

Demystifying

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION PROCESS

For academic degrees (M.S and Ph.D.) at US Institutions with an Astronomy focus.

A summary of Estien et al. 2022

<https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/bes2.2029> and

<http://www.loganpearcescience.com/grad-applications.html>

WHAT IS GRADUATE SCHOOL?

Master's (MS): 1-3 years, either research or course focused



Ph.D: 4+ years, always research focused

IS GRADUATE SCHOOL RIGHT FOR ME?

- Why do you want to go to grad school?
- Is an advanced degree expected/required for job/career?
- Do you enjoy independent research? Want to make an impact in your field?
- Is M.S. or Ph.D better for your goals?
- Carefully consider why!

PROS:

- Allows you to devote time to delving deep into a topic you find exciting and impactful
- Contribute meaningfully to the creation of knowledge in your chosen discipline
- Join the community of experts in your field

CONS:

- Time-consuming
- Potential delay in earnings
- Challenging, with many successes and failures

STRUCTURE OF A RESEARCH GROUP

- **PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR:** Faculty, Lead of the group, applies for funding/grants, sets group culture and expectations, guides research/projects within the group, mentors students and post-docs, handles money
- **POSTDOCS:** Post-doctoral researchers who recently completed their Ph.D. Helps with mentoring students in the group; focused on accomplishing their research programs
- **GRADUATE STUDENTS:** Independent researchers working towards Ph.D. Early grad students take classes
- **UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS:** Undergrads can participate in research within a group with grad student, post-doc, and/or faculty mentors
- **TECHs:** some groups may have scientist or other expert professional who help manage the group and equipment
- **ADMIN:** Some groups may have admin professionals who help manage the group and money



GET INVOLVED IN RESEARCH!

- Find out if you like research
- Learn important research skills
- Make your grad app more compelling!



GO TO CONFERENCES!

- Meet people in your field; network!
- Give poster and oral presentations
- Learn about latest research in your field



SERVE IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

- In clubs and organizations
- Develop leadership skills
- Contribute to meaningful causes



APPLY FOR SUMMER RESEARCH

- Get experience at another institution!
- Grow your network
- Experience different research areas and mentors



DEVELOP PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Get variety of letter writers
- Publicize your work and skills
- Collaboration breeds opportunities

PREPARING FOR GRAD SCHOOL IN UNDER-GRAD

THE APPLICATION TIMELINE

SUMMER

Figure out which programs to apply to:

- What subfield(s) do you like?
- What faculty do exciting research?
- Look at websites/publications
- Is location important?
- Do you want to apply for the NSF GRFP? (You should!)

AUGUST

Create a spreadsheet tracker for all the programs you want to apply. Take note of application elements and fees.

Template tracker:

<https://bit.ly/grad-app-tracker>

SEPTEMBER

- Start writing personal statements

<https://bit.ly/writing-personal-statements>

OCTOBER

- Register for GREs
- Contact letter writers
- Perfect CV

- Make a website to advertise yourself
- Register for conferences (AAS)

- GRFP application due near the end of Oct.

- Connect with letter writers again
- Have peers, faculty read personal statements and get LOTS of feedback!

NOVEMBER

- Some programs will have due dates near the end of Nov.

DECEMBER

- Some programs will have due dates near the beginning of Dec.

JANUARY

- Attend AAS beginning of Jan.
- You may be contacted for interviews in the first week or two of Jan. Not all programs do interviews
- You may get offers starting in mid-Jan.

FEBRUARY

- You may hear from programs into mid-Feb.

- Programs from which you've received offers should start planning their campus visits for prospective students

MARCH

- Attend the campus visit. Some questions to ask on your campus visit:

<https://bit.ly/visit-questions>

APRIL

- The deadline to accept or decline an offer is April 15th

- If you decide before this date let the program know ASAP. This helps them plan and admit folks on the waitlist.

MAY +

- Congrats, you're going to grad school!
- Start thinking about where you're going to live. Reach out to current grad students

- TAKE A BREAK! You've earned it.
- Ask the program if you can defer for a year if you want to take a gap year

REJECTION

Rejection is hard, but it's extremely common in academia and something we all have to get used to. Remember it's not personal! There are so many reasons you may not have gotten an offer that have nothing to do with your worthiness. You belong in academia and research. If you didn't get any offers, try again next year and look for ways/jobs to strengthen your application! Don't give up!