

US Graduate School Application Process

Presenter:

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Questions to be addressed

- ❖ Why graduate school
- ❖ Application process
- ❖ Funding
- ❖ PhD process



Transitioning from a Bachelor's to Graduate Degree



- ❖ “What happens now?” early! : 9-12 months before intended start date
 - ❖ Fall Semester (August)
 - ❖ Spring Semester (January)

Sample Timeline for graduate school application

Suggested timetable for applications

It is important to have a plan for completing the application requirements. Prepare a timetable with specific deadlines. The graduate admissions or funding deadlines may differ from the graduate program deadline. Be sure that you apply in time to receive full consideration for funding packages.

Summer before your senior year

- Begin to draft a personal statement of your academic and professional goals.
- Explore graduate programs. Become familiar with faculty interests, entrance requirements, and deadlines.
- Contact graduate programs that interest you and request information.
- Review for the GRE. Download FREE GRE PowerPrep software from the GRE web site, gre.org.

Hint: Even if your prospective program does not require the GRE, national fellowships and other funding sources may request GRE scores.

September

- Share your personal statement with professors you know. Ask their advice about which graduate programs you might consider.
- Consult your campus writing center to review your statements.
- Narrow your graduate program choices.
- Register to take the GRE.

October

- Take the GRE.
- Revise your personal statement, tailoring it to your chosen graduate programs.
- Order transcripts.

November

- Download application forms and complete a draft. Review and edit your drafts.
- Submit completed application forms.
- Ask faculty for recommendations. Give them specific information about deadlines and follow up to ensure that they meet the deadline.

December

- Submit your applications.
- Note: Letters of admission are sent on a rolling basis beginning in February.

January

- Follow up to ensure that supporting documents were received.

February

- Visit your prospective programs, if possible.

March

- Submit a FAFSA. Even if you expect to receive funding, it is good to have other options—just in case.

April 1

- You should receive admissions letters by this date.

April 15

- You must accept or decline offers of admission.

Why graduate school?

Should You Go to Graduate School?

FROM
WWW.BOOKSCOUTER.COM

If you answer yes to one or more of the following, Graduate School is a great opportunity for you!

A graduate degree is necessary for your professional field.

A graduate degree will result in a raise.

A graduate degree will result in a promotion.

Graduate programs expand your critical thinking ability.

The degree satisfies a personal curiosity.

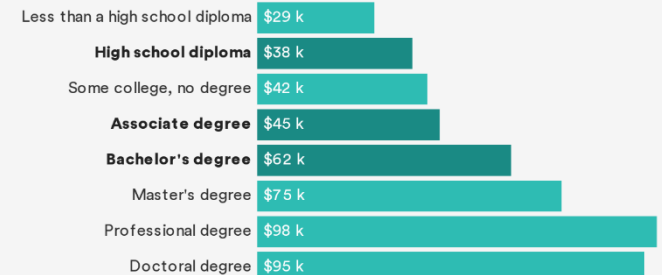
Graduate school will suit you personally.

Graduate school makes sense financially.

Reasons NOT to Go:

- You're going to grad school to please someone else.
- You're clueless about what you want to study or what you want to do once you've earned an advanced degree.
- You're secretly trying to avoid finding a "real job".
- You only want to earn more money.

Median annual earnings by educational attainment



Source: New America's calculation of the Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018 data on median usual weekly earnings by educational attainment. Accessed May 31 2019.

NEW AMERICA

Overview of the PhD application process

- ❖ Q: Do I need a Master's degree?
 - ❖ Not necessarily
 - ❖ A strong GPA and research experience goes a long way
- ❖ Can I get a Master's degree along the way?
 - ❖ In most programs, yes
- ❖ How do I begin? Find schools?
 - ❖ Identify research areas of interest
 - ❖ Google. Best US News Rankings.
 - ❖ Research schools that match area of interest
 - ❖ Reach out to current graduate students
 - ❖ Ask where/what graduate students do afterwards
- ❖ Find out application requirements for each school
 - ❖ Deadlines: December/January for PhDs

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Minimum admissions requirements

- ❖ Bachelor's degree:
 - ❖ Competitive GPA (3.5/4.0, ~4.2/5.0)
 - ❖ Transcript
- ❖ Statement of purpose
- ❖ Entrance exams: GRE and TOEFL/IELTS
 - ❖ GRE scores may be waived
 - ❖ Competitive GRE scores >158. Writing >4.5
- ❖ Recommendation letter
- ❖ CV/Resume
- ❖ Application fee
 - ❖ Can also be waived



