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

Jonathan Katz
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(!)