



# GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL GUIDE

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON GRADUATE SCHOOL

Due to COVID-19, graduate schools may not be offering on-site visits or interviews. However, there are many ways to engage with the programs virtually through online sessions and tours and connecting with specific departments and faculty. Many programs started the 20-21 academic year with remote classes but we do not know the impact of COVID-19 on classes in the future at this time.

## INTRODUCTION: DECIDING ON GRADUATE SCHOOL

Applying to graduate or professional school can be an interesting, exciting, tedious and overwhelming process, but there are many helpful people and resources at Swarthmore to advise you including faculty, Career Services, and the pre-med/pre-law advisor, Gigi Simeone. Deciding to attend graduate school requires careful thought. Ask yourself:

- Do I really love the field enough to obtain an advanced degree?
- Do I love doing research in this discipline and do I have research questions I'm motivated to explore?
- Is an advanced degree required to enter a particular profession or advance within the field?
- Do I have the financial resources to cover the cost of graduate school if I don't receive enough funding?
- Do I need to take some time off from school because I am burned out?
- Am I postponing making a tough decision about a career by going to graduate school?
- Do I want to go to school full time or part time?
- Do I have the personal qualities and skills that are needed to be successful in graduate school?
- What is the opportunity cost for me? Will it change over time?
- What is the cost benefit of attending graduate school in non-financial terms?

## WHEN TO ATTEND?

Once you have decided that you want to go to graduate school, you need to consider when to attend. Although approximately 90% of Swarthmore College graduates pursue one or more advanced degrees, only about 20% of the senior class enrolls in graduate programs immediately following graduation. Most Swarthmore graduates work before beginning an advanced degree. There are pros and cons to both choices.

Choosing to attend graduate school immediately allows for a continuity of your education which may be advantageous since you will still be in "studying mode." Many students also find it easier to finance graduate school when there are no other major financial pressures in their lives such as marriage, mortgages, and children. Undergraduate loans are typically deferred while you are in graduate school (however the interest will continue to accrue on certain types of loans). If you are certain about a career path which requires an advanced degree, choosing to go to graduate school right away will allow you to enter the profession sooner than if you took some time off.

Most people who plan to wait a year to explore options actually wait two or more years. Senior year is so busy many students are unable to do a thorough graduate school search, so having a year to “shop” around for a school/program that is best for you would be to your advantage. Exploring during the fall after graduation is common, but by then, one finds it best to have the experience of a full year of work and exploration before sitting down to do a highly competitive application. If you decide to delay grad school admission, consider a post-graduate work-related fellowship, a post-graduate internship, or a wide range of employment options – Career Services and the Fellowships & Prizes office can help. Before leaving campus, be sure to ask faculty to write letters of recommendation on your behalf – you can keep them on file in Career Services and ask faculty to update the letters in the future. Furthermore, some graduate programs encourage or even require applicants to have relevant full-time work experience prior to applying (e.g. MPA/MPP, MPH, MBA).

## TIMELINE

If you hope to enroll in a graduate program the August immediately after graduation, ideally you will begin your graduate school search in the summer before your senior year. Application deadlines for fall admission will be between the first of December and mid-January for most competitive programs. Deadlines to apply for financial aid, including assistantships and fellowships, are often earlier. It is best if you apply (with absolutely all admission materials submitted) at least a full month before the deadline—sooner if possible. 50% of applicants apply in the last month and to improve your competitiveness you need to get your application considered before the rush. Most schools admit students on a rolling basis and it is best to apply when all of the slots and all of the financial aid awards are still available. If you wait until the last month, you are competing with most of the applicant pool, but with only half of the slots still available. A detailed timeline can be found later in this handout.

## RESEARCHING & EVALUATING GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Searching for a graduate school is a much different process than searching for a college while in high school. Because graduate school offers specialized training in a particular field, there are different elements to consider. Some of the criteria include:

- ◆ The reputation and/or rankings of the department from which you hope to earn a degree
- ◆ The curriculum and types of courses and research required
- ◆ The faculty members in the department and their individual research interests (for PhD programs)
- ◆ The number of students accepted into the program and the competitiveness
- ◆ The location and size of the institution
- ◆ The cost of the degree and types of funding available (grants, fellowships, assistantships)
- ◆ Statistics on the types of jobs and careers pursued by their graduates
- ◆ Your qualifications for the particular schools to which you think you may apply
- ◆ The reputation and/or rankings of the university

At this level, departmental reputation or ranking is usually more important than overall university reputation. **Graduate school rankings are often subjective and difficult to assess** – ask Swarthmore faculty, review university affiliations of leading scholars (often found in academic journals) and ask graduate programs for detailed reports on the post-graduate plans of their alumni. For Ph.D. programs in particular, it is often interesting to consider the mean number of years it takes candidates to complete their degree. It is often much longer than one would initially expect.

In addition, choosing the right Ph.D. program can often be like selecting an “apprenticeship” -- you choose a scholar or scholars you want to work with and learn from. Often these faculty members have research funding that provides for graduate assistantships – a key way of funding your graduate study!

# QUESTIONS TO ASK GRADUATE PROGRAMS (FROM THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION)

- **Admissions** – How many applications does your program receive each year? How many students are accepted? How many enroll? What are the average GPA's and GRE, LSAT, MCAT, etc scores of accepted students?
- **Financial Aid** – What kind of financial support can students expect to receive during the entire course of their program? Do students need to reapply for funding annually? What is the area cost of living? How much debt do graduates have, on average?
- **Teaching (for Ph.D.'s)** – How many discussion sections and courses are grad students required to teach in order to receive a stipend each year of their program? What is the average teaching load each year?
- **Attrition** – What % of students enrolled in the program receive their degrees? At what point do most drop out and why?
- **Time to Degree** – How many years does it take to graduate, on average?
- **Career Prospects** – How long are graduates on the job market? For Ph.D. programs: Where is every graduate employed in academe and in what kinds of positions (e.g. tenure track vs. visiting instructors and adjuncts)? Who was their dissertation advisor? What were their subfields? Where are graduates working, if not in academe? Does the program lead to other career paths outside academe? For Law Schools: What are the bar passage rates for students? How many students find jobs where both a J.D. and bar passage is required? For Med Schools: What's your residency match rate?

## RESOURCES

There are many resources for researching graduate programs. Even if you think graduate school is not in your immediate future, take advantage of the resources you have.

- **Faculty** – They know many of the best programs and people within those programs. They also know a great deal about the application process. Research conducted with faculty while at Swarthmore and informal discussions with faculty are great ways to prepare for grad school.
- **Career Services** – We have many resources available to assist with research on graduate school and programs – a detailed list can be found later in this handout.
- **Websites** – Graduate schools have websites with information about their programs, admission requirements and applications available to download. You can also check out web forums where prospective and current graduate students discuss everything from deciding where to apply, to taking licensing exams and finding a job. Some of the popular ones are thegradcafe.com, top-law-schools.com, & studentdoctor.net.
- **Students** – Talk to students currently enrolled in a particular program to gain their perspective on the school, department, faculty and general quality of life as a graduate student. Alumni of graduate programs can also be a useful resource – consult the Online Alumni Community for contact information for Swat alumni who have gone on to receive advanced degrees.

## THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Completing an application for graduate school takes a great deal of time, energy and thoughtful preparation. Start early on this process (a year before you plan to matriculate) to avoid last minute stress!

### Application

Most schools have their applications available on their websites; however, some will require you to apply through organizations that facilitate the admissions process (i.e., LSAC). You will either complete the application online or download it as a .pdf file. If the schools you are applying to have a rolling admission process, you should apply as early as possible since applications are reviewed as they are received.

## Letters of Recommendation

You will need to provide each graduate school with letters of recommendation from current and/or former professors and/or employers. Typically schools require 3-4 letters. Many schools provide online forms for your recommenders to complete. Career Services also provides forms for professors writing letters of recommendation, if the graduate/professional school does not use an online form. In choosing your recommenders, remember that above all, graduate admissions committees are evaluating your potential as a student. This is also true for professional schools; in trying to choose between a professor and a former employer or supervisor, most programs prefer letters from professors.

Letters are best if they are from people who know you well and are in a position to evaluate your work, rather than from those who may have a higher title. Cursory letters from significant people (e.g. a letter from the Senator in whose office you interned) are often much less useful in making your case to the admissions committee than letters from people who actually know your day-to-day work (e.g. the Legislative Assistant you actually worked for). This is especially true for law and professional schools.

Ensure excellent letters of recommendation by providing your recommenders with the data they need – your resume, research papers, and transcripts – and be direct about asking them if they feel they know your capabilities well enough to write a strong letter on your behalf. Give recommenders time to write effective letters – at least two weeks notice – and a deadline for submitting the letter – usually 1-2 weeks before you need the letter, to allow for any possible delay.

## Personal Statements

Most graduate school applications require a personal statement or essay, which is an integral part of the application and criteria for selection. When all is said and done, your personal statement is about the only part of your application that you can positively affect at the time you are applying (your courses, GPA, test scores and even your recommenders' opinions are pretty well set). It is the part of the application that will make the difference when there are more than enough qualified applicants. Take the time to do it well. Ask several people to read it and comment – faculty, career counselors and peer advisors. When writing your statement, focus on why you are applying to this specific program and why they should admit you. Graduate programs aren't seeking "cookie cutter" candidates – they are looking for unique skills, qualities and experiences you will bring to the program. When writing your statement remember that admissions representatives read hundreds of essays. Be concise, clear, and compelling. Demonstrate that you've carefully considered graduate study and how it will help you accomplish your long-term goals.

This **Essay Writing** website can be helpful: <http://gradschool.about.com/od/essaywriting/>

## Admission Test Scores

Whether you are applying to law school, dental school, medical school, business school or a general graduate program, most programs require you to take the appropriate graduate school admission test. There are a few graduate programs that no longer require the GRE subject test or even the general GRE; however, be sure you know for certain what your prospective schools require. Below is a list of links to the most common tests used in the graduate school admission process:

• **Graduate Record Examinations (GRE)** <http://www.ets.org/gre/>

The general test is most often required by programs and is computer-based, offered year-round. GRE subject tests may be required by the programs you apply to and are offered as paper-based tests only three times a year: **September; October; and April**. Subject tests are available in the following disciplines: **Biochemistry, Cell & Molecular Biology; Biology; Chemistry; Literature in English; Mathematics; Physics; Psychology**. One test may be taken per administration day.

- **Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT) for business school** <http://www.mba.com/the-gmat>
- **Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT)** <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/>
- **Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)** <http://www.lsac.org/jd/LSAT/about-the-LSAT.asp>
- **Dental Admission Test (DAT)** <http://www.ada.org/dat.aspx>
- **Miller Analogies Test (MAT)** <http://www.milleranalogies.com>

The following sites offer test prep info, including free downloads of sample tests:

- **Peterson's** <http://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools/gre-gmat.aspx>
- **Kaplan** <http://www.kaptest.com/>
- **The Princeton Review** <http://www.princetonreview.com/>

### *Test Prep Pro Tips*

- If taking the GRE, make sure to download ETS's PowerPrep software after you register, which includes 2 free practice exams. These practice exams simulate the experience of taking the actual test. Also, check out Career Services for the official GRE guidebook.
- If you're looking for an affordable but still high-quality test prep resource, try Magoosh (<https://magoosh.com/>)
- Try to give yourself at least 2 months to study for whatever test you take

## Official Transcripts

You will need to provide each graduate school with an official transcript. You may obtain them from the College Registrar's office. Visit the Registrar's website at <http://registrar.swarthmore.edu>. One hint is to order several transcripts at once to be sure you have them on hand when you need them. Each one will be in a separate sealed "official" envelope. If you keep it sealed, it can be used later in the application process.

## Resume or Curriculum Vitae

You may be asked to provide a resume or curriculum vitae with your application to graduate or professional school. You may obtain a copy of the *Resume, CV and Cover Letter Guide* from Career Services and have your document reviewed by a career counselor or Career Peer Advisor. Including a resume/cv in your application package – even when not specifically requested – can be a great way to share additional information about your experience and research interests.

## Interviews

A personal interview is a valuable tool for you as the applicant and for the graduate school admission committee. Graduate school interviews are not always required for admission. Many large research institutions do not offer personal interviews because of the volume of applicants. Be sure to find out if your program factors an interview into their decision making process and prepare well in advance of the interview.

The interviewer's main focus in assessing your academic background is to determine whether you are up for the challenge of an advanced degree. In addition to assessing your academic background, interviewers will be interested in learning more about your personal qualities, future goals, motivation, and support network.

In addition to the interview providing the opportunity for you to share relevant information about yourself, it is also a time for you to gather more information about the program. You may be able to talk with faculty members with whom you would particularly like to study. Use this as an opportunity to get a sense of what it could be like to work with them (e.g., What are your publication expectations for your advisees?). This is also a perfect time to receive clarification on any info you're curious about but are unable to find on the department/school's website (e.g., summer funding).

If you do plan to have a personal admission interview, review *Interviewing Guide* on the career services website and/or schedule a virtual mock interview with a career counselor.

## FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

There are many types of funding you can obtain for graduate and professional school programs. Most graduate students seek funding in the form of assistantships and fellowships from their academic departments, but this funding is typically more available to Ph.D. students than Master's students and rarely available to professional students (law, medicine and health sciences, business). The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is typically required and can be found at: <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>

For a good overview of funding, visit the following websites:

