering and 4th in Computer Engineering in U.S. News; 96 professors) admission record in Fall 2003.

- Number of applications: 2,198
- Admission offers with aid: 175
 - Acceptances: 84 (9 Fellows, 53 RAs, 22 TAs)
 - Average GPA: 3.73/4.00
 - Average GRE Scores: 91% Q; 91.3% A; 71.9% V
 - Declinations: 91
- Admission offers without aid: 116
 - Acceptances: 47
 - Declinations: 69

Who can get teaching assistantships?

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Financial aid available for foreign students

- Research Assistants (RA): Professors seek research funding and “hire” RAs.
 - Professors spend TIME and MONEY
- Teaching Assistants (TA): Professors get \$\$ from the department or graduate school and hire “TAs”.
 - Professors spend TIME and MONEY
- Fellowships: Students come with external financial aid, but are quickly required to get an advisor.
 - Professors spend TIME
- In all cases, the reputation of schools and professors depends on the success of their graduate students.

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Cost for each graduate student per year (at UIUC)

- Tuition and indirect cost (to school): \$23,000
- Salary + benefits (to student): \$20,000
- Other (travels, publications, computer services, access to labs, materials): \$5,000 - \$50,000
- Total cost per year: \$50,000 - \$100,000

- => Together with the time commitment, it is a big investment of the school and professor.

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What does the school and professors expect from graduate students?

During your degree program:

- **Carry out research**
Requires you to be: intelligent, creative, motivated, proactive, able to work with others
- **Publish papers**
Requires: communication skills, being well organized
- **Assist with teaching**
Requires: communication skills

After your degree program:

- Have a successful career.

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Prepare to Apply

- Application documents
 - Application form
 - Statement of purpose
 - Supporting documents
- Application timelines and methods



Application Documents

- Application form
- **Statement of purpose (SOP)**
- Supporting documents
 - Educational documents (certified transcripts)
 - Letters of recommendation (incl. one from VEF)
 - Evidence of financial resources (VEF letter of financial support)
 - Evidence of English level proficiency (TOEFL)
 - Academic admissions exams (GRE)
 - University diplomas, awards, merits (certified translation)
 - Curriculum vitae



Application Form

- IMPORTANT to state that you are “a nominee or an alternate for a VEF Fellowship” and that you are “seeking supplementary financial support from the school”.
- check (✓) boxes asking if you are requesting financial support* from the university.

**NOT seeking full financial support during the first 2 years, but you do want full financial support from year 3 and beyond*

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Action plan

1. Obtain application brochures by email or from the Web (from graduate school and department; investigate requirements and deadlines)
2. Get official transcripts from your schools
3. Have your transcripts, university diplomas, awards, merits translated and notarized
4. Concentrate on the 5 recommended schools
5. Write CV, and SOP
6. Contact 3 Vietnamese professors to write letters of recommendation. (Please do not contact the U.S. scientists who interviewed you.)
7. Send application packages and application fee (if required)
8. Exchange emails with schools and professors

All of this requires a lot of **thinking** and **preparation**.

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Selection process

- At some schools, the selection is done by the departmental graduate admission committee
 - Students are guaranteed to be supported for the first two years (typically in the form of graduate assistantships - GAs). Continuing support may depend on performance.
 - Need to find an advisor as soon as possible
- At many others, professors directly make their offers (with or without RA) to incoming students
 - Most schools require Ph.D. students to get an advisor for admission

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Selection factors

1. Test scores: GRE \geq X and TOEFL \geq Y?
2. From which school?
Top: Tsinghua (China), IIT (India), NTU (Taiwan), NUS (Singapore)
3. GPA (class rank) & awards
4. Background and research experience
5. Letters of recommendation
6. Statement of purpose
7. Direct correspondence (emails, phone calls)

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Advice to student

- High test scores only get you into the short list
- To be selected, you have to make an application that stands out
- What makes an application stand out?
 - CV, SOP, LORs, and direct correspondence
- Schools/professors read these to **get an image of the candidate**

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Test scores

- Key for achieving good scores is practice
 - Lots of resources (books, Web sites) available
 - U.S. guide (www.svduhoc.vnn.vn/usguide/) has a lot of information
- Target test scores:
 - Good enough: TOEFL: 580 and GRE: 1,800
 - Ideal: TOEFL: 600 and GRE: 2,000

Note: Some schools/professors don't pay much attention to the GRE scores

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Curriculum vitae

- Spend time writing and rewriting CV
- Make it short (1-2 pages) and sharp
- Most notable:
 - GPA: Overall GPA and Technical GPA
 - Class rank
 - Awards/honors
 - Research experiences
 - Publications
 - Special talents/skills

Key: indication of an outstanding student

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Letters of recommendation

- Letters of recommendation are very important:
 - They confirm your qualifications; and
 - Provide additional information about you that application forms and scores do not.
- A good letter of recommendation should be **reasonable, specific, & personalized**
 - **Reasonable** means that the person writing the letter **knows you well** and **has the qualifications** to evaluate you.
 - **Specific** means that the person cites examples, provides specific information, and tells little stories about the student.
 - Example: What was your rank in class? What is the outcome of a project you have done? How do you relate to others?
 - **Personalized** recommendation letters that give insight into what kind of person you are and show that the recommenders believe in your potential.

