Making Your Graduate Application Stand Out

Theresa Culley
Biological Sciences

Cheri Westmoreland
McNair Scholars Program
Do everything early!

- Gather information
- Tests – GRE
- Applying
- Essay – Personal Statement
- Request Letters of Recommendations
Contact Potential Graduate Advisors!

• Ask UC faculty for suggestions
• Read current literature
• Google your interests
• Send introductory email

*These are your advocates on the inside!!*
Letter of introduction:

- Address it specifically to advisor

  NO FORM LETTERS!

- Ask if space is available
- Give your research interests
- Describe applicable experience and/or classes
- KEY: research, publications, presentations

**Review your personal information online - Facebook, etc.**
• GRE is standard for graduate school
  – (Quantitative/Verbal/Written or Subject)
  – But check as some programs are no longer requiring GRE

• TIPS:
  – Study!!
  – Practice tests, GRE testing materials
  – Accommodations for verified disabilities
• Purpose for attending graduate school

• Your educational background
  – Research
  – Work experience

• Your Professional background
  – Associations
  – External opportunities
  – Scholarships and awards

• Lessons Learned
• Reflect on the uniqueness of your background
• Be specific about your goals
• Connect your experiences, education, and motivations to the program you have selected
• Check spelling & grammar!
Letters of Recommendation

• Start early
• Don’t blindside people
• Talk
• Provide a letter, resume, personal statement, and information about the graduate programs
• Have worked with you closely – **Faculty Mentor**

• Have known you long enough to write with authority – **Academic Advisor**

• Have relevant expertise – **Professors**

• Are senior and well-known – **Departmental Chair or Dean**

• Have a positive opinion of you and your abilities

• Have a warm and supportive personal style
Advice on Letters

• Give your writers plenty of time
• Give them a well-organized, thorough packet of materials
  – Resume/Purpose statement
  – Any forms that are supposed to be submitted with letter
  – A cover letter
  – Information on graduate program or scholarship
  – Supporting documents
Reminders

• Waive your rights to see recommendations – confidential letters tend to carry more weight with admissions committees
  – Some faculty will only write confidential letters
• Follow-up to remind them to write/send your letter
• Have a clear deadline
• Drop them an email or a verbal reminder a week before your deadline
• Thank them! Card or email
While you are waiting...

• Double check everything
  – Confirm that all pieces have arrived successfully

• Possible interview (phone/Skype)
  – Be prepared to impress the committee with your passion for your field, your reasons for pursuing a graduate degree, and your qualifications.

• Fill out FA forms, if applicable
Most programs will admit a first cohort of students
  – Additional students maybe admitted as space/funding remains
  – Some admitted to MS instead of PhD

Recruitment Visit
  – Many programs will pay for you to come visit
  – If not, ASK!!
  – Opportunity to meet with potential advisor, talk with current grad students
Choose the school that...

• Has the best graduate advisor(s) for you
• Matches your research interest
• Has the best program for your needs
• Best fits into your budget
• Has the best campus
• If no school matches your criteria perfectly, bend a little
If you are not admitted...

- Improve references, test scores, and essays
- Apply to Master’s programs rather than PhD
- Apply as a non-degree student
  - But be careful in Ohio because of 174 graduate credit hour limit
- Apply to different schools or reapply to your current choices next year