- <http://www.swarthmore.edu/career-services/funding>
- <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/graduate-professional-funding-info.pdf>
- **Grants and Scholarships** – Financial assistance that does not need to be paid back and does not require work in exchange.
- **Assistantships** – Usually research or teaching assistantships are available in most academic departments – these typically include a tuition waiver and work stipend. Assistantships are also offered in non-academic areas as well including residence life, student activities, career services, etc.
- **Public or Private Fellowships** – Typically these are not associated with your program. An example would be a corporate-sponsored fellowship or the Swarthmore Fellowships for graduates attending graduate school.
- **Federal Perkins Loan** – low interest (5%) loan available to students with exceptional financial need, awarded through your school's financial aid office and repaid to your school. You can borrow up to \$8,000 per year for a total of \$60,000, including amounts borrowed as an undergraduate:  
<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/loans/perkins>
- **Graduate Stafford Loans (Direct Loans)** – Stafford loans are low interest rate federal loans available to most students and repaid after you graduate. Unsubsidized Direct Loans are available with a 6% interest rate. For more information, speak with the financial aid office at the schools where you are applying or visit:  
<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/loans/subsidized-unsubsidized>
- **Graduate Direct PLUS Loans** – low, fixed interest rate (7%) student loan guaranteed by the U.S. Government. There is also a loan origination fee, which is deducted from each disbursement (around 4%). The Grad PLUS loan is a non-need credit based loan similar to a private student loan with the benefit of having a fixed interest rate and federal guarantee:  
<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/loans/plus>
- **In-State Tuition** – Sometimes an out-of-state applicant will be given in-state tuition as a grant. This is often worth several thousand dollars.
- **Federal Work Study** – Part-time jobs for students with financial need:  
<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/work-study>
- **\*Income Driven Repayment Plans & Public Service Loan Forgiveness** - For students who will need to take on a large amount of student loan debt in order to finance graduate school, the federal government has provided a means through which you will be able to have your debt forgiven after a period of time in the form of income driven repayment plans. Individuals typically apply for these plans when their outstanding federal student loan debt is higher than their annual income or if it represents a significant portion of their annual income. Income-driven repayment plans are designed to make your student loan debt more manageable by reducing your monthly payment amount. Additionally, if you make consistent payments under one of these plans for a period of time (usually 20-25 years), you'll have your remaining balance of debt forgiven.  
<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/understand/plans/income-driven>

For students interested in public service work (e.g., federal/state government, non-profit, teaching, etc.) you may qualify for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. This program is similar to the typical income driven plans; however, instead of following the 20-25 year plan, your debt will be forgiven in 10 years. <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service>.

### **How to Pay for Your Graduate Education** (adapted with permission)

By Donald Asher, author of *Graduate Admissions Essays*, the best-selling guide to the graduate application process.

You'd love to go to graduate school, if only you could find a way to pay for it, right? Well, maybe you're thinking about it backwards. Maybe you have to decide to go first, and then you'll find the money. For many types of grad schools, you'll have to apply to the program, simultaneously apply for several internal and external sources of funding, and wait for months to see how it's going to work for you. So step one is clearly to decide to go. Looking for money is just a part of the process.

Next, stop looking for "financial aid." That's an undergraduate term. You want to look for "funding" and "support." The best source for funding is the graduate department and financial aid office where you plan to apply. Remember that sometimes a university financial aid office must be involved for university-wide, federal or state aid, while the individual department will award grants and assistantships. Be sure you have done everything you need to do to apply for both.

Financial assistance for Ph.D. programs is primarily merit based and most often comes in the form of grants and assistantships. Financial aid for most MA/MS programs and professional degrees is primarily loan based. If you are not sure what level of degree you will be seeking, it is often better financially to seek the Ph.D. right from the beginning rather than to figure on exploring with the Master's degree and then making the jump to the Ph.D.

Let's start with **merit scholarships**. If you're brilliant, with the fantastic grades and scores to prove it, many graduate programs, including law and business, will give you a merit scholarship or a full waiver of tuition. Here's the secret: Tier 2 schools poach talent from Tier 1 schools by offering a free ride. So you get into Top Ten School of Law and the Pretty Good School of Law, but Top Ten wants you to pay full fare while Pretty Good gives you a free ride. All kinds of programs do this, but many don't talk about it.

Also, think about taking the plunge and going for the doctorate. Full-time doctoral students at many—but certainly not all—programs automatically get a full waiver of tuition. This is well known among academicians, but not well known by the general public.

Next, look for assistantships. Assistantships are a weird animal. According to the IRS, they are jobs. According to most faculty, they are apprenticeship programs. According to some students, they are a form of modern indentured servitude. They are also an honor and a form of financial aid. The good news is that assistantships almost always include *a full waiver of tuition* plus *a stipend*. Stipends vary from as little as \$8,000 a year to more than \$30,000 per year, but the real value of an assistantship is the waiver of tuition. For ten to twenty hours a week of service to your department, you can go to school for free.

Obviously, if you are not paying tuition, public and private schools cost the same, and in-state and out-of-state tuition is also exactly the same. Because of this, it is frequently cheaper to go to an expensive school! They often have more money to give to students they want to recruit.

There are three types of assistantships. Most undergraduates know about **Teaching assistantships**. To get a teaching assistantship, you have to have outstanding grades in the subject, maybe a strong GRE score, and maybe prior teaching or tutoring experience. Departments have stringent rules about who gets selected to be a teaching assistant.

**Research assistantships** are much easier to get than teaching assistantships. You don't have to have

great grades and scores; you just have to have the same passion as a faculty member who needs an assistant. Prior research experience is more important than your grades or scores. All you have to do is convince one faculty member, not a whole department, that you'd be useful to have around. Start by saying, "Dr. Lee, I've read every article you've ever written. I think you're a genius...." Well, maybe not literally, but you get the idea. There are research assistantships all over any campus, including in areas where students might not think to look, for example, in English and education departments.

**Graduate assistantships** are the easiest to get, in terms of what credentials you need to possess. GA assignments are really just jobs, with less of an academic component. There may be assistantships available from other university departments, often within student affairs: residence life; student activities; career services and others. For example, undergraduate residential life offices frequently hire graduate students as head residents-regardless of department. Coming from a small residential liberal arts college is frequently to your advantage, especially if you have been an RA or otherwise been active in student life.

Here's a secret assistantship often overlooked: If you are a native speaker of a foreign language, you can sometimes get a teaching assistantship in a foreign language department, leading a conversation group or even a whole class, while you are studying somewhere else, say engineering or business. If you speak a truly needed language, such as Arabic, you may find this an easy way to pay for your graduate education. Sometimes there are opportunities to be an instructor in areas where there are shortages, for example, an acquaintance of mine paid for his doctoral studies by teaching statistics in several departments.

One of the few ways to go to business and law school for free is by being a graduate assistant. They take GAs in only a few select areas, typically career services, admissions, and IT roles. Interest alone won't win these assignments; some kind of prior experience is usually required.

If you want to get assistantships it helps to be a doctoral student, but all these assistantships are available for you as a master's degree student at all universities that do not offer the doctoral degree in your field of choice. Assistantships are common for full-time students at brick-and-mortar institutions, and pretty rare at online and distributed-model institutions and for all part-time students.

If you want to go to school for free part-time, one of the better ways is through some type of **employer-sponsored educational benefits** program. Many universities themselves have outstanding educational benefits for full-time employees, so making a career move to working for a university may be your best way to get additional degrees and credentials part-time without taking out any loans. Of course, other types of employers subsidize the educations of their employees. Watch out for complicated rules! For example, some employers only reimburse you for completed courses, or for courses directly related to your ongoing assignments, some cover books and fees and others only tuition, and you may have to pay back every dime if you subsequently leave the company within a specified time of using these benefits.

Suppose you have to pay for your own education. Wouldn't it be nice to have a scholarship for 25 to 30% or more of your tuition? You can! If you'll study something that helps you advance in the career you already have, your tuition is tax deductible. So the government in effect gives you a scholarship equal to your combined federal and state income tax rate. Be careful, though. If an auditor decides your investment in a part-time master's degree in poetry has no bearing on your career in corporate finance, it's not deductible at all. Consult a tax professional before trying to deduct any educational expenses.

