Applying to Graduate School in the US

MIT-AITI Ghana 2004

G-Unit

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Introduction

- My Background
- Why I chose graduate school

Introduction (cont.)

- What you need to go to graduate school?
  - Get good grades, mostly, if not All A's
  - Work hard during undergrad and take part in any opportunities to do research (publish papers)
  - Establish relationship with faculty who can write you a superior letter of recommendation (don't burn your bridges)

To be competitive
Specialized knowledge
Enjoy research-developing cutting edge technology
PhD teach at the university level

Outline

- Introduction
- **My Recommendations**
- Selecting Graduate Schools
- Timeline
- The Application
- Application Process
  - Essay
  - Exams (GRE)
  - Letters of Recommendation
- Funding

My Recommendations

- Start Early!!! The application process takes a full year
- Start the personal statement essay EARLY!
- Be organized!
  - Keep a folder for each school
  - Read through each application and keep a list of all material required
- Work Together!
- Backup Plan

Selecting Graduate Schools

- Research the schools and their department
  - Internet, journals, talk to alumni, contact school directly for brochure
- US News (www.usnews.com)
  - America's Best Graduate Schools 2005 Top Engineering Schools.htm
  - US News Science Listings
- Talk to your professors about applying
- Make a top 10 list of schools you want to apply to (include 2 back-up schools)

Timeline (15-12 months before entering grad school)

- Research your areas of interest
- Register and prepare for admissions exams (GRE)
- Request Application Materials
- Request Funding Materials
- Draft Statement of Purpose (Essay)

Timeline (12-6 months before)

- List all deadlines (usually December onwards)
- Order Transcripts
- Request Letters of Recommendation
- Submit Fellowship Applications
- Submit Application (1 month before deadline)
- Check that all application is complete
- Send thank you notes to references and those who helped you
- Visit Schools, if possible

Timeline (6 months before)

- Prepare to enter the school you choose
- Take extra classes
- Talk to students at the graduate school you wish to attend

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The Application

- Paper, download on-line, submit on-line
  - Sample apps
- Application Fees ($75-$125 USD)
  - Sometimes there is a fee waiver
- Application Deadline
- Transcripts (record of grades)
- Essay
- Letters of Recommendation
- Background Information

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Application Process: Essay

- Extremely Important
- Show why you want to do research, why you are unique, and what you will gain from obtaining a grad degree
- State how the school will benefit by admitting you
- Tell an interesting story
- Write, re-write, re-write, re-write, re-write (getting feedback from faculty and friends)

Application Process: Essay

Include..

- Published papers
- Work experience
- Hardships you had to overcome & special circumstances
- Explain any unanswered questions or inconsistencies in academic record
- List honors and activities

Application Process: Essay

Sample Outline
- Intro
- Research Experiences
- Teaching Experiences
- Extra-curricular activities
- Conclusion (tie together interest to the school)
- Write, re-write, re-write, re-write, re-write (getting feedback from faculty and friends)

Application Process: Exams (GRE)

- GRE (Graduate Record Examination)
  - Analytical Writing
  - Verbal
  - Quantitative
    - understand basic concepts of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and data analysis, reason quantitatively
- GRE Subject Exam
  - Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Literature in English, Mathematics, Physics, Psychology
- GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test)
- LSAT (Law School Admission Test)
- MCAT (Medical College Admission Test)

US News GRE Info

Hi Aisha,

we had given seminars beforehand, but mainly for undergraduates. It is great that you are doing it for the graduate students. I have helped a few students apply for graduate school. The biggest problem graduate students face is funding. I really don't know where we can get a list. Maybe the International student office can help.

One thing they really need to know is that the application process is a year long effort. Hence, they need to come up with a detailed time-line for GRE, when to choose the schools and get application material, when to apply, when to request recommendations, and when to write the essay.

You need to highlight to them that the essay is extremely important. The essay gives them a chance to show why the want to do research, why they are unique, what they will gain, and more importantly, how the school will benefit by admitting them and considering them for funding. They need to show that they are unique and the best. The essay should show this through examples of their activities and by telling an interesting story.

Same with the recommendation. Most African professors tend to write 3 line recommendations which do not make sense. The letters need to show the great values of the student, and they need to be very convincing.

If I come across more ideas, I will let you know…

Have a great time
Solomon

Application Process: Exams (GRE)

Registering for the GRE

- Registration Fee ($140, can be waived)
- Select a date to take the exam
- GHANA

  TO REGISTER:
  REGION 9 - SOUTH AFRICA
  CALL: 31-320-239-593 *(Lelystad, The Netherlands)*
  FAX: 31-320-239-886

  ACCRA
  TEST CENTER NUMBER: 8238
  TESTS OFFERED: GMAT, GRE, TOEFL
  PERMANENT CENTER

- Study with friends and colleagues
- If a school does not require it, don't send it (Less is More)

USIS (United States Information Service)

- Educational advice
- Exam Information
- Books/Brochures on school (library)
- Information Session every Monday
- Advice on Funding
- Advice on Visa and Immigration
- And Much More!!
- Location: opposite Children's Park in Accra

Application Process: Letters of Recommendation

- Extremely Important!
- Should be at least a 1 page letter
  - Some applications have a form to complete
- The letters need to show the great values of the student
- Must be very convincing

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Funding

- Fellowships and Scholarships
  - International Education Financial Aid (IEFA) http://www.iefa.org/
- Research Assistantships (RAs)
  - A research assistant is a member of a research group in a laboratory or on a project, whose principal duty is to contribute, under supervision, to a program of departmental or interdepartmental research.
- Teaching Assistantships (TAs)
  - The principal duties of a teaching assistant include assisting a member of the faculty in grading undergraduate quizzes and homework, instructing in the classroom and/or laboratory, preparing apparatus for demonstrations, posting web-based materials, and conducting tutorials.
- Loans

International Education Financial Aid (IEFA) scholarship search is the premier resource for **financial aid**, college scholarship and grant information for international students wishing to study abroad. At this site, you will find the most comprehensive college **scholarship search** and grant listings plus **international student loan** programs and other information to promote **study abroad**.

Questions?

Find a way or make one

Essay (what it should include) when to start, Letters of recommendation, GRE, General exam, Subject Exam, Funding, Fellowships (company, school), app is similar to grad school app, RAships, TAships, Loans?, Application Process, Due dates, General Questions, Handouts, Aspire higher, Contacts, Web.mit.edu/gso
http://www.usnews.com/usnews/rankguide/rghome.htm
Student visas, Logistcs (living costs, environment, car)

Websites

- University sites (eg. www.mit.edu, www.upenn.edu, www.stanford.edu)
- US News Graduate School Guide
  - http://www.usnews.com
- Fellowships for international students
  - NAFSA (Association for international educators)
  - Fellowships International Education Financial Aid (IEFA) http://www.iefa.org/
- GRE
  - http://www.gre.org
- Great Search Engine
  - http://www.google.com

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