

Biodiversity Careers Workshop: How to Apply and What to Expect*

*Presentation modified by Anna K. Monfils from PowerPoint compiled by Ann K. Sakai
Professional Development Workshop:
Graduate School and Beyond
Botany 2013



Academic Stepping Stones

Undergraduate BA/BS → (M.S.) → Ph.D. → (post-doc) → career



Why go to graduate School?

- Intellectual curiosity, enjoy discovery, innovation
- You want to learn more
- Professional advancement

Do not go to graduate school because you...

- Are not sure what to do
- Don't feel ready for a job
- Could not get in to med school

Questions to Ask Yourself as You Consider a Graduate Degree

- What interests you?
- What do you like to think about?
- What do you like to do?
- What is your strength?
- What is your level of academic commitment?
- What are your career goals?
- Are you ready to focus and specialize?

What should I be doing to be competitive for graduate school?

- Grades
- Relevant Courses
- **UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH!!!!**

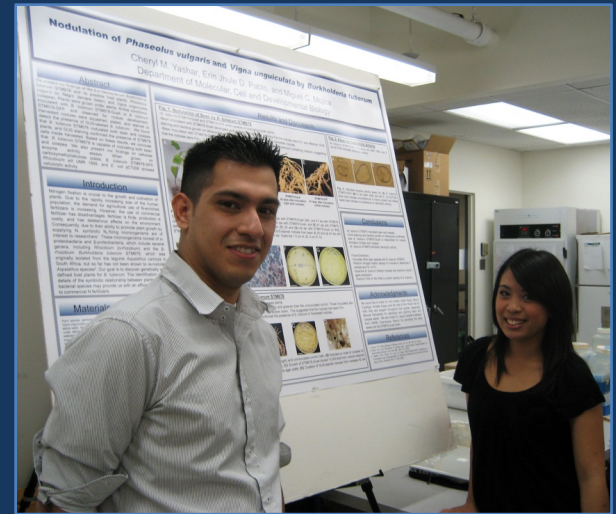


Why Undergraduate Research?

- Individualized faculty mentoring and peer mentoring
- Increased awareness of opportunities at home institution and beyond
- Exposure to broader field and potential graduate school possibilities
- Insight into your own potential
- Supportive environment

Not to mention...

- Better grades
- Increased academic maturity
- Potential scholarships
- Travel
- Learn valuable writing skills
- Stronger letters of recommendation
- More substantial experiences from undergraduate degree



So...are you still thinking about graduate school?

- Research graduate schools via the web...it is never too soon to do this!
 - Application dates
 - GRE required? Subject test?
 - Course requirements
 - Average GPA
- Investigate potential mentors
- Talk to professors, post-docs, grad students and mentors about their experiences



Timetable for applications – do your homework!

- Summer before senior year (or earlier!)
 - Explore grad programs
 - Explore potential advisors
 - Draft personal statement
 - Study for and take GRE
 - Explore external funding possibilities (NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program, GRFP, Ford Foundation Diversity Fellowships, etc.)
- Fall of senior year
 - Get advice from mentors about grad programs, personal statement
 - Contact potential advisors
 - Request letters of reference
 - Submit applications; confirm that all materials are in
- Spring of senior year
 - visit programs if possible
 - Submit FAFSA forms (funding)
 - Notification of admission (by April 1st)
 - Accept or decline offers of admission (by April 15th)

What are graduate schools looking for in your application?*

- Statement of specific interests and why that particular grad program fits your interests
- Contact between you and your potential advisor before applying
- Letters of reference
- Overall quality and strength of application

* Graduate school \neq Program \neq Department \neq Lab

How do I make my application as competitive as possible?

- A strong statement :
 - Specific experiences, ideas that influenced you
 - Special skills, work experience in this area
 - What you hope to contribute to your area
 - Career goals
 - Familiarity with the program, good match
 - faculty research you are interested in
 - specialized training, facilities, courses of particular interest to you
 - Motivation and persistence to pursue academics
 - Makes clear why you will be successful

*Get feedback, editing from knowledgeable mentors for both content and grammar

How do I make my application as competitive as possible?

- Contact between you and your potential advisor before applying
 - Contact faculty before you submit your application (can be your advocate for admission and funding)
 - How do I contact potential mentors?
 - First contact—email*
 - formal correspondence—be professional, not informal
 - Show interest in that particular faculty as advisor; ask if taking new students—tailor email to that one person
 - Give enough information for assessment:
 - School, GPA, GRE, undergrad advisor, area of interest, contact info
 - Indicate why that particular faculty member and how you know about them; make your research interests clear
 - Attach CV, statement of Interest
 - Do not try to sound like you know more than you do
 - Mention your positives, not your shortcomings
- * The quality of the faculty response often indicates their interest
- Respond to faculty in a timely fashion
 - Contacting more than one faculty member at the same school—pros and cons



How do I make my application as competitive as possible?

- Excellent letters of recommendation
 - Ask a person who knows you well and will take the time to write a thoughtful letter
 - Faculty
 - In your research area
- When asking for a letter of recommendation make sure you:
 - Meet with them about your goals and application
 - Provide your personal statement, unofficial transcript, and resume/CV, reference form and due dates
 - Give them time to write the letter (friendly reminders)
 - Best to waive rights to see letter



Campus Visit

- Many large research institutions may pay to have prospective students or admitted students visit campus
 - Always clarify who is paying and what is covered

Always be aware that you are interviewing all the time, even when you are interacting with only the graduate students

Funding...a very important consideration!

- Be clear on what is being offered: amount, duration, what is covered (e.g., summer salary; tuition waived; additional fees; health care etc.)



Funding Sources

- Funding opportunities change through time
 - Teaching assistants (TA) and research assistants (RA)
 - Pay for services (teaching, research, admin)
 - Often 20 hr/wk commitment
 - Provides training, experience, networking
 - Graduate fellowships (Funded by department, grad school/univ, or external; look for directed opportunities)
 - Usually no service requirement
 - Size and benefits vary
 - More time for own research
 - External support
 - Employment related to your research vs. other
 - Cost vs. benefit to your academic advancement
 - Loans—need to pay back

“If you don’t go after what you want, you’ll never have it. If you do not ask, the answer is no. If you don’t step forward, you’re always in the same place”

Nora Roberts

Thank You Panelist!

- **Mechelle Crazy Thunder** (Career Center, Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute)
- **Heather Fitzgerald** (School of Math Science and Engineering, Central New Mexico Community College)
- **Tony Marin** (Assistant VP Student Affairs, New Mexico State University, NMSU)
- **Cheryl Martin** (Senior Academic Advisor, Biology Graduate Program Coordinator, University of New Mexico);
- **Michael Ray** (American Indian Program, NMSU)
- **Emily Stern** (Center for Diversity and Integrated Learning, Santa Fe Community College)