Many people pay for their graduate educations through loans. If you stand to earn significantly more money upon completing a degree or credential program, it makes sense to borrow money and pay it back later through increased income. In fact, education is one of the best investments you'll ever make, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. People who complete a master's degree will earn \$400,000 more than people who stop at the bachelor's degree. A Ph.D. is worth \$1.3 million more, and doctors and lawyers earn \$2.3 million more. Individual results will vary, but on average, borrowing money for tuition can make sense.

In the sciences it's expected that you will apply for three or four third-party funding sources and, frankly, that's a good practice for everybody. Just make it part of your application process.



## SWARTHMORE FELLOWSHIPS

Awarded to seniors and graduates of Swarthmore College (with no age limits) for an initial year of advanced graduate work, Swarthmore Fellowships carry a stipend of \$4,500 or more, paid directly to the school of your choice. Available fellowships: **Leedom** (open to everyone), **Lippincott** (open to everyone), **Lockwood** (for members of the Society of Friends, and subject to application for renewal), **Mott** (for women only), **Tyson** (for women planning to enter elementary or secondary education), **Janney** (for women only, preferentially to members of the Society of Friends, and subject to application for renewal), **McCabe** (for graduate work at one of the following business schools: Harvard, Chicago, MIT, Northwestern, Penn, or Stanford; subject to application for renewal). US Citizenship is NOT required. Swarthmore deadline: April 20 of each year. For information and an application form, contact Melissa Mandos, Fellowships and Prizes Advisor. Learn more about Fellowships at: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x16576.xml>

**Beinecke Memorial Scholarships** <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x16665.xml> Scholarships for juniors of strong potential who are interested in attending graduate school in the arts, humanities, or social sciences. Scholars receive \$4,000 immediately prior to attending graduate school and \$30,000 while attending graduate school.

**Churchill Scholarships** <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x16672.xml> Offers American students of exceptional ability and outstanding achievement the opportunity to pursue graduate studies in engineering, mathematics, or the sciences at Churchill College, the University of Cambridge for one year.

**Jack Kent Cooke Graduate Arts Award** <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x32056.xml> Offers students or recent alumni with exceptional artistic or creative promise and significant financial need up to \$50,000 annually to pursue up to three years of study towards a graduate degree in the performing arts, visual arts, or creative writing at an accredited graduate institution in the US or abroad.

**Fulbright Grants** <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x16674.xml> Provides grants for one academic year to pursue graduate study, conduct independent research, or participate in a teaching assistantship in any of 155 countries around the world.

**Liebmann Fellowship** <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x16666.xml> Offers full tuition and stipend of approximately \$18,000 per year for up to three years for advanced education and graduate study, as well as for independent research or study projects. Study must be carried out entirely in the U.S.

**Marshall Scholarship** <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x16676.xml> Finances young Americans of high ability to study for a degree at any institution in the United Kingdom for two years.

**Mitchell Scholarship** <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x16675.xml> Supports one year of graduate study in any discipline offered by an institution of higher learning in Ireland or Northern Ireland.

**Rhodes Scholarship** <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x16661.xml> Provides for two years of graduate study at the University of Oxford, England (with the possibility of renewal for a third year).

**Truman Scholarships** <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x16670.xml> Graduate scholarships in the amount of \$30,000 for juniors preparing for careers in public service. Scholars may attend graduate school in the United States or abroad.

To find graduate school and funding resources, visit: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x5546.xml>

## Graduate School Timeline (from Kaplan Online at <http://www.kaptest.com>)

### RESEARCH - Spring semester, Junior Year

- Find out what a graduate program will take in time, personal commitment, and money and make a decision.
- **If pre-med**, spend time with the pre-med advisor and make sure you are taking the necessary course requirements, discuss your grades and potential schools. Take a diagnostic MCAT and start preparing for the April MCAT. Register for and take the April MCAT. Order transcripts. Begin essay and obtain recommendations. Obtain AMCAS and non-AMCAS applications.
- **If pre-law**, register for the June LSAT (you can retake it in October if your score needs improvement).
- Spend time researching schools using books, the Internet, or by talking to people who went there.
- Make and prioritize your list of target schools.
- Start scheduling campus visits for the summer.
- Spend time with people in your field, ask questions, and investigate the long-term employment outlook.

### BUILDING YOUR APPLICATION PACKAGE - Summer Prior to Senior Year

- Start researching the GRE and the subject tests, or the LSAT (law) or GMAT (business). Determine which tests you need take, learn what's on them, find out the registration requirements, etc.
- Start preparing for the GRE/LSAT/GMAT. Take a sample test. Determine areas where you're strong and areas where you need more work.
- **If pre-med**, mail all AMCAS and non-AMCAS applications. Request submission of final transcripts. Receive April MCAT scores. Complete and return secondary applications. The August MCAT is administered. Prepare for admissions interviews. Receive early decision notifications; if rejected, immediately apply to other programs.
- **If pre-law**, take the June LSAT. Register for the October LSAT if unhappy with your score. Subscribe to LSAC(application service) if you haven't already. Order your transcripts.
- Make a list of potential recommenders.
- Visit campuses and meet with department members.
- Begin drafting your application essay/personal statement.
- Draft a resume/cv geared towards your application.
- Contact your top-choice programs and make sure you have access to their updated applications.
- Ask for financial aid applications on the institutional, state, and federal levels. Inquire about assistantships, fellowships and scholarships available at your schools of interest.

### FINALIZING YOUR APPLICATION PACKAGE - Senior Year: September-October

- Order your transcripts. (updated transcripts can be sent to programs following fall and spring semesters)
- Choose recommenders and arrange meetings with them. Get all the necessary information to them 2 months in advance –this may include a resume and examples of your academic work (e.g. research papers, projects).
- Ask others to read your personal statement/application essays (faculty, career counselor). Finalize the drafts.
- Take the GRE/LSAT/GMAT if you haven't already.
- Speak with current students and recent alumni in your top-choice programs.
- Prepare for interviews (if necessary).

### MAILING IT IN - Senior Year: November-December

- Complete and mail applications. Keep copies of everything you send.
- Remind your recommenders of deadlines (if necessary).
- Complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) no earlier than January 1 but no later than the campus and/or state deadline. Submit any forms required by the schools' financial aid offices.

### AWAITING THE DECISION - Senior Year: January-April

- Await decisions and receive response letters from schools. Decide which offer to accept.
- Receive financial aid award notices from schools. Project your resources and costs. Consider educational loans to bridge any gap between financial aid and total expenses.
- Send in acceptance of admission and financial aid and **CELEBRATE!**

# Sample Personal Statements

## MIT Architecture

**Please give your reasons for wishing to do graduate work in the field you have chosen. Prepare your statement of objectives and goals in whatever form clearly presents your views. Include as far as you can, your particular interests, be they experimental, theoretical, or issue-oriented, and show how your background and MIT's programs support these interests. You should set forth the issues and problems you wish to address. Explain your longer-term professional goals. The Admissions Committee will welcome any factors you wish to bring to its attention concerning your academic and work experience to date.**

I was born to challenge convention, push the limits and forge ahead. I've been doing it my entire life and I have no desire to stop. I was the girl who refused to listen when told I couldn't play baseball with the boys and grinned with pride when I was selected for the all-star team. I was an engineering student with curiosity beyond the standard curriculum who gained approval from the department to spend my senior year pursuing independent studies. I was the daughter who approached her parents with a dream of taking their business online and who found herself managing a successful internet sales channel offering thousands of products to customers all over the world. And now, as an inspired professional, I want to obtain an education that will give me the power to change the manner in which people see, use, and think about space with the seamless integration of technology and architecture.

