Graduate Admission Committees: The Application Process

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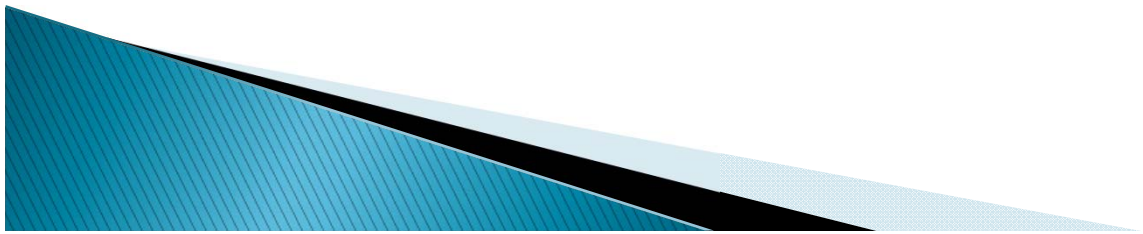
Higher Education in the United States

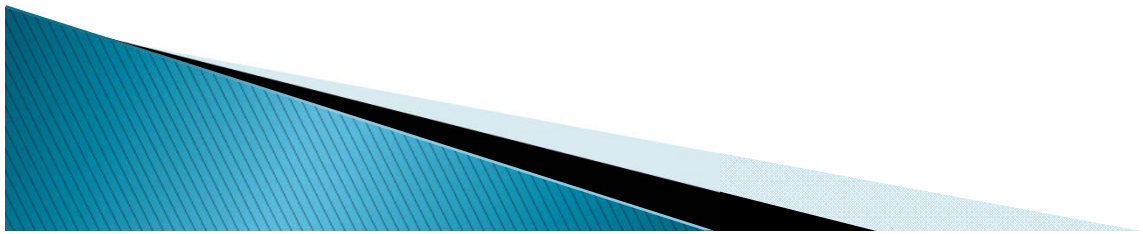
- Decentralized system
- Diversity in the types of universities
  - Public v. Private distinction
  - Different focus and mission, e.g.
  - Rensselaer Polytechnic University , Catholic University , Northeastern University
- Common characteristics exist in admission procedures, but each university and program has different specific requirements. VEF Alliance



What Do Universities Want?

- Universities need to show that they are successful.
- Their graduates are leaders in their fields.
- Their professors are leaders in research.

  Prestigious research projects
  Research dollars
  Talented Master's and Ph.D. students



What Are Universities Looking For?

Test Scores

Most universities require that post graduate applicants take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) General Exam.

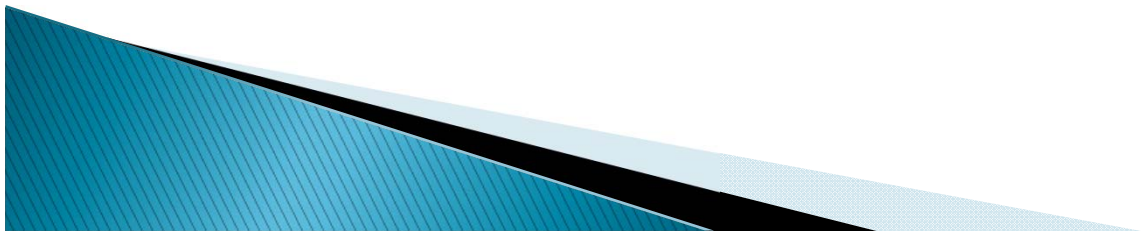
Some universities & departments require/accept discipline specific GRE Subject Test scores also.

Minimum acceptable scores vary between universities and within universities; so, you must determine what is required where you want to go.

What Are Universities Looking For?

Past Academic Performance

- **Your overall GPA & official transcripts**
- **Class standing or rank**
- **Quality of the undergraduate institution**
- **Your grades in the major and especially upper division courses and in the past two years**
- **Signs of improvement if you did not have a strong start**



PK3

What Are Universities Looking For?

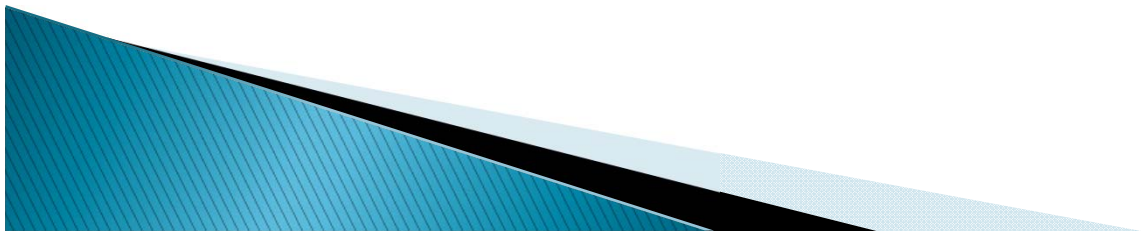
English Skills

Minimum acceptable TOEFL scores vary between universities and within universities

→determine what is required where you want to go

A well written Statement of Purpose or Personal Statement is your opportunity to promote yourself and show your mastery of English.