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 - ❖ Competitive GRE scores >158. Writing >4.5
- Dedicate at-least 1 month to prepare
- Look up average GRE of incoming PhD class at each school
- Don't stress about it. A perfect score is not required



Minimum admissions requirements

- ❖ Entrance exams: GRE and TOEFL/IELTS
- ❖ Recommendation letter
 - ❖ Allows admissions committee learn about you from a colleague's perspective
- Contact professor's who know you WELL!
 - Can speak on your ability to conduct research
 - Demonstrated excellence and willingness to learn
 - Potential success in a graduate program
 - Qualities that make you stand out from other applicants



Recommendation letter tips

- ❖ Entrance exams: GRE and TOEFL/IELTS
- ❖ Recommendation letter
 - Contact professor's who know you WELL!
 - Can speak on your ability to conduct research
 - Demonstrated excellence and willingness to learn
 - Potential success in a graduate program
 - Qualities that make you stand out from other applicants
 - Ask for letters far in advance (~ 2 months before deadline).
 - Send reminders
 - Provide resume and SOP to letter writers
 - Emphasize content you want recommenders to be sure to include
 - Thank them afterwards!



Strong Letters of Recommendation



You'll need at least 3 letters at least one should be "strong" if you seek admission to competitive programs.

Characteristics of strong (influential) recommendations:

2. Author knows you and your work well.
3. Author likes and respects you.
4. Author has relevant academic or professional credentials.
5. Author is known in the discipline that you seek to enter.
6. Author knows people in the program/university you seek to enter.

Minimum admissions requirements

- ❖ Entrance exams: GRE and TOEFL/IELTS
- ❖ Recommendation letter
- ❖ CV/Resume
 - ❖ Resume (~1-2 pgs)
 - ❖ CV (no length requirement)
- ❖ Application fee
 - ❖ Can also be waived



Top qualities of a graduate student applicant

❖ Ideal PhD applicant

When evaluating a student's application, we look at the overall quality and strength of the application. Does the applicant know what she wants to do? Does she make it clear why she wants to attend our particular graduate program?

Having a good fit is the most important predictor of whether or not a student will thrive in our program. Did this student apply because he feels that it is the best place for him? Will our program serve his intellectual needs and goals? What I mean by that is not that the applicant tells us that this is a fabulous program, but rather do we have the faculty, the courses, and the research here to support the applicant's goals. Do we have strengths in the particular areas that the applicant desires?

An applicant might have a stunning academic record, but if we do not have strengths that match her interests we won't serve her well. She won't be able to get what she needs in order to thrive. There must be a good fit.

Top qualities of a graduate student applicant



Elaine May
Professor of American Studies
University of Minnesota

It is up to the student to learn about what we do here in order to prepare a strong application. How much does he know about our program and the specific fields we offer? It will be obvious if the student just lists areas from our web site. Prospective applicants should look at the web site, but shouldn't stop there. They should find out which faculty do what kinds of work. A strong personal statement might include sentences like, "The work of Professor So-and-So really inspired me" or "I would like to work with this professor because I have read her work and used it in a research paper." They might, for example, comment on the professor's approach in their research. A strong application will demonstrate that the student has been in touch with faculty in the department and that the applicant knows something about the field.

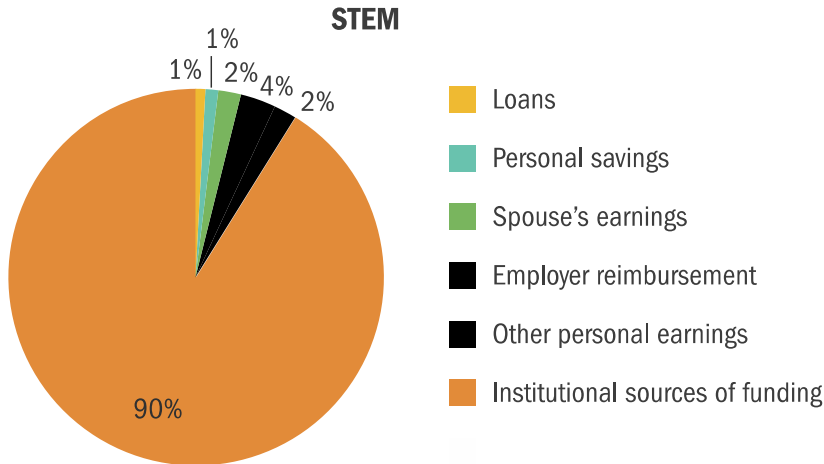
Students should choose their undergraduate courses carefully so that they can get a sense for what they want academically and begin to focus their interests.