My studies in engineering were fueled by my lifelong desire to design, build, and create. As these studies progressed I discovered a love of computers, technology, and innovation. I found that I needed to look at the world in a different way and I wanted to offer this experience to others. Independent studies in advanced computer graphics and computer vision provided me with knowledge that was essential in the completion of my selected senior design project, the development of LOICZView, software that permits visualization of a complex data set. Scientists worldwide are able to use this software to find meaning in numeric results.

Energized by my successful use of advanced graphic technologies to offer researchers a new perspective, I independently directed development and operations of an e-commerce site for The Christmas Loft, a chain of retail stores. While working in this intense retail and commercial environment I realized that designers have immersed the public in a world of their inventions, manipulating their audience with everything they produce. I developed a strong sense of responsibility toward those who interact with my creations and was compelled to seek a career in which I could contribute objects of significance that would positively impact society.

Enrollment in the six-week intensive Career Discovery program at Harvard's Graduate School of Design was a pivotal moment in my life. My creativity was transported from a virtual world to three-dimensional, tangible space. I was struck by how the arrangement of space, much like the arrangement of information on a screen, can have an effect on human behavior. This phenomenon was particularly apparent during our first project when we were asked to design an outdoor environment capable of accommodating individual or group activity. Rather than promoting existing usage patterns, I was challenged to modify the behavior of people by manipulating the space they occupy. As the studios progressed I found myself questioning my ideas of what "space" was and how it could be defined and inhabited. I attempted to push the limits of this understanding in my final design of a school in which space was defined by continuous ribbons of material that could serve as floor, ceiling, or wall. I felt empowered by the opportunity to engage people in an environment rather than interacting with them only on a screen.

This fall, I returned from the open house at MIT overflowing with excitement. I had discovered a place that would offer me the freedom to dream and the power to make my dreams a reality, a place where I

saw people doing the things I had imagined were possible. As a graduate student I am seeking more than an education. I want to immerse myself in an environment filled with brilliant people on the cutting edge of technology. I saw projects such as *Aegis Hyposurface*® by Mark Goulthorpe and I couldn't help but imagine how, on a larger scale, space could adjust to human emotion or become a three dimensional method of communication. Specifically, I am fascinated by research being done in the Design Computation group, particularly in the areas of interface/interaction where the integration of technology with the built environment is being investigated. I'm also eager to learn more about the research consortium *House\_n*, where I see special attention being paid to the intelligent use of technology in design to improve the quality of life in the home. As a professional, through both research and practice, I hope to be able to blend creative inspiration with cutting edge technology to challenge notions of how people interact with their environments.

Life has given me the confidence and drive to independently pursue my goals. Engineering taught me to love technology. E-commerce awakened my need to offer something of value to society. Architecture will provide me with the means to change the way people think about space and the world around them. At MIT I will bring these ideas together, challenge convention, push the limits, and forge ahead. I've been doing it my entire life and I have no desire to stop.

## Stanford Ph.D. Communication

One of the most poignant history lessons I have ever learned was taught to me outside of the classroom on a crowded carpeted floor with other black members of Swarthmore College's student body. The lights dimmed and the pioneering African-American historian, John Hope Franklin, lectured to us through the medium of a film made more than two decades ago. I listened, fascinated, as he explained how Europe had first appropriated Christianity, the radical religion of North Africa and much of the Arab world. As Christianity took root in Italy through its newly converted emperor, painters and sculptors by edict, as well as by choice, began to depict Biblical stories through what would become masterpieces of European art. In one of the world's greatest public relations campaigns, the image of God was anthropomorphized into the person of Christ rather than the message of Jesus of Nazareth. And Jesus, who must have resembled the bronzed and brunette *mestizo* of the Palestinian region, instead became a light skinned European. The center of Christianity became Rome, and Christianity began a journey that transformed it from the marginalized religion of the oppressed to the religion of conquerors and imperialists. The use of manipulated images changed the course of history. So effective was this campaign that many Christians today, regardless of ethnic background or nationality, have difficulty picturing God as anything other than a man with pale skin and long, wavy hair.

This example clearly reveals that the power of history lies with who tells it, or in other words, the wielders of communication. Franklin's use of film conveyed an even clearer message – that not only can one study the function of communication in society, but one can also use its mediums to propagate formal thought and education regarding society's development. His piece exemplifies the way in which the academic world provides scholars with space to reflect critically on areas of interest while producing meaningful works that both shape and depict history. This powerful insight led to my decision to pursue a Ph.D. degree in Communication at Stanford University, a program that provides its students with extensive research skills to examine the media's influence in contemporary society. A Ph.D. will allow me to become a scholar-journalist, not only engaging viewers, but actively evaluating my work's effects and influence—I want to tell a story *and* understand its impact at the same time.

The way that stories are told, repeated, modified, and accepted or rejected has always intrigued me. As a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader, I led a one-girl petition to replace my elementary school's old and suspiciously abbreviated history books. In high school, I wrote and directed a play that the principal ultimately censored because she feared its message would trigger a riot among the members of our racially stratified student body. When a group of white students came in blackface to a Halloween party at my putatively liberal college, I captured students' voices on film and produced a script that depicted the outpouring of emotions and frustration from a variety of perspectives. While pursuing my self-designed major in Social Justice, I grew to value the empowering influence of images, words, and even songs in accelerating the progress of social change worldwide, as evidenced in the U.S. Modern Civil Rights Movement and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. In my work as a journalist in public television, I have helped produce news stories that narrate the lives of the poor and disenfranchised. And I have learned to appreciate the power that communication has in shaping identity and altering human behavior.

My academic pursuits have pushed me beyond the confines of my own knowledge and provided me with a framework within which I explore these insights and the effects of communication in contemporary society. I can now connect the influence of the media to Antonio Gramsci's idea that hegemony is not just domination, but the governance of the many by the few with both coercion and consent. My studies have led me to discern the exploitative, revisionist, and consumerist aspects of the entertainment media and its impact on people's actions. Today, I find myself struggling with the need for national guidelines in media and the importance of self-policing in a society where information should be free and accessible.

My senior thesis in college, an ethnography of a small Newark, NJ Protestant congregation, showed me the centrality of communication within the Black Church and the church's institutional impact on its surrounding community. This place of worship sits in the center of a troubled, struggling city where its core issues often are marginalized or overlooked by the news media. The media, instead, excessively reports on polarizing faith controversies such as sexuality and war, forcing the church to walk a careful line of involvement and outreach. My eyes were opened further to the world of media and politics around me and I began to ask more questions: Where did the line of media and politics blend? In what way did each segment of media—entertainment, news, mainstream, alternative, documentary—create and generate a nation's culture and interests, and in what ways did it simply reflect them?