Suggestion: Have at least one native speaker proofread in addition to several other readers



Slide 6

PK3 Would add either on the slide or in the notes that students MUST have AT LEAST ONE native English speaker proofread their personal statements before submitting them for spelling/grammar/synta. Also recommend that a few people reveiw the statement as against the university's personal statement's directions to be sure covering the bases requested.

Pamela Katz, 9/9/2012

What Are Universities Looking For?

Recommendations

- **Read carefully the requirements specified by the university for LOR(s), including number of letters, from whom, what they should address, etc.**

- **Recommenders should have *personal knowledge* of the applicant addressing the factors required above**
  - **academic talents**
  - **work ethic**
  - **attitude**
  - **accomplishments in his/her field**

- **Recommender respected in his/her and ***your*** field**

Best letter will give specific examples of when applicant demonstrated the qualities attested to

Slide 7

PK4 i'm not sure how these three are different! I would suggest not listing them in terms of first, second, and third but say:

Personal knowledge of the applicant's academic talents, work ethic and attitude.
- from a professor who knows you well
- from an academic advisor who has worked with you for a long time
- from a trusted colleague, if you have been working in your field

Best letter will include Specific examples of when the student demonstrated the qualities the recommender recognizes

Pamela Katz, 9/9/2012

What Are Universities Looking For?

Personal Statement

- **This is your opportunity to demonstrate the following:**
  - **Motivation**
  - **Study skills**
  - **Research skills**
  - **Goals**
  - **Maturity**
  - **Persistence**
  - **Understanding of self**
- **This is your opportunity to address short-comings in:**
  - **GPA**
  - **Research experience**

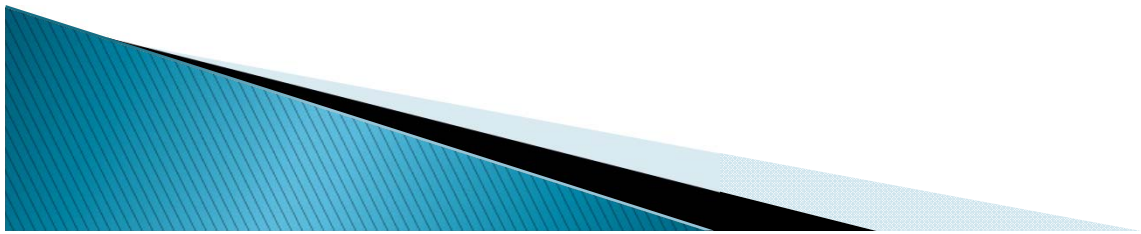
  (no one is perfect. Don't complain but this is the chance to explain why you may have weaknesses)
- **This is your opportunity to demonstrate your writing and English skills.**

What are disciplines Looking For?

(INFORMAL POLL OF PROFESSORS)

- **Mathematics**
  - **GRE Score/GPA (for the top rated schools)**

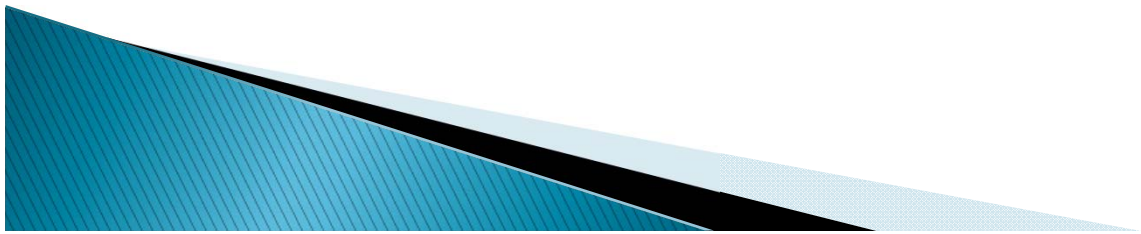
- **Chemistry**
  - **GRE and GPA less important if there is not research experience**
  - **Alignment of courses with US standards (check to see that required courses in the US are completed)**
  - **Emphasize research (passion, experience, abilities) in all parts of the application (personal statement, letters of recommendation)**
  - **Previous successes from the same university system**



What are disciplines Looking For?

