



CENTER FOR
TEACHING & LEARNING

GRADUATE SCHOOL PREP AND FUNDING

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GRADUATE SUPPORT

CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Common Questions



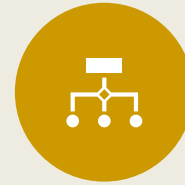
WHAT IS YOUR
CAREER
GOAL?



WHAT DO YOU
KNOW ABOUT
GRAD
SCHOOL?



WHAT DO YOU
DO IN GRAD
PROGRAMS?



WHAT IS THE
APPLICATION
PROCESS
LIKE?



WHEN CAN I
GO TO GRAD
SCHOOL?



HOW DO YOU
CHOOSE A
PROGRAM
AND
SCHOOL?

What is Graduate School Like?

- ▶ Graduate programs are places to explore one subject in-depth
- ▶ They are also places to prepare and grow as professionals in a field
- ▶ You can move or shift fields as you go into graduate school—and sometimes programs only exist at the graduate level
- ▶ You'll spend a lot of time within your department, college, and other spaces (like labs, libraries, workshops, etc.)
- ▶ You will be part of a typically-small cohort of like-minded individuals
- ▶ People come from all walks of life into graduate school
- ▶ Faculty will require more out of you and will also treat you differently
- ▶ It is also a time where you grow a lot as an individual, and a chance to make new lifelong friends
- ▶ Expect to work hard and learn a lot! And you also get a cool title out of the program

Do your Research

Do research; undergraduate quality is focused on the university itself, graduate quality is based on the specific program/department

- Rankings are somewhat helpful, but don't rely on those
- Not every school has grad programs
- Become familiar with faculty research and work
- Look over courses offered by departments
- Consider location, cost, financial aid, and other factors too

Determine if exams are necessary

- GRE is most common for STEM programs, but not all programs use it; there are also the GRE Subject exams in Math and Physics and the TOEFL for international applicants

Request information from interesting programs

- Send your requests to the graduate advisor/director of the department as well as any graduate administrator/staff
- Also discuss the program with the advisor and send a follow-up email

More Considerations

- ▶ Do you have concerns about the workload and intensity of a grad program?
- ▶ Do you think you are “right” for grad school?
- ▶ Do you want to go to grad school right now, or in the future?
- ▶ Is there something that you’d like to do that would require a grad degree?
- ▶ Have you spoken with anyone from the department, like a faculty member or grad student?
- ▶ Which specific degree are you looking at (MS, MEng, PhD, etc.)?
- ▶ Have you used an assessment, such as those found on MyIDP, to help you determine your interests?

STEM Grad Admissions Process

- ▶ Faculty members from the program compose the admissions committee and determine acceptance
- ▶ Unlike undergrad, grad admissions is very focused on perceived fit between program and applicant
- ▶ They receive dozens of applications a year, so each reader goes through applications quickly
- ▶ Faculty want to see that you have a clear purpose and drive
- ▶ Grades/transcripts are important, but they are only one part
- ▶ They look for experiences and values which make you a good fit
- ▶ They also want to see that you have reviewed their courses, faculty, and labs
- ▶ Research topic should be at a rough proposal stage esp. for PhD applications

The Process Overview

1. Consider your interests and what fields you could go into. Start this process about a year-and-a-half in advance

2. Gather information, including time-to-completion, career pathways, research opportunities, and then search for schools, talk with faculty and current grad students in field

3. Determine a shortlist of schools you will apply at, build a checklist of what you will need to do and the relevant deadlines. Also keep an eye out for scholarships and funding opportunities

4. Prepare for exams, work on a writing sample, gather faculty letters, write your resume/CV and statement, send transcripts, submit application packet

5. A few months later, if you get accepted by programs you can evaluate your choice of school, determine your funding, and decide where to go

Deciding on Programs

- ▶ When you pick out a few programs to apply, focus on the faculty that are there and your research or professional interests
- ▶ Also consider practical limitations you might face (city demographics, cost of living, weather, etc.)
- ▶ Once you have done some research into a list of programs, you'll want to narrow it further and start working on your application materials
- ▶ Many people only apply to one or two programs because they feel certain they'll get in—this is usually a mistake
- ▶ It is a good idea to apply to several programs because acceptance rates are low
- ▶ Unlike undergrad, grad programs admit limited numbers of students
- ▶ This is based on perceived “fit” between your interests and faculty
- ▶ For PhDs, always check if the faculty member you want to work with is accepting students