Currently, I work as a journalist for the Public Broadcasting System's Emmy Award-winning television show "NOW." My experience at NOW has given me opportunities to ask questions and expose truths that often are obscured or denied, a skill that I believe will be critical to my work as a scholar. Most recently, I was able to propose and help produce a show about voter disenfranchisement efforts surrounding the latest midterm elections. My time in television has encouraged me to examine the ways that historical events are used in contemporary entertainment media to not only reinvent history, but also play out modern conflicts regarding various social issues. For example, I am interested especially in the remakes of films that were incendiary social commentaries for their time, like "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" or "The Stepford Wives." Do their re-articulations attack the political, moral, and ethical intent of the originals? Does contemporary entertainment media attempt to reconstruct history and how does that inform us?

As I pursue my Ph.D., I will gain the tools to explore these questions and others building upon skills I have already acquired. My undergraduate major was both self-designed and interdisciplinary, so I have no doubt that I am prepared for self-directed and multi-faceted study. As a teacher, I created lessons and engaged elementary students in various subjects; it was a position I immensely respected and a role I hope to resume in a university setting. Having already gone through the process of a lengthy research project, I am confident that with support and guidance I will study and write a dissertation that adds to the scholarly field. My interests are complementary to the areas of focus in your Communication program, and I look forward to working with the outstanding members of your faculty. Of particular interest to me is the work of Dr. Jon Krosnick, who studies how the presentation of information affects choice and behavior, and Dr. Marcyliena Morgan, who examines the diverse uses of language among people of African descent; their mentorship and research will greatly influence my own. I am ready to participate in and contribute to the process of social change through my work as a professor and scholar. I aspire to teach, write, and produce works that comment critically on the strengths, weaknesses, and hidden truths of our society. There is no better place to begin this tremendous task than in your program, and I hope for the opportunity to do so.

## Duke Ph.D. English

I vividly recall a conversation I once had with a Chilean friend of mine about why I was passionate about studying Modernism. We were hiking in the hills just outside Santiago where the city outskirts disappear into the brush and I was struggling to explain to him how *Ulysses* continually evaded interpretation, how I kept coming back to Joyce's novel, armed with Gifford's annotations, but always struggled to settle on any one satisfactory thesis. My friend was puzzled at my explanation and we stared out over the sprawl of the city together in silence. How does one explain, in this late-capitalist world—a world that is increasingly caught up in the act of consumption—a fascination with a period of literature that consciously resists being consumed? I believe that the best recent work in Modernism strives to do just that, by placing Modernist texts in constructive relation to today's globalized, late-capitalist world. I am fascinated by Fredric Jameson's vision of high Modernism and mass culture as "objectively related and dialectically interdependent phenomena, as twin and inseparable forms of the fission of aesthetic production under capitalism"<sup>1</sup>. Modernism, especially when viewed as a product of the global process of modernization, can tell us quite a bit about our own postmodern reality (and vice-versa).

I am hopeful about several recently published works providing new insight into Modernist debates, including a resurgence of critical interest in Frankfurt School studies and, in particular, in the writings of Theodor Adorno<sup>2</sup>. I believe that this resurgence indicates the continued relevance, in an era of globalization, of the issues originally raised by the Frankfurt School, and by Modernist literature generally—issues of mechanical reproduction, aura, urbanization, nostalgia and the quest for a sense of community, to name a few.

As a graduate student, I hope to study Modernism, with a focus on the works of James Joyce, but from a more global, cross-cultural perspective than it has traditionally been viewed. I believe the Duke

English department is an excellent match for my interests for several reasons. I appreciate the emphasis the department places on cultural studies and postcolonial literature. I am particularly interested in the comparative nature of the work of professors Michael Moses and Ian Baucom. Professor Moses' book, *Globalization and the Novel*, is one of the best studies I've seen examining modernity as a global, homogenizing force in literature. Professor Moses was also my honors examiner my senior year at Swarthmore and I have been in contact with him regarding my interest in Duke's program.

I am also interested in the possibility of working with some of the professors in Duke's Graduate Program in Literature, particularly professors Fredric Jameson, Alberto Moreiras and Walter D. Mignolo. I believe there is opportunity for interesting work exploring the relationship between postcolonial literature and high Modernist texts. At Swarthmore, I minored in Spanish and have long been interested in connections I've seen between Latin American Boom literature and Modernism. Professor Moreiras and Professor Mignolo would be excellent contacts if I decided to pursue this area of study.

My final reason for applying to the doctoral program at Duke involves my love of teaching. I admire Duke's commitment to train graduate students to be teachers as well as intellectuals. During my three years of experience working with students in Swarthmore's Writing Center, and now as an assistant English teacher in an international high school, I've come to realize that teaching literature at a college or university is a serious aspiration of mine. I feel that at Duke, I would be able to work with faculty members who would challenge me to think about Modernism in new, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary ways while providing me with the tools I need to be able to challenge others to do the same.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Signatures of the Visible*, New York: Routledge, 1990, pp.14.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Kaufman, "Negatively Capable Dialectics: Keats, Vendlar, Adorno and the Theory of the Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry*, Winter 2001, pp.354. Kaufman mentions here works by Susan Buck-Morss, Martin Jay, Fredric Jameson, Shierry Weber Nicholzen, Robert Hullot-Kentor, Miriam Hansen, Peter Uwe Hohendahl, Russell A. Berman, Richard Wolin, Lambert Zuidervaart, Anthony Cascardi, Tom Huhn, and Beatrice Hanssen.

## University of Pennsylvania Ph.D. History

When, in the summer of 2005, I had the opportunity to pursue historical research on gender identity and household dynamics in the model town of Pullman, Illinois, I began my task armed with little more than a laptop and a love of United States history. The first day that I walked into the reading room of Chicago's Newberry Library, the help desk attendant quickly showed me the available resources and then asked if I felt "comfortable enough to proceed on my own." Overwhelmed by the countless card catalogues, finding aids, online databases, and the task that lay before me, I could only shrug in response. But as days turned into weeks and my research progressed, that initial feeling of uncertainty gradually faded and enthusiasm crept into its place. Even now, I can vividly recall the thrill I felt unlocking the secrets of a brittle, yellowed newspaper or the creak that would escape from an old wooden chair as I excitedly jumped forward after every new discovery. But, most of all, I remember the pleasure I felt as the scholarship I had poured over in semesters past and the lessons I had learned in my honors history seminars at Swarthmore College suddenly came to life before my eyes and gained a cogency heretofore unknown to me.

At the beginning of the current academic year, I returned to Swarthmore College with the intention of transforming my research into a senior thesis.<sup>1</sup> Throughout this process, I continually have been inspired and surprised by the way in which a gendered reading of the historical past not only illuminates new areas of inquiry, but also reinterprets familiar ones. For example, though my thesis examines the well-known story of George M. Pullman's model town, a gendered lens has allowed me to reconceptualize the traditional narrative, move beyond the shop floor, and analyze both public and private spaces within the model town. I explore the very specific and deeply gendered domestic ideal that company officials promoted and that Pullman residents hoped to achieve when they relocated to the model town. As I argue in my thesis, when wage reductions and periodic layoffs pushed Pullman residents farther from that domestic ideal by simultaneously disrupting the structure and functioning of the home and challenging traditional sex-role ideology, class tensions dramatically intensified and eventually led to the 1894 strike. My work on my thesis has led me to recognize the productive value of engendering *all* of history and the importance of recognizing gender as an ideological construct that informs the relationship between race, class, and individual identity. My fascination with this process of identity construction inspires my passion for United States gender history and draws me specifically to recent scholarship which examines the ways in which masculinity and femininity have been constituted throughout the history of the U.S.