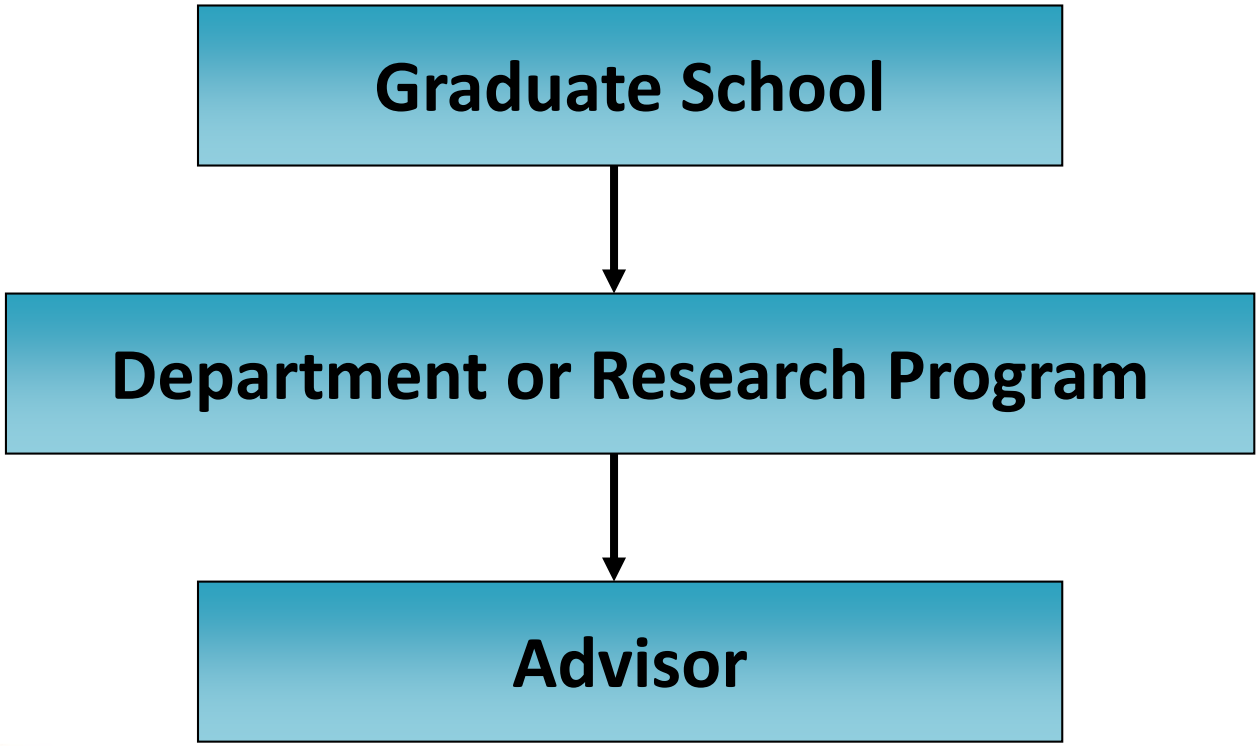
- **Biology**
  - **English competency**
  - **Subject GRE may be requested**
  - **Find potential advisors by contacting them to see if they are taking students**

- **Physics**
  - **Good GRE scores**
  - **Completion of core physics classes**
  - **Involvement and understanding of research issues**
  - **Letters from project supervisors (letters from class teachers are less useful)**
  - **Statement of goals**



Who determines your admission?

Admission to a graduate program occurs at several levels: each level has different emphasis



Who determines your admission?

The Advisor

- **It is recommended (and possibly required) that you specify one or two professors with whom you are interested in working**

- ***Make contact with these professors by email--keeping in mind that they are very busy.***

  Introduce yourself with a short and professional email

  Demonstrate interest and drive

  Tip: mention their work specifically

Who determines your admission?

The Advisor

- **Ask the professor if s/he is taking new students**

  It is not always possible for a professor to take new students. If you like the department, consider working with someone else.

- **The Advisor will:**

  Evaluate your application
  Determine if s/he is willing to advise you
  Support you in department meetings regarding admission
  May provide funding for you

Who determines your admission?

