not nearly EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT LIFE AFTER COLLEGE *but a pretty good start*

By no means is this an exclusive and exhaustive list of everything you need to know about making application to graduate and professional schools, and pursuing jobs. You should rely on professor in your department for specific advice in your chosen discipline.

RESEARCHING SCHOOLS

Once you decide the type of graduate or professional degree you want, check out Peterson's to find all the schools that offer this program. Peterson's is an omnibus/clearing house of every advanced degree-offering program available. **www.petersons.com**

Nearly all graduate and professional programs have thorough on-line view books. Request and print as much of this information as you can for easier reference later, or at the very least bookmark the SPECIFIC departments.

In doing your research, find out the possibilities for school- or department-level funding (assistantships, fellowships, etc.), as well as the pros and cons of pursuing a master's only or going right into a PhD program.

MEDICAL SCHOOLS The medical school application process is centralized through the American Medical College Application Service. https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/amcas/.

LAW SCHOOLS The law school application process is centralized through the Law School Admission Council. http://www.lsac.org/JD/apply/applying-to-law-school.asp

TAKING TESTS

Get a book to use as a study guide and take advantage of formal and informal study groups. If applying for different types of programs.

When you contact the departments of interest, ask them the range of test scores that have been accepted in the past year. A central graduate admissions office (say, for an MBA program) will have a school-wide range. But you should find the departmental admissions coordinator (someone in Management, for instance) to get more specific info on your area of interest. This person can also give you feedback on whether you might need to re-take the test to strengthen your chances of acceptance.

Offered several times a year

- GRE: www.gre.org
- GMAT: www.mba.com

Offered a limited numbers of times

- GRE Subject Tests: *Some programs require the GRE AND a GRE Subject Test. Contact the schools to which you are applying to confirm any required subject tests. Subject tests are paper-based and given ONLY in April, October and November.)*
- LSAT: www.lsat.org
- MCAT: www.aamc.org/students

PERSONAL STATEMENTS

In your personal statement, admissions committees want to see a passion for the area you've chosen to pursue as well as a well-written statement. To that end, you should get, minimally, two people to review your statement: one an English or communications professor (or someone you know and trust to be a good writer) to give you feedback on the mechanics and writing, and the other an accomplished professional or professor in the field you are pursuing.

You can be clever or include personal anecdotes in your statement, but don't let that overwhelm the idea you should be commu-

ROUGH TIMELINE *(exact times and activities will vary)*

during your Junior year

- Clarify for yourself your next step after Clemson -- work? grad school?
- Begin a wide search on potential graduate programs -- talk to seniors, professors, grads, etc., to collect any wisdom they have on specific programs and on the general application process
- If pursuing a graduate program, register for, study for and take appropriate test (LSAT, MCAT, GMAT, GRE – you should clarify if your desired program ALSO requires a GRE subject test, and consider taking a spring test, in case you need to re-take in the fall to bring up your scores)
- For med or law school, aim to take a Spring or early Summer MCAT or LSAT to allow time to re-take in the Fall if you choose
- Begin draft of personal statements, essays, AMCAS (for med school)
- Research potential grad schools -- start a "maybe" list of as many as you would like to research
- Before end of summer, give potential referees heads up that you will be asking for letters of reference when you return in the Fall

Early Fall of Senior year

- Narrow down list of schools and apply as early as possible – many programs offer funding and fellowships, or require in-person interviews for admission and assistantships, and the sooner your applications are in the better situated you will be to be considered
- Give referees details of what you need for letters: deadlines, addresses, required forms, current resume, personal statement, etc.
- Re-take test if necessary
- Finalize essay, statement
- Request transcript (you may not be able to include your Fall grades; find out if your schools want an updated transcript)
- Update your resume

Spring of Senior year

- Follow-up with both your application school and department within 3 weeks to ensure receipt of application
- Visit schools, talk to profs and students there
- Make decision

nicating in this essay: what inspired you to pursue this field (specific incidents or general values or personal philosophy) and the whats, hows, and whys of the specific areas of the field on which you plan to make impact.

You should also include some longer terms goals beyond completing this particular degree and your immediate employment after. Admissions committee want to see that you have a plan, and how their programs fits into that plan.

REFERENCES

You'll be asked for anywhere from two to six references. Most programs will give you specific guidance (only science professors; one science professor, one supervisor; etc.) If you aren't given specific guidance, aim for at least two professors who know your work well and at least two who know you through a supervision role. The schools to which you are applying may also require specific types of references, so be sure to check with the schools before you lock in your letters.