As a graduate student, I plan to study nineteenth-century United States history through the lens of gender. I intend to focus on examining constructs of masculine and feminine identity and their relationships to power and to race. I hope to employ a perspective that emphasizes cultural and social history and to analyze the role that certain issues ranging from interracial interactions and consumerism to leisure and parenting play in the formation of individuals' understandings of their own manhood or womanhood.

I believe that the University of Pennsylvania Department of History reflects both my interests and my educational priorities. I appreciate the emphasis that the department places on gender issues, as illustrated by the numerous Penn historians currently working within this field. I am particularly interested in the emphasis that Stephanie McCurry and Kathleen Brown place on the connection between gender and race. While I realize that Dr. Brown focuses on colonial history, I feel that her work represents the type of scholarship that I would like to produce, and I know I could gain valuable methodological insight from working with her. Similarly, I was impressed by Dr. McCurry's book *Masters of Small Worlds*, and I believe that her expertise in navigating both public and private space offers a valuable model. After having read her work, I contacted Dr. McCurry regarding my interest in Penn's program and have been in touch with two of her current graduate students. Finally, I am interested in the work of Kathy Peiss and greatly appreciate the cultural approach that she employs. I have tried to keep in mind several of the techniques she demonstrates in her scholarship, particularly *Cheap Amusements*, when writing my thesis and examining the ways in which Pullman women constructed their identities. In the future, I would love to work with Dr. Peiss.

Finally, I am applying to Penn's doctoral program because I value the environment fostered by the department. As a Swarthmore student, I have had the opportunity both to exchange intellectual ideas

with my peers in honors seminars and to learn from the faculty members with whom I have developed relationships. Swarthmore has taught me that scholarship is not a solitary endeavor, and for that reason, I am particularly attracted to the University of Pennsylvania. I greatly appreciate the program's emphasis on faculty mentoring and value the commitment the department has to maintaining a small, selective program. Finally, I admire the University of Pennsylvania's commitment to train graduate students to be teachers as well as scholars. As a tutor for Upward Bound, I have discovered the satisfaction of sharing with others a subject about which I am passionate.

---

If admitted to the history program at the University of Pennsylvania Department of History, I know that my graduate experience will be both challenging and highly rewarding and that I will leave the program with the tools necessary to succeed as an historian.

<sup>1</sup>The fact that I will not have completed my thesis until Spring 2006 has prevented me from sending it as my writing sample. The sample provided is a paper I wrote for a Swarthmore honors seminar. However, I have also sent a copy of my thesis prospectus which I wrote at the beginning of the current academic year.



## he Thrill of the Chase

There was something surreal about the scene. I was seated in an old, wood-paneled room, wearing the formal gown of a Cambridge undergraduate, signing a massive tome with a centuries-old pen. As I replaced the pen, the man seated across from me shook my hand and said, "Welcome to Cambridge University."

For a lover of history, there is no greater thrill than literally stepping inside an 800 year old tradition. Cambridge offered me an equally stimulating academic experience, one that presented a unique challenge and served to enhance my attraction to history. With limited time and often minimal guidance, I had to investigate, analyze, formulate and defend a solution to a specific historical question in each of my weekly essays.

Rather than receiving texts to review and evaluate, my Cambridge studies forced me to answer specific questions

without the assistance of assigned readings. I was compelled to independently identify the relevant data, analyze it, weigh the opinions of other historians, and finally offer an answer. One of the professors supervising my work helped to define both the challenge and the intellectual reward when he said, "This is what makes a good history student, Matt: the love of the chase." This analytical, investigative process has always been what I most loved about studying history.

My work experience has also shaped my appreciation of this analytical form of inquiry. As a research analyst for a

consulting firm, I experienced the same kind of mental challenge I had at Cambridge. A partner assigned me a problem in much the same way as my Cambridge professors. I often worked with little guidance, since even the partner did not know the answer to my assignment. The sources I researched differed greatly from the history texts I had read at Cambridge, but the method and the intellectual thrill remained the same. I searched for and evaluated data, weighed the opinions of experts, analyzed my findings, and presented both a solution and an argument to defend it. Perhaps the most unique and exciting aspect of this work, however, was seeing how it affected the client's future.

My experience at Cambridge gave me an opportunity to experience a unique historical and

intellectual tradition and to participate in a stimulating form of analytic inquiry. Likewise, my work as a research analyst showed me the broad applications of this sort of investigative work, as well as the satisfaction that comes from offering solutions that have a perceptible impact on a client's future. To me, the study and practice of law is a perfect combination of these qualities. It blends the analytic form of inquiry, the impact on future decisions, and the historical tradition I have found so stimulating in my past experiences. The practice of law also brings with it the potential to make a real difference for an individual client and possibly society at large. Of course, the pens are generally new and the gowns have gone out of style, but the "thrill of the chase" remains.

**STANFORD MBA** *Essay A: What matters most to you, and why?*

"Don't close your eyes." - It's a spell that takes me back to the New Years Eve of 2004, France.

"Six, cinq, quatre, trois, deux, un—Bonne Année!" After the count down everyone was blowing on party horns with lots of kisses and hugs. I could only hear what was going on, as I was curled up on the couch. My mom was telling her friend how it's too bad I fell asleep so early to miss a great party. My family was visiting France for the holidays after ten years since we returned to Korea. With no memory of the stay in France, I was tired of feeling lost every time someone who knew me as a child came up to me and started a conversation in French. I thought the words sounded like a chant. Pulling a blanket over my head, I wished I were home. It was uncomfortable.

Since then, I slowly learned that it was not the situation I was uncomfortable with, but my passive reaction. I regretted how I let a precious moment to reconnect with people who cared about me just pass by – all because I was a coward.

When an opportunity came several years later, I started learning French. The image of myself on New Years Eve worked as a strong motivation. With expressions I learned, I wrote short emails and Christmas cards to Chantal, Jonas and Laurence, our family friends in France. I thought about ways to make up for the moment I had lost. Then in 2009, after submitting college applications, I went on a solo trip to France. I decided to be there alone to not hide behind anyone. And as I look back, it was one of the best choices I have ever made. Not because I could understand more of what my French friends were saying, but because I could truly appreciate an opportunity by having a little bit of courage.