Graduate Assistants and Dept Funding

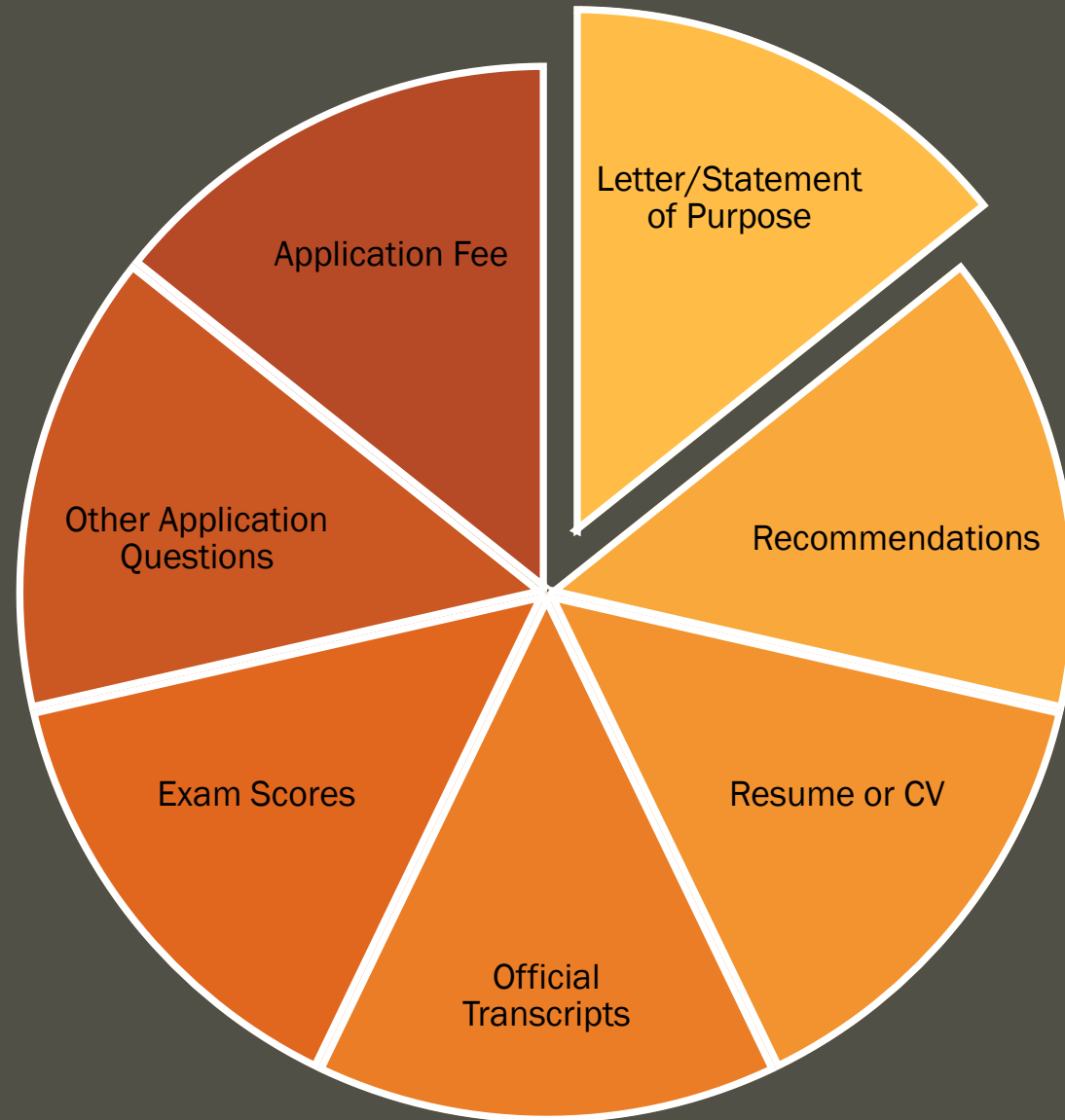
- ▶ Many graduate programs can be paid for through Graduate Assistantships
- ▶ GAships are typically offered by departments or programs, and consist of helping teach a course, administer a project, or conduct research
- ▶ GAships pay for tuition, offer healthcare, as well as provide a stipend/salary
- ▶ Many programs ask if you are interested in a GAship with the application, and may require an additional statement
- ▶ Other programs tie your funding as Gaships
- ▶ Start looking and asking for financial help while you are applying, and be proactive about the search
- ▶ Funding options are often different between public and private institutions, including department funding just for conferences/travel or research equipment/rentals