Chances are, if you ask three Chemistry professors to be referees, what the can and will say about you will overlap by about 90%. Pursue referees who can speak to something specific and unique about your intellect or abilities.

Aim for a breadth of areas across the board. But if you are applying for a very specific area (ethnobotany as opposed to GP medicine), it will not hurt to have two or more ethnobotanists.

No later than mid-September, confirm your referees, and give them an earlier than final deadline (if you need it Dec. 15, tell them you need it Nov. 15).

Provide your referees with an updated resume, the most recent draft of your essay, and all other relevant information or forms. Some programs ask applicants to send the letters in sealed envelopes with all other application materials, others ask the referees to mail those directly to the admissions office.

Follow-up with the referees to make sure this is done. It may seem that you become a nag, but this is your future. Be tactful. Let them know upfront that you'll be following up with them as the deadlines approach, just so you can have peace of mind that all elements are a go.

RESUMES/CVS

Send an updated and detailed resume/CV, regardless of whether they ask for one. If there's nowhere to put it in an on-line application, mail a hard copy to the admissions office ~ it will get to your file.

Even if you are applying for a specific or narrow discipline, don't pare down your resume to support just that area ~ leadership, service, studies abroad, etc., are important to include as these paint an image of a whole person, not just an academic.

CONTACT THE SCHOOL

Sometime during the application process but certainly after, contact the admissions office and possibly the specific department to which you are applying.

Some universities have a single graduate admissions office that handles all decisions; most, though, are decentralized and each grad school (law, medicine, business, etc.) has their own admissions offices. This could be the final decision-making office. However, many of these decentralized admissions offices will forward the applications on to specific departments for final decisions (i.e., the med school admissions office sends all

Advice from Lucas Hurd (class of 2010, PhD in Engineering Physics, University of Wisconsin) on applying for doctoral programs with the goal of being faculty or a research scientist. His thorough feedback was so well thought-out and written that it is presented here in full.

To be a Division 1 research professor or a government scientist, it is vital to go to at least a Top 20 (or even Top 10) program in your field. Apply to as many of them as possible. Look at the CV's of the Clemson professors in your department and you will probably find the same alma maters as you would at any other Division 1 university in the same department.

For these elite programs, there is a lot of emphasis on matching the research interests of the program for that year with the applicants, and it is likely that you will not be considered for some (or even most) of these programs based solely on your specific research interest indicated on the application and your personal statements, even if you were the best student in the world. I was accepted to Wisconsin, so it is more likely I will be rejected from some of the other elite plasma physics programs than it is that I will be accepted since chances are the programs all have different goals for research interests this year. Therefore, the standard logic of applying to one or two dream schools, several mid-tier programs that you think you have a good shot at, and then one or two backups does not apply.

APPLY AGGRESSIVELY TO MOSTLY DREAM PROGRAMS. There is also not much of a point to applying to several mid-level programs that you think you can get into. Choose the best fit or two for you and leave it at that - if you think you can get in to them, why waste the time and money applying to the others? I would venture to guess that any National Scholar has enough credentials after four years in the Program and in the Honors College to safely get into any mid-tier program in almost any field. There is no shame in going to a mid-range school, but you want to absolutely be sure you are not selling yourself short and giving yourself every possible chance of getting into a top program.

APPLYING TO A PHD PROGRAM IS LIKE APPLYING TO A JOB, and you should approach the application process with this attitude - e.g., a job search committee would consider a detailed cv of your experiences one of the most important pieces of the app. For a PhD program, a one-page resume is not sufficient - they need a detailed, multi-age CV that highlights your experience as it relates to their program. I included one-page summaries of some of my past research experiences that included the goal and scope of the research, my role and creativity in completing the project, what skills I learned, etc. I also described in more detail what some of the awards listed meant, and what was covered in some of the courses that directly relate to their program. Half of the programs I applied to asked for an (exhaustive!) list of all of my courses with the name of the professor who taught the course, the textbooks and literature used, and the content covered. That is a little overdoing it unless the school asks for it, but the admissions committee would probably appreciate the effort and they would know for sure that you are academically prepared for their program if you did it for the key courses.

IN YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT, you should include a 10-15 year goal. Show the admissions committee that you know your life is only beginning at graduate school - not ending with it - and that

apps to the emergency medicine department).

