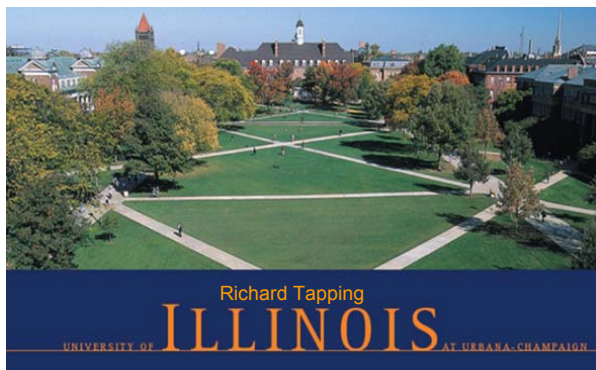


## How to Apply to Graduate School.



## How to apply (overview):

- ▶ Research different schools and programs
- ▶ Check out potential mentors/research areas
- ▶ Obtain application and catalogue
- ▶ Pay very close attention to deadlines!  
(most programs have Dec or Jan deadlines)
- ▶ Prepare for and write the GRE early
- ▶ Request letters of recommendation early
- ▶ Write a draft personal statement essay.
  - Have it reviewed and rewrite and rewrite.
- ▶ Submit everything far before deadlines

## How to choose a program

### Academic Considerations

- ▶ Is this a high quality program/Is it well recognized?
- ▶ Are you comfortable with the program's structure and organization?
- ▶ Are there sufficient faculty choices?
- ▶ Is there flexibility within the program to change directions?
- ▶ Are there adequate university support systems (library, computer facilities, specialized equipment, etc.)?

### Ask Faculty and Grad Students

## Other program considerations

### Financial Considerations

- Can you afford it?  
(Determine total costs, including housing, food)
- availability and types of financial aid (loans, fellowships, research and teaching assistantships, etc.)

### Other Considerations

- geographic location of the school
- campus environment
- appropriate support systems (advisors, tutoring services, etc.)
- diversity of students
- past record on placement of graduates

## How to Convey Your Credentials?

- ▶ Application Package Components:
  - The application
  - Grades/Scores
  - Letters
  - Statement(s)
- ▶ Successful Interview
  - Show enthusiasm for science and research!
  - Show that you understood your research!

## Filling out the Application

Follow the directions carefully  
Include Scientific Conferences and presentations  
Include authorships, acknowledgements  
Include all awards and fellowships  
Include special skills and experiences  
(study abroad, foreign languages)

Some Universities are able to offer Graduate Fellowships to:  
Top applicants  
(nominated by admissions committee).  
Underrepresented Students  
(indicate your background on the form).

Make a copy of the application and keep track of it.

## Undergraduate Courses

- Take a broad spectrum of introductory science courses (A particular area of focus is not important)
- Work to improve your speaking and writing skills (liberal arts classes can help here)
- Facility in math and chemistry will be helpful.
- Key subjects include: statistics, biochemistry, cell biology, genetics, organic chemistry and molecular biology.

## Grades

- ▶ Official transcripts are requested for every institution you attended
- ▶ Record your grades accurately on your application
- ▶ Balance activities to promote GPA
- ▶ Best to keep above 3.0
  - Good to show improvement over time
  - Grades are more important for upper division major courses
- ▶ Poor grades can be overcome if there are...
  - Great letters
  - Pubs/credentials
  - Great Statement and Interviews

## Letters from Faculty

- ▶ Required at all levels of science
- ▶ Request letters from faculty who know you
- ▶ Will they write a good recommendation?
- ▶ Prioritize:
  - Research mentors
  - Other researchers with whom you've worked
  - Program Director
  - Course Instructors-smaller courses are better
  - TAs and fellow students hold little weight
- Ensure letters are not providing redundant information

## Get Experience In a Research Lab

This not only shows your interest in research but will help you decide if research is really what you want to do!

- Can obtain research experience either during school term or summer.
- MCB 290-Mechanism for getting research experience <http://www.mcb.uiuc.edu/undergrad/research.html>
- MCB advising office has information on summer research programs.
- An good alternative is non-MCB labs (Vet Med. SIB, etc.) (You can get MCB credit for some of these)
- Consider summer jobs in industrial labs

## GRE Test Scores

- ▶ Required by all schools
  - Can be more or less important depending on the school
  - May also want subject test scores
  - May be important for certain fellowships
- ▶ Take GRE Prep course and practice tests
- ▶ Take test no later than early Fall
- ▶ If scores are low, study and retake (allow time)
- ▶ Try to get at least 1000 (1200 better!)
- ▶ Medians for acceptance to MCB in 2008 were:  
-GPA 3.61, VGRE 560, QGRE710, WGRE4.5
- ▶ Poor test score can be overcome if...
  - Great letters
  - Pubs/credentials
  - Great Statement and Interviews

## Letters Continued

- ▶ Ask early
- ▶ Provide personal statement, CV
- ▶ Set appt. to talk to them
- ▶ Provide schedule of due dates
- ▶ Provide envelopes/stamps
- ▶ Gently remind as needed (they will procrastinate)

## Graduate School Essay:

- ▶ Should represent you!
- ▶ Is an important part of the “Package”
- ▶ Common themes are:
  - Personal statement
  - Statement of purpose
  - Personal essay
  - Statement of background and goals
  - Expression of your qualities as an applicant
- ▶ Think them out carefully look at program goals

## Thinking....

- ▶ “Your” story
  - What do you want to do?
    - ▶ Career objectives and final goals
    - ▶ Research fields of interest
    - ▶ Any particular interests
  - Why do you want to do it? (anecdotes are good!)
    - ▶ Motivation for Ph.D.?
    - ▶ Motivation for research in general?
    - ▶ Motivation for your particular research goals?
    - ▶ Motivation for their school in particular?

