

Grad School: Why, Where, and a bit about How

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Why?

- Or...why go to grad school?

Some possible reasons

- Figure out what you like
 - Figure out what you want to do with your life
- Different job opportunities
 - Higher salary potential
 - Only way to get into academia/some research labs
 - Not relevant if you don't like the jobs a MS/PhD prepares you for

Masters or PhD?

- Masters degree
 - Higher salary than a bachelors degree
 - Management potential
 - More control in your job
- PhD degree
 - Research-oriented jobs
 - Opportunities may be more limited, but so is applicant pool

Where?

- Or...how to pick a grad school

Criteria

- Faculty advisor(s) to work with
 - The most important question
 - Is there *someone* you really want to work with?
 - Are there *multiple* people you would be happy working with?
 - Do *they* seem willing to work with *you*?

Criteria

- Funding
 - A very important question!
 - Are you guaranteed funding?
 - Under what conditions?
 - Teaching requirements?
 - When do you choose an advisor?
 - Is funding coupled with your choice of advisor?
 - How much?
 - But take into account cost of living
 - Fellowship?

Criteria

- Reputation of department/school
 - Not just “name-brand” recognition...
 - What range of courses/seminars are offered?
 - In other departments as well...
 - Breadth of faculty research areas
 - What kind of facilities are there?
 - What will the other students be like?
 - What is the “atmosphere” like?
 - Often affects funding also...

Criteria

- Overall happiness
 - Location can make a big difference
 - What are the other students like?
 - Definitely visit!

How many applications?

- Narrow down your possibilities, and apply to any that you might potentially consider
 - Use visits to further narrow down once you've been accepted
- Can also apply to some “sure things”
 - But only if you would want to go!

How?

- Or...what is grad school like, with an emphasis on research in theory
- Focusing on PhD programs...

- How to position yourself and your application

How?

- Early on:
 - Get involved in research...
 - Reading groups/seminars
 - Interact with professors, even if just to read articles
 - Interact with other students
 - Work on something, even if not your thesis topic or even if not publishable
 - Expect to do a lot of reading to learn what is more recent/advanced than classes can cover

How?

- Middle of grad school:
 - Work on what you find interesting
 - Don't always think about whether it makes a thesis topic
 - Your advisor will be worrying about that
 - Believe it or not, your exact thesis topic is not that important for an academic job
 - Try to branch out beyond your area
 - Can you apply what you are doing in other contexts?
 - Remember that grad school is 98% persistence

How?

- End of grad school:
 - Get to know people outside your school
 - Conferences, summer internships, email(!)