I tried to remember this lesson when I started to work at HeliTrak, a startup company that develops autopilot and avionics for helicopters. Although I was hired as a software developer, aerospace industry vocabulary and acronyms were all foreign to me. In the weekly engineering meeting, I had a hard time figuring out what was going on. Also as the only Asian female and a foreigner in a group of fifteen male Caucasian engineers, I felt like I did not belong there. It was uncomfortable again, similar to how I felt ten years ago. Yet, this time, I did not let the opportunity fly by. I first went online to familiarize myself with aeronautics and aircrafts. I also participated in a private pilot ground school training program. Most importantly, I took efforts to get to know everyone. A year and a half has passed, and I am really glad I didn't just close my eyes. I have already been to three of the biggest trade shows in the industry, where I demonstrated our product, Collective Pull Down, to helicopter pilots and avionics dealers. I now work as both a software developer and a marketer. I spend most of my time developing software for the autopilot system, but I also manage the company website and help design

marketing materials. Looking back, I am really thankful that I was there to appreciate the opportunities that came my way.

I have made numerous mistakes and I know I will make much more. I am also not good at everything, and I will definitely face failures. However, what matters most to me now is not to close my eyes, because I know I will get to see a bigger world when I do.

### *Essay B: Why Stanford?*

As a Studio Art and a Computer Science double major at Swarthmore, it was always interesting to find intersection between artistic design and technical implementation. The summer internship at CLO Virtual Fashion Inc., a software company that develops 3D simulation tools for fashion designers, provided an opportunity for me to see how this could be done in a corporate setting. As I collaborated with fashion designers, software developers, and marketers on a fabric selection tool project, I realized how important a good management is in bringing these diverse groups together. This unique experience fomented in me a desire to not only find ways to combine my biggest interests but also do it in a position of leadership.

Now a full time employee, I see more mindsets converge as different departments work together to develop and sell a product. The valuable experience of traveling with the management team and interacting with them on a personal level has taught me how much I enjoy the dynamic factors of doing business, as much as its potential to turn vision into a viable plan.

I am currently attracted to exploring a new technical process for designing individual and human centered clothing. I would like to come up with a way to manufacture organic clothes— not necessarily in terms of fabric or material but in relation to us, with all our scars, idiosyncrasies, and body shapes. To turn this vision into a plan, I decided to pursue graduate education in management.

I feel like Stanford would be the perfect place to realize it, not only because of its top MBA program but also because of opportunities specific to the school. At Stanford, I would like to take advantage of the d.school experience, by taking classes there and participating in innovative projects. It would allow me to learn about ways to better combine human values, technology, and business. Also, I want to be part of the Stanford Venture Studio. With the community there, I hope to gain foundational skills and support necessary for starting a new business.

I am excited to bring my skillsets and energy to the vibrant community at Stanford Business School. I am confident that Stanford would be the right place for me to start finding answers and that my unique interests and experiences will add to the diversity.

## **Donald Asher, Asher Associates**

The final two pages of this handout appear courtesy of Don Asher, adapted from his *Graduate Admissions Essays* (Ten Speed Press, 2000), the best-selling guide to the graduate admissions process. See *Graduate Admissions Essays* for sample essays in all fields; available in the Career Services Library, 135 Parrish, or at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

## **Best Sources to Learn about Graduate Programs**

### **Professors**

This is your best source. Professors know you, they know which programs favor students from your school, they know the relative quality of graduate programs in their fields, and they even have personal friends at graduate programs where you might like to apply.

### **Other Students and Alumni**

Students and alumni have similar information. Alumni at graduate programs will give you the most honest information about the quality of the program and the faculty.

### **Peterson's Guides**

Peterson's guides have every accredited program in the United States. They're a little dense, but if you want to learn about programs there's no other complete resource.

### **Specialty Guides**

Find specialty guides for your field, for example, *Graduate Programs in Neurosciences*, by asking professors for reference to them, by using the subject search engine at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). Some associations also print guides to graduate programs. Find out about them by looking up the association's HQ phone number in the *Encyclopedia of Associations*; then just call them and ask them or visit their website.

### **Academic Journals in Your Field**

Top students should get grad school ideas directly from the academic journals. The best programs generate the best and the most articles, so look in the journals for writing and/or research that interest you. Then find out where the article writer teaches.

### ***Research-Doctorate Programs in the United States***

This is the best source for unbiased, multivariable analysis of graduate programs. It is the result of a National Research Council-funded study, limited to the top programs in 41 major subject areas. This is a much more sophisticated resource than the "beauty pageant" unilinear rankings of business magazines (see below).

### ***Educational Rankings Annual***

A compendium of data from other sources. Expensive, but useful. Check the library.

### ***The Gourman Report***

Another "ranking" book, with methodologies never fully explicated. Can be useful.

### **The Business Magazine Rankings**

Business magazines are in the business of selling business magazines. Their editors usually know less about higher education than they know about automobiles, which is not a lot. These "rankings" are not useful *per se*, but you can get ideas to investigate further.

### **World Wide Web (www)**

Online data are voluminous but shallow, and can be downright misleading (for example, some sites list schools in order of having paid a subscription fee). Use the Web to investigate schools you're already interested in, in this order: university-department-faculty-specific faculty member's research interests-his or her advisees (i.e., currently enrolled graduate students). Also, watch carefully for information on related labs and institutes, which might interest you more than the main department.

## Questions to ask any graduate program

What do you teach here?

What is the largest and the most typical class size for a graduate class? Are classes restricted to graduate students or are undergraduates common in your graduate classes?

What would be the advantages and disadvantages of going to grad school immediately after completing the undergraduate program? The advantages and disadvantages of waiting a few years? The best use of the interim time?

What are the criteria and process for selecting teaching assistants, research assistants, and fellows?

I will probably need financial assistance. Can you tell me how most students fund their studies here?

Will I get to develop my own topics, or will I be expected to work on a professor's ongoing research?

What is the mean time to complete (a) class work, (b) research, (c) dissertation? (i.e., what is the mean time to complete the Ph.D.? Ask about the program as a whole, but perhaps more importantly, by professor.)

What is your attrition rate? Of those who don't finish, what are their reasons?

What kind of student thrives in your program?

How reliable is your financial support year to year? Is the first-year offer always sustained given attainment of academic goals?

What is the age, race, gender balance, ratio of married/single, and geographical origin of graduate students in the program? (In other words: Are there any other people like me?)

May I have some bibliographies of recent publications by faculty? Which professors have won awards and grants lately (and presumably need graduate assistants)?

Can you tell me about your placement rates and types of jobs obtained by recent graduates? (Avoid relying on testimonials and anecdotal evidence.)

May I meet some currently enrolled students (Virtually)? (Be sure to ask about their research topics and be sure to take notes on specific profs mentioned.)

How can I be a strong candidate for a program like this?

## Ten Things to Do if You Don't Get In

Apply earlier (avoid the last six weeks before the deadline)

Apply to more schools (six is usually considered a prudent minimum: two safe schools, two middle of the road schools, two reach schools)

Visit and wow 'em (virtual connections may be the only option in 20-21)

Apply to more safe schools (even 4.0 students can and do get rejected)

Attend summer school in the targeted subject and wow 'em (it's easy to get into summer school, even at Harvard)

Take one class at a time in the targeted subject and wow 'em (remember: your most recent grades count the most)

Get volunteer or internship experiences in the targeted field (even part-time, even unpaid)

Work in a "real job" in the targeted field (there's no substitute for actual experience, and recommendations from supervisors in the profession)

Get an intermediate degree (such as a master's or even just a credential)

Get older and try again (many times, that's all it takes)

Don't forget that the best time to apply is early in the fall to start graduate school the following fall,

so be sure to plan ahead!

