Guide to Applying to Graduate Programs

WHY?

Consider WHY you want to earn a MS or Ph.D. – schools will be interested in knowing that you have a strong reason for wanting to commit several years to this endeavor. They want to know that you have experience in this field, an understanding of what you are committing to, and strong motivation for this.

What are some factors to consider when choosing which schools to apply to?

- What is the ranking/reputation of the school?
- Are there faculty doing research of interest to you?
- Is the research well-funded?
- What is the stipend and research funding landscape?
- What are alumni outcomes?
- What kind of support is offered to students?
- What does the diversity of students look like? Are there diversity initiatives?
- Geographic location – Do you want to live there? Family, friends nearby? Things to do? Cost of living? Resources for your field of study?

Questions to Consider about Programmatic Structure:

- What are the pre-reqs/requirements for admission?
- How are mentors identified? Direct admit to research group? Rotations? Tutorials?
- What is the funding situation? Guaranteed? Stipend good for cost of living? TA-ing required and how often?
- What courses are required as part of the program?
- What are graduation requirements – oral exams, defense, etc?
- Do they offer fee waivers for applications?

Admissions

- Research Experience
  - The single most important thing on your application
- Letters of Recommendation
  - From those who can speak to your potential to do research
  - Be mindful of the importance of cultivating and maintaining mentoring relationships
- Personal Statement
  - Your chance to talk about the "data" in your application
  - CLEAR description of your research experience – WHAT and WHY
  - Describe your goals and how this program is a good fit
  - Address any weaknesses in your application
- Transcript
  - Discipline specific GPA
  - Grades only tell part of your story! Have you improved over time?
- GRE
  - Many schools GRE-optional now: https://grenotrequired.com/