



# Applying to Graduate Programs

Information to make your applications stand out

# Thinking about graduate school?

- Admission to graduate programs is very competitive, especially for Ph.D. programs, in part because many schools provide funding for their students (whether as fellowships, research assistantships, or teaching assistant positions).
- However, there are many ways to improve your chances of being accepted into graduate programs.
- This presentation highlights some factors to consider.

# Score well on the GRE

- This exam is a general measure of your knowledge of the English language and mathematics and your ability to think logically.
- It also reflects your ability to take tests—so take practice tests available online or at public libraries several times.
- Some schools focus more on GRE scores than others
- GRE will not get you into a school, but might get you weeded out, so PRACTICE as much as possible!

# GPA is important, but it's not everything

- A high GPA will help you, but other factors are more important—particularly your application essay(s) and letters of recommendation.
- A low GPA can be a strong detriment, however.
- If you have a low GPA in one or two semesters but have good reasons for them (significant illness, family crisis, etc.) you may wish to discuss this with recommenders and have them address this in their letters.

# Spend time on your application essay

- This is a very important part of your application and truly needs to be stellar. It is what will distinguish you from other applicants with similar grades and GRE scores.
- Have more than one person proofread and comment on your essay.
- Revise the essay multiple times based on feedback.

# Your essay shows how you approach research questions

- What committees look for in application essays are evidence that you can:
  - Formulate a good research question
  - Have an understanding of how to conduct research in ways that help answer that question
- Do include personal touches—why is this of interest to you?
- You will not be required to stick to this project—again, its purpose is to show *how you approach research questions*

# Letters of recommendation

- Request letters from faculty who know you well
  - Faculty who have taught you in several classes
  - Faculty with whom you have conducted research or who were your advisors
- Your goal is to get honest, highly personalized letters
  - Form letters are a turnoff to admissions committees—they suggest you didn't stand out in your studies

# What schools should I choose?

- Consider the programs
  - Do people conduct research that is of interest to you?
  - Look at courses taught as well as faculty interests
  - Talk with graduate students whenever possible for their perspectives
- Consider the faculty
  - Are there multiple people you could work with? Remember, faculty sometimes leave for research, sabbatical, or simply to go to another program—you want to make sure you can complete your degree!
- Consider “fit”—location, climate, etc.



# Be very sure grad school is for you!

- Graduate school—and the job market—are very competitive!
  - You will need to excel to get an academic job after finishing the dissertation—there are hundreds of candidates for each position
  - Remember that an undergraduate degree prepares you for many jobs already
  - If you are not sure this is the route for you, consider taking time off between undergraduate and graduate school
    - Experience will also improve your chances of admission, funding, and a later academic job!