

Advising Students about Graduate School

**Dr. Barbara Spencer
Mississippi Advisors' Meeting
2008**

Agenda

- Does graduate school make sense?
 - Selecting and evaluating graduate programs
 - Graduate admission tests
 - Financing graduate studies
-

Does graduate school make sense?

- Goals, needs, and interests
 - Motivation
 - Having what it takes
 - Getting started early
-

Selecting and Evaluating Graduate Programs

- How graduate programs vary
- How to select the right schools

Graduate Admission Tests

- GRE
- GMAT
- LSAT
- MAT
- MCAT
- DAT
- OAT
- PCAT
- TOEFL

Financial Assistance

- Teaching assistantships
- Research assistantships
- RA positions
- Fellowships
 - From the university
 - From outside sources
- Federal and state loans
 - The FAFSA (soon after Jan. 1)

Sources of Information

- www.gradschools.com
- www.petersons.com
- Princeton.localplacement.com

Time Line for Graduate School

- Start searching for schools by the summer after junior year
- Take exams in the fall by October
- Many admission decisions made in January or February

Are You Ready for Graduate School?

Assess your goals, needs, and interests

- What do you want to do in the future?
- Is it necessary to attend graduate school to do that?
- Is applying to graduate school your goal?

Assess your motivation

- Are you ready to remain in school for five or six more years?
- Are you prepared to live on a low income all that time
- Do you give up socializing when you have a lot of studying or lab work to do?
- Do you welcome challenging term paper topics or essay test questions?
- Do you attend graduate or departmental seminars on occasion?

Determine whether you have what it takes

- Are you developing an intense interest in a particular academic field or profession?
- Do you have patience when things go wrong and the stamina to hang in there and fix things?
- Do you organize your time well?
- Can you concentrate on your studies for hours at a time?
- Can you carry out projects and study without direction from anyone else?
- Do you prepare for exams by studying regularly over time rather than intensively for a short period?
- Do you take responsibility for knowing requirements, important dates, etc.? Are you prepared when you talk to your faculty adviser about course enrollment, etc.?
- Do you seek out faculty members and graduate students to discuss your interests with them?
- Are you comfortable giving verbal presentations in front of groups?

Selecting and Evaluating Graduate Programs

Some Ways that Graduate Programs Vary

- Quality of institution
- Ranked vs. unranked
- Large vs. small
- Flexible vs. structured
- Supportive vs. Competitive
- Online vs On Campus

How do you select schools that might be best for you?

1. Personal review of literature in the field, to give you an idea of where productive people are and what they're working on;
2. Consult faculty members, graduate students, and research staff in your own school to learn about options
3. Visit schools you are particularly interested in. Ask questions.
4. Think about what you want in Program Emphasis and Structure
 - Is your area of interest represented in department?
 - How strong is it?
 - What other areas are represented (possible minors)
 - Are there large, important areas that are missing altogether?
 - Are there opportunities to get to know all of faculty and their research before deciding upon your research topic (rotation)
 - Are you accepted as a student of particular faculty member upon entrance? If so, is there an option to change if things don't work out?
 - Is there a lot of student/faculty interaction with department level, i.e., within a research group?
5. Quality of Faculty
 - Academic training--where and when?
 - Amount of research activity and productivity
 - Teaching reputation and effectiveness.
 - Do they have proven success as mentors?
 - Are they easy to get access to?
 - Do they inspire students?

6. Reputation and Resources of Institution

- First-level school will have:
 - Faculty who are leaders in field.
 - Students of high quality upon entrance, and who are successful after leaving
 - A large amount of research money/grants
 - Excellent library and research facilities
- Need to evaluate:
 - Libraries - (on campus and in area).
 - Research facilities and equipment.
 - Computing facilities, and who has access.
 - Amount of space devoted to grad student offices.
 - Variety of financial support options
 - Graduate-student housing and support services.
 - Other Factors
 - Is the program emphasis changing?
 - Department morale - (faculty and students).
 - Student satisfaction with program structure and opportunity.
 - Quality of life at Institution and area (cultural activities - available, etc.)
- Quality of Students
 - What undergraduate programs do the students come from?
 - What is the range of GRE scores of the entering class?
 - How much prior research experience or prior publications do students have?
 - Do students publish while in grad school program?
 - Do their theses get published? How quickly?
 - Are they getting jobs? Where?
- Suitability of Location
 - Is the school located in a part of country you could live in?
 - Is it located close to other research institutions?

Exams

GRE – Graduate Record Examination www.ets.org

General Test measures verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking and analytical writing skills.

Subject Test measures undergraduate achievement in 8 fields: biochemistry, biology, chemistry, computer science, literature, math, physics, psychology.

GMAT – Graduate Management Admission Test www.mba.com

Measures basic verbal, mathematical, and analytical writing skills. Used by business schools to assess MBA and other graduate applicants.

LSAT – Law School Admission Test www.lsac.org

Measures reading and verbal reasoning skills. Used by law schools as one of several factors in assessing applicants. Test is given four times a year at many locations around the world.

MAT – Miller Analogies Test <http://pearsonassess.com>

A high-level mental ability test requiring the solution of problems stated as analogies. Accepted by some graduate programs.

MCAT – Medical College Admission Test www.aamc.org

Assesses problem-solving, critical thinking, writing skills and knowledge of science concepts and principles required for the study of medicine. Required by most U.S. medical schools. Offered in January, April, May, June, July, August and September.

DAT – Dental Admission Test www.ada.org

Measures general academic ability, comprehension of scientific information, and perceptual ability. Required by dental schools.

OAT – Optometry Admission Test www.opted.org

Measures comprehension of scientific information and general academic ability. Required by optometry schools.

PCAT – Pharmacy College Admission Test www.pcatweb.info

A specialized test that helps identify qualified applicants to pharmacy colleges. Measures general academic ability and scientific knowledge.

TOEFL – Test of English as a Foreign Language www.ets.org

Measures ability to use and understand English as used in university settings.