

6 November 2008

Undergrad info session on grad school--

Participants:

Bill; Phoebe; Ursula; Gregg; Tiffany; Danielle; Naomi  
Marissa; Jordan; Erica; Brad

Graduate students dole out advice about applying to grad schools:

**Phoebe:** *Contact potential advisors.* Take time off. Don't settle for somewhere-- if you're not interested in the program, don't do it; there's really no such thing as a "safety school" for grad school. If you take time off, you will go back if you are supposed to go to grad school. It's much easier to get back into school if you're interested than getting out if you hate it.

**Bill:** Masters v. PhD? *Make sure you make contact with professors in whom you are interested* to make sure they have space in their lab. Masters v. PhD: consider saying you're interested in getting your PhD, and you can always change your mind later.

**Danielle:** Decided to go to grad school because didn't know what else to do. *Take time off!* Use your advisors as advocates and guides. Don't rely on websites!!

**Ursula:** US as a good place to get PhD because allows you to pursue your own project and design your own path. *Contact people-- to make sure they have funding and space, and to establish your interest in their projects. Go to a meeting or conference. Try to visit.* Do research! if at all possible. Helps both to establish research interests, and to bolster your recommendations. *Ask about money!* Don't be bashful about asking about funding.

**Gregg:** Recommends taking time off. Check the deadlines, especially for foreign universities. Also, when considering foreign universities, remember that things (especially funding) will likely be different for foreign students. *Visit!*

**Tiffany:** Apply to work with a person and don't get hung up on a name.

**Naomi:** Application process: Take time off!! It allows you to focus your interests and wants. Feel free to change your direction-- now is the time to shift focus. Ask professors for some direction and read a bunch of papers. Contact the people who interest you directly. Then go visit!!

Other things to consider:

- Size of departments matter
- Requirements for coursework, especially dependent on masters v. phd

Statement of purpose:

- How do you write a good statement of purpose? Write clearly, do not write in flowery prose, no anecdotes.

GREs and letters of reference:

- Get your faculty to write you letters and then put them on file while you're still in school-- your faculty will never remember you better than now. Take your GREs now-- you will never do better than right now.

Time off:

- Do it if you feel like that may be the right path. You can always get back into school, and you can use that time to focus your skills or build your resume, etc.

Recommended process for applying to grad schools:

1. Talk with advisors and faculty members whom you respect about their suggestions of schools and potential advisors.
2. Read recent papers from suggested potential advisors.
3. Try to attend a conference, or at least look at the abstracts from GSA and AGU to see who is publishing new work on topics that interest you.
4. Contact people with whom you may be interested in working to see if they are looking for new students and have space in their lab, and to help you stand out above the rest of the applicants. Email is a good place to start.
5. Try to talk with potential advisors on the phone once it is clear that they are looking for students and may be interested in you.
6. Apply.
7. Definitely try to visit schools. Most schools will be able/willing to reimburse you for travel expenses.
8. Take your time in making your decision. If you do not feel like, after visiting schools, you are interested in going to grad school, then decline offers and try again in the future. Do not accept an offer for a place at which you didn't feel comfortable.