Grants and Fellowships

- ▶ Where else can you look?—graduate studies offices, graduate student associations, and departments often keep lists of scholarships and grants
- ▶ Grants are different—they help you pay for something specific, like travel or buying equipment or conducting a particular research project (connected to external grantor needs)
- ▶ Fellowships are also available, but they are competitive and usually tied to research, academic achievement, or finishing a program
- ▶ Note that most graduate school aid is not need-based, it is merit-based
- ▶ For STEM a major source of funding is the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship Program—talk with Jairo b/c he manages a cohort for applicants every early Fall
- ▶ Most fellowships and scholarships require similar application materials, including a CV, proposal, personal statement, budget, and letters
- ▶ Leverage work you are already doing for the grad school applications towards funding applications, and have advisors and peers review them

Components of the Application



Graduate Exams

- ▶ Talk to others who have taken the exams and find resources online
 - ▶ Some resources will have a cost, others will not
 - ▶ There are now study apps for exams (minimal cost)
 - ▶ Princeton Review offers study guides, sample questions
- ▶ Set up a study schedule
 - ▶ This is also a healthy habit for your future graduate career, so start now
- ▶ Take practice exams multiple times
- ▶ Register for the official exam—test centers, test dates, and seat availability are all online
 - ▶ You may be able to get a fee waiver for the actual exam
 - ▶ Schedule your exam well in advance; they are offered during limited time frames

Letter of Intent/Statement of Purpose

- ▶ Have a header, greeting, and closing
- ▶ Be clear and precise in your writing
- ▶ Review and proofread the letter before sending it
- ▶ Show the following via examples and specifics
 - ▶ What are your career plans?
 - ▶ How will the degree/program help you get to your career?
 - ▶ Which faculty member(s) will you want to work with and why?
 - ▶ What assets will you bring to the program?
 - ▶ Research interests, life experience, etc.
 - ▶ What qualifications do you have?
 - ▶ Volunteer experience, research background, etc.



Educational Background



Academic Experience



Research Experience



Other Relevant Experience



Awards and Grants



Publications



Presentations



The GRC can help you build your CV!

Curriculum Vitae (CV)

Letters of Recommendation

- ▶ Faculty recommendations—these letters should come from faculty members who will speak highly of you and your potential in graduate school
 - ▶ Allow faculty enough time to write letters and send to the program
 - ▶ Provide faculty with the information they need—your personal statement, details of the program you're applying to, deadlines, etc.
- ▶ Start cultivating relationships with faculty members; do not surprise a faculty member by asking them to write a letter
 - ▶ If you ask an employer for letters it should be directly related to your career path (such as an engineering internship supervisor)
 - ▶ Consider the faculty member's time; some are very busy or will not prioritize your letter
 - ▶ Be proactive—reach out to a professor in your major and build a mentoring relationship

Submitting Your Application

Online submissions

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graph TD; A[Online submissions] --> B[Create checklists for each program you apply to—make sure you have all the required documents and deadlines for each]; B --> C[Confirm your exam scores, transcripts, and letters of recommendation are sent off before deadline]; C --> D[Official transcripts take time, so do not wait until the day before the application deadline];
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The Application Sieve





Preparing for Interviews

- ▶ In many cases programs will also have interviews as part of their selection process
 - ▶ These can take one of several forms, which you might be familiar with from employer
 - ▶ You'll be asked to discuss your field and the work you want to do—practice your talk a bit and build some slides if you think those will help
 - ▶ Foreground your experiences doing research or lab/internship work in the field and provide specific examples when possible
 - ▶ Focus on listening to the questions and responding effectively and efficiently—don't spend too much time on a topic or avoid a question
 - ▶ Be personable—they aren't looking for science robots
 - ▶ Ask a question or two about their program—good examples are about centers or resources on the campus, ongoing or future projects, or about graduate student culture
 - ▶ Ask your advisors or current grad students for advice as well, and contact us to practice a mock interview

Additional Preparation

- ▶ You've been accepted, now what?
 - ▶ Become familiar with graduate school culture—much more self-directed than undergrad
 - ▶ Improve upon areas such as critical reading skills, writing, and time management
 - ▶ Most students do not enter writing at the graduate school level
 - ▶ Most new grad students are overwhelmed with the amount of reading and lab time they need to manage
 - ▶ Graduate Support and ESSC offers workshops to help with these skills; email us if you are planning to attend UNM
 - ▶ Find resources on campus that will help you transition to grad school
 - ▶ Look for internships and professional development opportunities that help you get ahead



WHAT IS THERE TO LOOK
FORWARD TO IN GRAD
SCHOOL?

Questions?

Graduate Support at CTL helps undergraduates with graduate school applications, and helps graduate students with writing, ESOL, statistics, academic skills, career, and thesis/dissertation consultations

- ctl.unm.edu to see our resources
- ctlgs@unm.edu to make an online or in-person appointment
- Zimmerman 3rd Floor (temporarily)