In addition to course work, they should attend departmental seminars; work with research projects if they can; read books by scholars in their field. Whose work do they find exciting? Where are those scholars located?

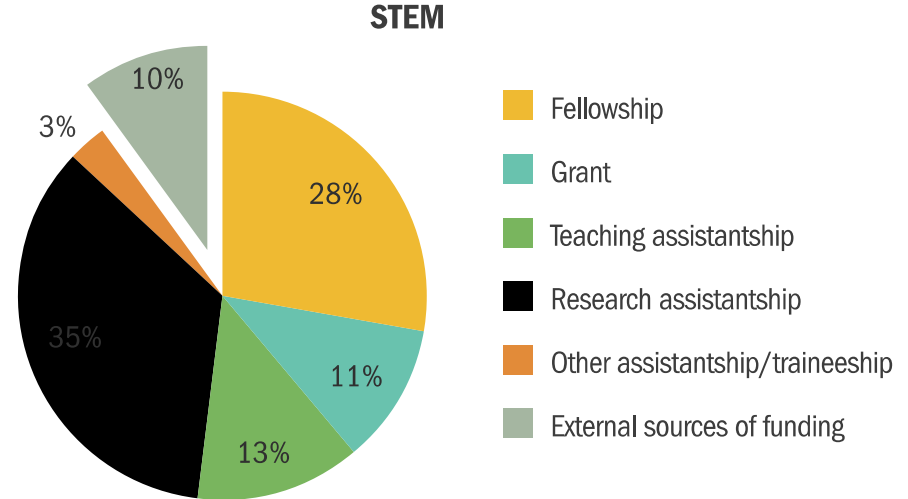
There is no ideal/perfect candidate!

Funding your graduate school education

Primary Sources of External Funding Among PhD



Primary Sources of Institutional Funding Among



- ❖ Assistantship packages vary by school and departments!
 - ❖ Check individual schools
- ❖ Graduate research assistantships (GRA)
- ❖ Graduate Teaching assistantships (GTA)
- ❖ Graduate assistantships (GA)

Difference between GRA, GTA, & GA



The duties of a **Graduate Research Assistant** are to apply and master research concepts, practices, or methods of scholarship. Assistants whose primary (i.e. greater than 50%) duties consist of the following types of activities will be categorized as Graduate Research Assistants:

- Conducting experiments
- Presenting findings in a publication or dissertation
- Organizing or analyzing data
- Collaborating with faculty in preparing publications
- Overseeing work of other RAs
- Other research activities

- ❖ Most PhD students are GRAs. Some Master's students (thesis track)
- ❖ Typically covers tuition cost and health insurance (for PhDs)
- ❖ Includes living expenses

Difference between GRA, GTA, & GA



The duties of a **Graduate Teaching Assistant** are to conduct or support instruction. Assistants whose primary (i.e. greater than 50%) duties consist of the following types of activities will be categorized as Graduate Teaching Assistants:

- Teaching classes (not as the instructor of record)
- Providing artistic instruction
- Grading student assignments
- Proctoring exams
- Leading lab or discussion groups in a course setting
- Leading lab or discussion groups in a course se
- Developing academic instructional materials
- Tutoring students
- Accompanying/coaching musical or vocal performances
- Maintaining office hours to provide instructional support

- ❖ Some PhD and Master's students will be GTAs some/most of the time
- ❖ Typically covers tuition cost and health insurance (for PhDs)
- ❖ Includes living expenses

Difference between GRA, GTA, & GA



The duties of a **Graduate Assistant** are to support administrative functions. Assistants whose primary (i.e., greater than 50%) duties consist of the following types of activities will be classified as Graduate Assistants:

Clerical Support

- Copying course materials
- General office work/clerical/receptionist
- Correspondence
- Supervising reading room

Technical/Support Services

- Website management/assisting faculty with web pages
- Network administration/end user support
- Equipment management
- Monitoring instructional and service labs (computer, video, etc.)
- Translation
- Routine support for publications (record keeping, writing copy for university or department newsletters or non-research publications, correspondence, etc.)