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English communication skills

- This is different from the skills tested on the TOEFL.
- Being a good researcher requires being effective at
 - Exchanging ideas via emails, at seminars, meetings, conferences
 - Writing papers
 - Giving talks.
- These will be judged through SOP and direct correspondence.

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Which schools to apply?

- Five recommended U.S. universities.
- Use school ranking from usnews.com, National Academies (from VEF Web site), or rankings of Ph.D. programs at <http://www.phds.org/rankings>.
- Visit school Web sites to see if they do research in your area of interest.
- Contact the professors before applying.
- Also consider:
 - It would be very helpful if the school already has some successful Vietnamese students.

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Contact university & professors in the U.S.

- Contact admissions office by e-mail -- the quickest and easiest way to get answers.
- Send a personalized email to the professor
 - Make it short but sharp.
 - Personalized letter gets more attention.
 - Indicate that you visited professor's homepage and find a good match.
 - Don't send exactly the same letter to every professor.
- Attach your CV with the letter.

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Do your homework . . . Knowledge is your power

- Study the guides
 - Lots of information on the Web
- Study the schools
 - Visit schools' Web sites
 - Visit professors' homepages
 - Learn about their current research
- Study the U.S. culture
 - Communication styles: Web, news, movies
 - Understanding the U.S. culture in advance is a strong point.

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Application Time Lines

- Application seasons: late September to mid-December.
- Encouraged to apply early
 - [Princeton](#): December 01
 - [Stanford](#): December 05
 - [UC Berkeley](#): December 01, 15, January 2, February 9, etc.
 - [Harvard School of Public Health](#): December 15
 - [MIT](#): December 1
- Admission decision: December 15 to early March.
- **Deadline to inform VEF: April 1**
- Start of school: early August to early September.

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Application Methods

Online application (recommended)

- Fast
- Lower application fee
- Can track the application status on line

Paper application

- Takes time for mailing
- More expensive
- Cannot track the application status on line

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Application Fees

VEF-Alliance schools: Application fee will be waived or taken care of by the schools.

Recommended non VEF-Alliance schools: Application fee will be paid by you first, and reimbursed later by VEF based on receipt.

Non-recommended schools: application costs will be born by YOU, should apply to schools that are the best in your field.

[Rankings of Ph.D. programs](#)

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Mail Documents to the U.S.

- Pay close attention to application deadlines.
- Submit all documents electronically IF the school allows this. Be sure your scans are very, very clear!
- If not, mail your documents directly to universities.
- USE EXPRESS MAIL, not surface or airmail.
- Keep track of the documents after sending.
- There is **NO** reimbursement for mailing costs.

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Important Notes

- Keep VEF informed of your admission status at all times (using provided Username, Password).
- In the end, VEF and the National Academies will consider the schools that provide you with official admission and decide to which school you should go.
- Must inform VEF if you are seeking or are offered other scholarships or fellowships.

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Actions to be Taken

- Check Web sites of recommended universities (Graduate School and department)
 - Graduate admissions requirements
 - Graduate admissions deadlines
 - Establish time line
- Write and rewrite CV and SOP
- Obtain letters of recommendation (English)
- Obtain certified transcripts
- Have university diplomas, certificates, awards, merits, etc. translated and notarized
- Contact SOP reviewers for editing and refining
- Submit applications on line (remember to get/keep receipt)
- Contact admissions advisor, department advisor, and professor for clarification and follow-up
- Keep VEF OMS updated (using username & password).

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Conclusions

To be a successful applicant to top U.S. graduate schools:

- Be motivated
- Be persistent
- Be specific
- Create an image that stands out
- Do your homework: study and think!

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Useful Web sites

- USguide:
usguide.hypermart.net
www.svduhoc.vnn.vn/usguide/
(a guide by Vietnamese students)
- Be BeYond:
[www.bebeyond.com/StudyAbroad/Study Abroad.html/](http://www.bebeyond.com/StudyAbroad/Study%20Abroad.html/)
(an English guide by Chinese students)
- **Basic Information about Study in the USA**
www.educationusa.state.gov
www.internationalstudent.com
<http://www.internationalstudentguidetotheusa.com>

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Useful Web sites

- **Searching for universities and colleges:**
- www.petersons.com/educationusa
- www.collegeboard.com
- www.collegeview.com
- www.acuinfo.com
- www.studyusa.com (has some information in Vietnamese)
- <http://www.esl-guide.com/dir/location/index.html>
- <http://www.americangraduateeducation.com>
- <http://www.cc-usa.org>
- www.AmericanGraduateEducation.com (for graduate students)
- www.utexas.edu/world/univ
- www.princetonreview.com
- www.talk.collegeconfidential.com

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**Thank you
&
GOOD LUCK!**

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