## How to Start the Essay

- ▶ Free write
  - Review your life
  - Ask those who know you best
  - Use thought questions above as a guide
  - Focus on the theme the school is requesting
  - Write without bothering with corrections
  - Allow time for feedback and re-writing!
- ▶ Outline
  - Take your thoughts, refine, place into paragraphs!

## What goes in the essay?

- ▶ Balance academic and personal information but **accentuate research experience!**
- ▶ Convey that you’ve taken a thorough, analytical and self-reflective look at yourself and your goals
- ▶ Create an interesting, non-generic essay that sets you apart...
- ▶ Should be relevant to your field of study
- ▶ Not an autobiography (avoid self-indulgence)
- ▶ Balance what you’ve done and what you want to do
- ▶ Sound realistic (avoid clichés and Nobel references)
- ▶ Make the essay fit the program. List faculty members you might be interested in meeting/working with.

## More Thinking....

- ▶ Why are YOU particularly suited for grad school?
  - What are your strengths?
  - What has made you resolved/strong?
  - Document these with detailed facts
- ▶ What have you done to reach goal?
  - Undergrad experiences
  - Research projects
    - ▶ Sound like scientist, not a pair of hands
    - ▶ What is the significance of your research?
    - ▶ What question were you attempting to answer?
    - ▶ How were you attempting to answer the question?
    - ▶ What did you find? What conclusions can you make?
- ▶ Why do you want to go to their school/program?

## Personal Essay Information

- ▶ Why do you want to be a scientist
  - Is there a good story?
- ▶ Try to hook your audience!
- ▶ What have you overcome/unusual circumstances?
- ▶ Explain inconsistencies (grades below B in pertinent courses and how you’ve overcome; put near end)

## Please keep in mind...

- ▶ Make goals sound reasonable and attainable
- ▶ Continuously ask, "Is it relevant, interesting, different, memorable?"
- ▶ Convey your excitement
- ▶ Document strengths with facts specific information/examples
- ▶ If you've faced adversity, mention but don't dwell
- ▶ Avoid gimmicks (fake magazine article, etc)
- ▶ Don't be boring
- ▶ Follow rules on length

## Refining the essay

- ▶ Ensure it is well organized, relevant, concise
- ▶ Take time to write- multiple drafts, read aloud
- ▶ Grammatically correct, spelling, punctuation
- ▶ Concise and easy to read
- ▶ Ensure it answers all questions
- ▶ Follow instructions and adhere to length requirements
- ▶ Tailor it for the individual school
- ▶ Have it reviewed by others before sending in!
- ▶ Reread it before your interviews anticipate interview questions

## A graduate program is looking for someone who:

- ▶ Will successfully complete the program
  - Has background required for success
  - Has motivation required for success
- ▶ Will assist in school's research efforts
- ▶ Will impact "energy" of school
- ▶ May make great breakthroughs for them
- ▶ Will be a good representative for their program, forever-good long term goals and communication
- ▶ Will increase the program's diversity
- ▶ Ultimately:
  - Will be a good financial investment
  - Will be a good time investment

## Additional Essay Tips:

- ▶ Don't dwell on High School experiences
- ▶ Avoid controversial topics
  - Religion or politics
  - Things that are unusual or unconventional
  - Trivial aspects of your research
  - Inappropriate personal information

Tie everything together at the end and reaffirm the your desire to be in their program.

## Visiting Departments and Programs

- Do some research on the program
- Look up possible thesis labs (can request to visit specific ones)
- Make eye contact, smile, look alert, avoid slang
- Bring questions to help yourself and to convey you interest to the interviewer
- Avoid making prepared speeches
- Appear confident and be positive
- NETWORK ~~wear~~ your name tag and talk to people!
- Ask students their opinions, are they happy?
- Are the labs funded?
- How are students supported?

## Additional General Information

[www.theleadershipalliance.org](http://www.theleadershipalliance.org)  
[www.graduateguide.com](http://www.graduateguide.com)  
[www.phds.org](http://www.phds.org)  
[www.AmericanGraduateEducation.com](http://www.AmericanGraduateEducation.com)  
[www.talk.collegeconfidential.com](http://www.talk.collegeconfidential.com)

## Information about graduate programs

[www.aamc.org/members/gre/start.htm](http://www.aamc.org/members/gre/start.htm)  
[www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com)  
[www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)  
[www.usnews.com](http://www.usnews.com)  
<http://recruit.sciencemag.org>  
<http://www.princetonreview.com>