



Getting Started with Your Graduate School Application

A Webinar for NNE Students

August 19, 2025

Meeting Logistics

- Meeting is being recorded and will be made available with slides to NNE enrollees
- Please submit questions for the speakers in the Q&A button in your toolbar
- You will have an opportunity to complete a survey after the webinar to guide future in NNE programming
- Meeting overview:
 - Learning goals and speaker introduction
 - Presentation from Dr. Brian Mitchell
 - Audience Q&A
 - Conclusion and upcoming events

Learning Goals

- The key components of the graduate school application
- Learn about standardized testing and whether you should take the GRE
- Differences between master's and doctoral graduate school application processes
- Letters of Recommendation: whom to ask, how to ask, and when to ask
- Personal Statements: length, differences from statement of purpose, addressing potential application red flags
- Managing the waiting process

Meet the Presenter:

Brian S. Mitchell, PhD

Professor Emeritus
Tulane University

Host
Grad-Post Podcast



Getting Started with Your Graduate School Application

August 19, 2025

Brian S. Mitchell, PhD

graddean@grad-post.com

Outline

- How to Prepare
- When to Apply
- Where (and how many) to Apply to
- Potential Advisor Inquiries
- Letters of Recommendation
- Personal Statement
- Supplemental Materials
- Managing Expectations
- Pursue your passion! Have your “Why?”

How to Prepare

Episode 3*

- Start at least four months ahead of application deadline
- Budget the necessary time
 - e.g., 5 hrs/wk for final eight weeks
 - You may be busiest during final exams!
- Take the GRE!
 - Many programs have waived or eliminated the requirement
 - Use it to gauge your readiness for grad school and which programs you might be eligible for
 - <https://www.ets.org/pdfs/gre/gre-guide-to-the-use-of-scores.pdf>
- Talk to people you trust
 - Instructors
 - Friends/relatives with advanced degrees
 - People you know currently in grad school

* Refers to grad-post podcast episodes

When to Apply

- Usually December/January for following Fall admission
- Earlier for Spring admission (rare for PhD programs)
- Rolling admissions for online programs
- Don't expect leeway with application deadlines

Where to Apply

Episode 23

- Be flexible in matching undergraduate degree to master's program (e.g., interdisciplinary studies, peace and conflict studies, nanotechnology)
- Cost of attendance
- New federal "guidance" requiring employment statistics for program graduates
- Application Costs; fee waivers for NNE, need-based waivers
- Valhalla vs. Rivendell; have a few options
- **Dirty Little Secrets**: It doesn't matter as much as you think it does

Potential Advisor Inquiries

Episode 17

- Mostly a terminal degree concern; e.g. PhD, MA
- Approach is very discipline specific
 - Do I need a faculty advisor before entering grad school?
- Humanities – try to meet people at conferences and events
- STEM fields – don't send cold emails
- Ask faculty you know well for recommendations and introductions if appropriate

Letters of Recommendation

Episode 21

- Whom to ask?
 - Faculty; have backups
 - Limit number of letters to < 5 each
- How to ask them?
 - Do it in person!
 - Follow up with a thank you email and details for your letter
- What do they need?
 - Resume/CV
 - Highlight major accomplishments
 - Where you are applying; make connections
- When should I start?
 - Give them plenty of time; 4-6 weeks
 - Try to group automated requests as tightly together as possible
 - Send a gentle email reminder one week before
 - Have an emergency backup; department chairs
- Letters are confidential and submitted via secure link. Don't ask for a copy.
- **Dirty Little Secrets:** What is generally in them?

Personal Statement/ Statement of Purpose

Episode 22

- Some schools require BOTH Personal Statement and Statement of Purpose
- Read the prompt!
- Tell a story; biographical but not necessarily chronological
- 1-2 pages; no longer
- Address barriers, highlights, and potential red flags (gaps in academic training)
- Personalize it for each institution
- Close with impactful recapitulation
- Don't use AI
- Have someone read it for clarity
- **SPELL AND GRAMMAR CHECK!!!** (Yes, I'm shouting)
- Answer the question "Why?" (more in a moment ...)

Supplemental Materials

- Submit only what is requested. Portfolios, recordings OK if requested
- Use links in Personal Statement if it's really that important
 - DOI to publications
 - Articles written by others that feature you

Managing Expectations

- These things take time – don't harass the admissions office
- Not hearing isn't necessarily a bad thing
- Request a decision if you must, but be prepared for "No"
- Have a plan "B"
 - Work
 - Gap Year
 - Delay graduation
- April 15 deadline for decisions on offers of financial support

Have Your “Why” Ready

- Why do you want an advanced degree?
- Why do you want to attend this program specifically?
- Pursue your passion!

Campus Visits

- Some do this prior to offer of admission = “audition”
- Some do this after admission = “recruitment”
- Some don’t do this at all; go anyway
- Budget the necessary time away from classes

Additional Resources

- <https://grad-post.com>
- <https://www.profellow.com/tips/>
- Professional societies
 - <https://www.apa.org/education-career/grad/applying>
 - [ACS Graduate School Readiness Boot Camp](#)
- Free publications
- Lots of sites for \$\$\$

BULLETIN ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

Contribution | Open Access |

Demystifying the Graduate School Application Process

Cesar O. Estien Melissa Chapman, Christopher J. Schell, Nicole Lowy, Jacqueline R. Gerson

First published: 30 September 2022 | <https://doi.org/10.1002/bes2.2029> | Citations: 1

SECTIONS

PDF TOOLS SHARE

Abstract

Navigating the graduate school application process is often challenging, requiring intricate knowledge of academia and graduate institutional structures. This "Hidden Curriculum of Academia" includes what different graduate degrees offer, how to connect with a faculty member of interest, and the skills needed to submit a "competitive" application. We hope to demystify a portion of this hidden curriculum by focusing on the process of applying to graduate school in research-oriented science programs. This article provides an overview of graduate school, the application process, how to prepare for it, and potential career paths to pursue following a Master's or Doctoral degree. Our work contributes to the larger literature that aims to increase the transparency of academia and create a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive space.

The background is white with two large teal geometric shapes. On the left, a teal triangle points towards the center. On the right, a teal trapezoid is positioned. The text 'Good Luck!' is centered in a teal font, and 'It can be very rewarding ...' is placed within the right teal shape in a white font.

Good Luck!

It can be very rewarding ...

Audience Q&A

*Please submit your questions in the Q&A section of your Zoom toolbar.
You can upvote questions that you would like prioritized.*

Upcoming Event

Money Matters: Financial Basics Every Prospective Graduate Student Should Know

September 18, 2025 from 1:00-2:00 PM Eastern

Presenters:

Kevin Collins, Director, Financial Consulting, TIAA

Phil Schuman, Executive Director, Higher Education Financial Wellness Alliance (HEFWA)

https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_HiztJQbtSF-bY3N2QclzxA

GRAD\$ENSE

- **GradSense is a free website to help you make good financial decisions about graduate school.**
 - Breaks down key factors like how to choose a program, how to fund your degree, what you can expect to earn compared to any debt you may take on, and tips for how to manage your money during the program
 - Includes a glossary of terms, a quiz to check your knowledge, and links to further resources

Grad school is a journey. We're here to help.

Thank you!

Email nne@cgs.nche.edu with any
questions