The Department

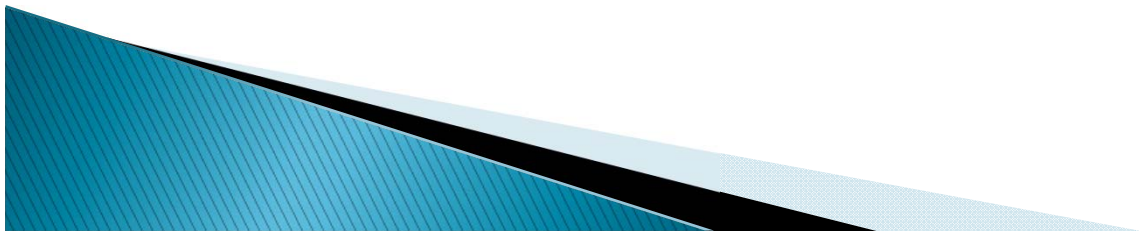
- **You must specify and be accepted by a department or research lab**

  The Graduate School will not admit you without the Department's consent.

- **Department requirements (GRE, GPA) may be more strict than the Graduate School**

- **The Department will:**

  Evaluate your application
  Determine which applicants are recommended to the Graduate School for admission
  Determine which applicants receive funding (teaching assistantships, etc).



Who determines your admission?

Graduate School

- You are formally admitted by the Graduate School of a university.

- The Graduate School is mainly administrative. They work with departments and programs in the admissions procedure

- The Graduate School will:
  - Determine application deadlines
  - Set minimum GRE scores
  - Set minimum GPA scores
  - Receive and process your application

What Are Universities Looking For?

Holistic View of the Applicant

- Resume or CV
- Personal Statement(s)
- Letter(s) of Recommendation
- ETS Personal Potential Index http://www.ets.org/ppi/
- Extra effort: Show your interest/make yourself known to faculty and admissions

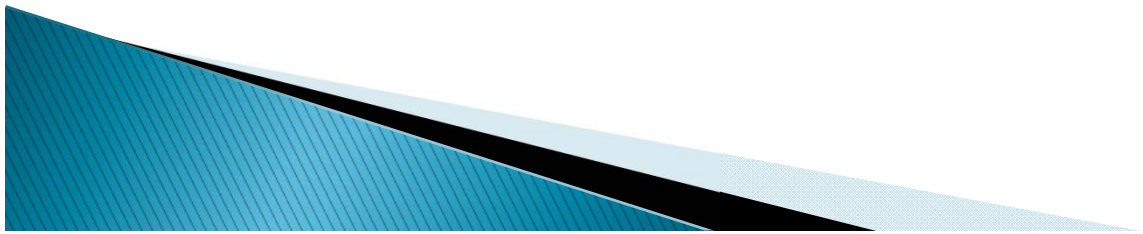
Orchestrate your application

Resources

Websites of the graduate schools and departments you will apply to (requirements & deadlines).

Thompson Peterson's online guide to graduate schools:
http://www.petersons.com/graduate_home.asp?path=gr.home

About Graduate School:
http://gradschool.about.com/cs/generaladvice/a/guide.htm



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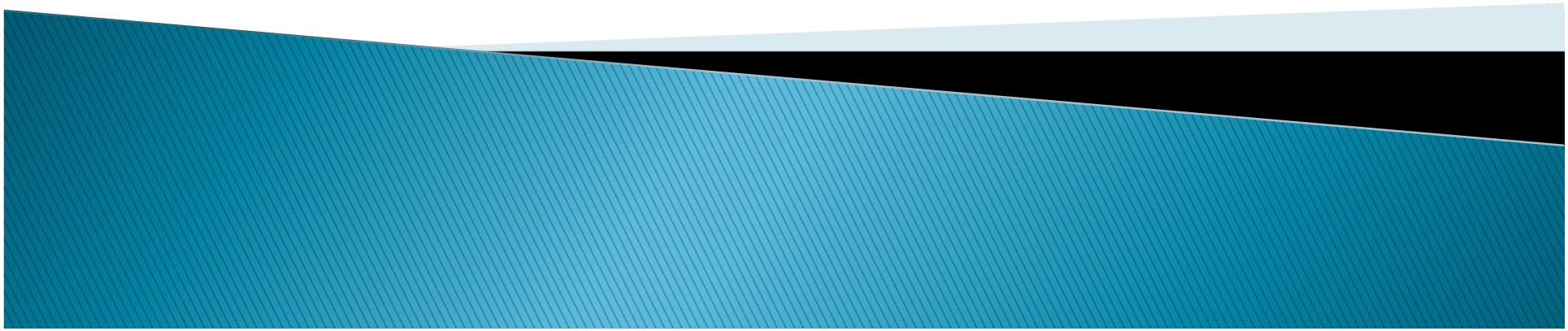
Good Luck!