Advising

- Providing curricular and academic advice to students
- Providing support to advisors

Outreach Duties

- Recruiting students
- Publicizing programs and activities to campus and public constituencies

❖ Typical source of additional funding for Master's students



General funding advice

- ❖ Reach out to the schools and departments early (as soon as offer letter is received)
- ❖ If there are no provisions for GRAs, ask about GTA opportunities
- ❖ Funding situation of professors can/may change during degree duration. Keep an open mind
- ❖ Always be on the lookout for other sources of funding
 - ❖ Fellowships (External and Internal): NASA, AAUW
 - ❖ Scholarships: NSBE, SWE



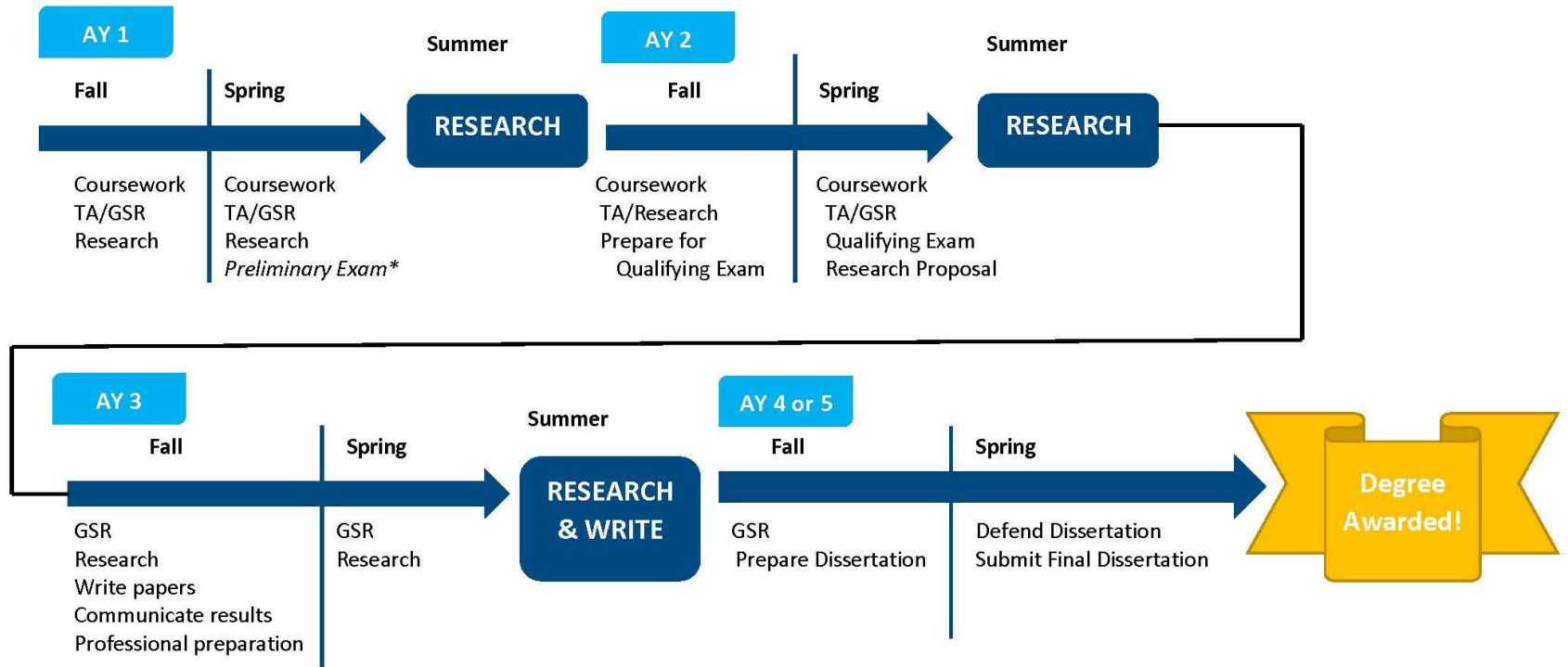
That PhD life.

- ❖ Average length of PhD program (~4-6 years)
- ❖ F-1 Visa required for International students
 - ❖ Typically don't need to show proof of finance during visa interview since it's fully funded (I-20)
- ❖ Choosing an advisor
 - ❖ Admission into specific lab
 - ❖ Matching during 1st and 2nd semester
 - ❖ Rotation during 1st year



That PhD life.

Roadmap to Success: Sample timeline for Ph.D. Degree*



*This graphic is for demonstration purposes only. For specific details regarding the Ph.D. requirements, please refer to the program/emphasis website.

Conclusion

SHOULD YOU DO A PHD? - A FLOW DIAGRAM

ERRANTSCIENCE.COM