Find out if your desired department has a "graduate chair" or graduate coordinator, and contact this person via email with a cover letter and resume (in addition to the admissions application you submit), as this person can be an important final decision-maker.

Find out how each school processes apps, and who the appropriate person is to contact with questions and to confirm receipt of your app.

When you call after making application, you should ask questions about the average test scores of past classes, how big of a class they plan to enroll next year, what kinds of internships/research students are currently doing in the program, and where some recent graduates have gone for jobs or continued education.

You'll walk a fine line of being curious about the program and expressing a strong interest in that program, and being a nag. Aim for the former. Even offer to come interview if that would help your chances. But don't call (or even email) once a week to ask the status. You want to be regarded positively, as all they will have are pieces of paper and the sound of your voice to make the final decision.

ALL ALONG

Seek advice from people in your life who've applied to grad school successfully: graduates of the NSP (most are on Facebook), professors, TAs, graduate assistants, soon-to-graduate seniors, parents of friends, friends of parents, etc.

graduate school is really only the next step in many towards your eventual goals of becoming a research scientist, a medical doctor, etc. I had one professor that has served on many admissions committees tell me that he thought this was the most important element of the personal statement since they are all so similar. He said you read hundreds of similar statements that are almost all well written and very good, but it is rare that you read one that truly addresses the post-graduate school future more than just in passing.

REGARDING REFERENCES, just because a program says it wants you to send 3 recommendations, that it does not mean that you can't send 4. In general, if you send a program something, it will end up in your admissions file. This is especially true if you are applying to a science program and one your first 3 letters is from a non-scientist. Or if you send 3 letters from research advisers, so you send a fourth one from a professor you've had in class several times so they are aware of your academic potential.

In some of the more selective science programs, it may be considered a weakness to have one of your references be from a non-scientist, no matter how positive the letter is. In professional schools, the elite programs probably do want well-rounded students that do community service, etc., but this is truly not the case for science and engineering PhD programs. They want scientific research and the ability to write well.

- A UPenn survey from the physics department asked schools from all levels of selectivity and specific disciplines to address the importance of certain pieces of the application: "Extracurricular activities (drama, community service, sports, etc.) are wonderful things to do, but they don't seem to be the least bit useful in getting into a good physics graduate program."
- A similar Cornell survey: Cornell: "Anyone you do research with should write a letter — unless something disastrous happened. Letters from classroom instructors tend to be less valuable (but there are exceptions). Letters from non-scientists are rarely useful."

Of course, I hasten to add that in my opinion a student who is not well-read and well-rounded did not receive a proper undergraduate education, but that stuff isn't directly important for the scientific PhD application process. One possible exception is teaching experience and tutoring. Even if you do not want to be a professor, in graduate school it is likely you will have to teach at least one or two semesters.

GRE SUBJECT TESTS: Study hard for them, even if you do not think they are important. They now offer them 3 times a year: one in the spring, October and November. You may consider taking an unscored one in the spring of your junior year just for the experience, and then taking the October test your senior year for real. You will not receive your score for the October test before the registration deadline of the November test. You may not even receive your score before the November test date. Therefore, you really only have one shot at it - either pick October or pick November and commit to it.

FINALLY ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS you can do to increase your chances at these elite PhD programs is to contact a professor in the department you are applying to. You should spend a great deal of time researching the professor to do this with. You want to pick someone whose research interests align with yours. They should also be tenure-track, and not near retirement age. You should research their publications and confirm that they are publishing now - i.e., they are not in a slump or an administration-heavy position and haven't produced good work in three years. If possible, find out if they have a large research budget - the government agencies usually post this kind of information. In your initial email, introduce yourself and talk more about their research than yours. Ask what their near and long term goals are and if they predict having the budget or lab capacity to accept new graduate students this coming year. Ask that if they do not anticipate accepting new students, is there is a colleague that does similar research that would be interested in new students? Attach your cv with all of your contact info so they can read it or forward it. If there is a major Fall or Winter conference in your field the year you are applying, make all effort to present work at it and invite the professor to your poster or talk if he will be attending the conference. Have questions in mind to ask if you do get a chance to meet in person or if he calls you via telephone. Also be sure that you can accurately elaborate on your research experience: have a 1-3 minute discussion in mind and how you would talk about it in more detail (e.g., 10+ minutes or over lunch).

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