

How to Apply to Graduate School and Fail to Get Admitted

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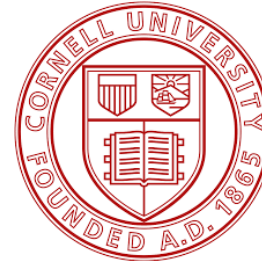
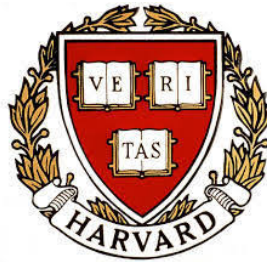
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Overview

- MS or PhD?
- Funding
- Statements
- Transcript & GREs
- Letters
- Scholarships
- Programs
- Interviews
- Visit Days
- Timeline





UC San Diego
JACOBS SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING



ETH
Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich
Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich



MS or PhD?

MS

- MS programs are course based - performance in courses is key admissions criteria
- 5th year MS programs at Berkeley are bargains



PhD

- Letters are very important
- Added research component so you need to show or explain demonstrated interest in an area.
- Match between advisor and student
- Make sure you are interested in academics
- Having your own funding will open doors
- Plenty of qualified applicants - key to offer of admission is often a match with advisor and research funding



Funding

MS

- Schools assume you are self supported



PhD

- Fellowships are available
- Research opportunities (Graduate Research Assistantships (GSA) or Graduate Student Researchships GSR) are available
- Teaching opportunities (Graduate Teaching Assistantships (TAs)) are available



Statements

Statement of Purpose

Discuss research interests and academic history

Don't be modest - help others help you!

If no personal history statement, then give a brief synopsis of what you would write in a personal history statement.

Personal History Statement

- Only used for Univ. of California's application to my knowledge
- Tell us where you came from, where you are, and where you want to go
- Used for internal scholarships for equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Discuss service, mentoring, outreach etc.



Transcripts and GREs

Transcripts

Emphasis on record in junior year and the types of courses that you are taking

GPA can be used as a cutoff so doing well in courses is important

GREs

- Can be used as a cutoff.
- Take while you are in school
- Look for online/inperson tutoring and guidance
- Do as well as you possibly can.



Letters

Dos

- Need 3 letters from academics for PhD programs
- Ask letter writers in person in the beginning of the Fall Semester that you are applying
- Ask them what exactly what they need from you so they can write the strongest letter possible and what their deadlines for completing letters are.
- Help the letter writer help you
- Send the letter writers a list of the programs you are applying for, the specializations, and the degree goals (PhD/MS etc)
- Send thank you notes

Don'ts

- Ask for letters at the last minute
- Ask by email or badger the letter writer
- Provide the paperwork at the last possible instance
- **Don't assume the online submission will tell the writer the program and degree.**
- **Don't use a letter service**



Scholarships

External

Apply for fellowships while you are working on applications

- NSF
- NDSEG
- GEM
- Hertz

Internal

- Most schools have internal fellowships
- Interview days are used to select some of the nominees
- Cal: Berkeley, Chancellors, and One Year Fellowships
- If possible, ask what fellowships the school has and the selection processes. Graduate students are best resource for this type of information



Programs

Searching

- Websites are the first place to look but they can be incomplete or outdated. Faculty's individual websites are often the most up-to-date.
- Ask graduate students at your current school about their experiences
- Ask faculty at your school about their recommendations for programs
- When visiting another school ask the staff, faculty, and graduate students about their admissions processes

Identifying PhD Advisors

- Identify candidates by talking to faculty, web searches, research papers, etc.
- Reach out to their graduate students - either by email or visit, to get more information
- If you are visiting and have identified a potential advisor then reach out to them to see if they (or their students) would be able to meet with you.



Interviews

Email

- Every email is an interview - check spelling, grammar, tone, and format.
- Your email to the faculty member is private, they might assume that their response to you will be posted online so they may not respond because of that.

Interviews

- Typically start in December and continue into January and February
- Don't interview if you aren't serious about the school
- More schools doing Zoom/Skype interviews before invites to visit days
- Ask faculty about their unfunded research and their proposed research and pending grants
- Be prepared for your interview.
- If all you talk about and write about is \$\$\$\$ then that's not a good sign.



Visit Days

- Cal - late January, Stanford mid February, MIT around St. Patrick's Day,
- Michigan, February and March, Cornell, March;
- The days are critical for fellowship selections and advisor seeing if there is a good fit.
- You get to see the inner workings of a graduate program in ways others don't.
- Don't visit if you aren't serious about the school
- Pay attention to the attitudes of the faculty
- Talk to as many graduate students as possible
- Ask faculty about their unfunded research and their proposed research
- Be prepared for your visit. Send thank you notes.
- **Could I be at this school for 5 years, be creative and have a transformative academic experience?**



Timeline

1. Late October: NSF & NDSEG Applications due;
2. Early December: Application deadlines for Cal, CalTech, etc.
3. December: Some faculty start looking at files and interviewing applicants over the break
4. January: Visit/Interview day invitations are sent out
5. February/March: Visiting schools
6. Late February: Most PhD admissions have been made at top programs, some declines sent out
7. Late March: NSF and NDSEG fellowship announced
8. Mid April: Declines from most schools sent out
9. April 15: Decision day for funded offers
10. **Unknown and uncertain: A professor's grant gets funded - this adds noise to the entire admissions process and can lead to offers after the April 15 deadline**



Thank You!

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Application process
is equivalent to a 3
Unit Class

Help others help you

Process is a hybrid -
Job application and
school admission

