

# The Graduate School Admission Process

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November 8, 2019

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(Materials Science and  
Engineering)

**Panel** Prof. Burcu Gurkan, Chemical Engineering Prof. Mike Hore, Macromolecular Science and Engineering

- Year in School
- Discipline
- Degree to be sought (MS vs Ph.D. vs other)
- Outline
  - Timeline
  - Deciding where to apply
  - Organizing letters of recommendation (LORs)
  - Personal Statements
  - Networking

- About sophomore year on, take it all in...
- Pursue research opportunities
  - school year vs summer
  - credit or pay
  - Major or non-major department PI's
- NSF Research Experience for the Undergraduate (REU)
  - different focus for each school, usually like previous research
- Talk to new graduate students
- Cultivate a network of recently graduated students
  - LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.
- Local and Regional Meetings

Beginning of year

Look at schools/programs and narrow down to no more than 8; Contact  
PIs? Soph/Jun Year

November 15 November 30  
December

What type of research and school appeal to you?

Keep your resume

Draft personal

Have a strong statement

draft of personal visit Career  
statement to PI, Center; have  
organize grad student read  
information on it

excel sheet

Deadlines- Be aware of overlap with finals and holidays; **program  
dependent**

up to snuff!!!

Berkeley: 12/2-19

**SUBJECT GRE:**

**GENERAL GRE:** Year round **Registration deadline is 5-6 weeks prior**  
ets.org/gre Given 3x year:

(note: many schools doing away with

Stanford- 12/3 MIT 12/1+ CWRU- 12/15

September, October, April

GRE requirement)

**Study for Subject!** Ask department for resources. Sample  
tests @ <https://www.ets.org/gre/subject/prepare>

- Location

- Metropolitan or rural? Big or small school? Big or small department?

- Outside obligations

- Family/friends

- Lifestyles

- What is the department culture? Hours expected to work?

- Multiple PIs you would consider working for at each school

- You can ask directly if they will have funding/will take a student

- Is the PI retiring/taking a sabbatical?

- Applying to multiple schools: remember time and application/transcript fees)

- Consider what makes a “top” school

- No such thing as a “safety” school

- Literature review: note faculty research interests & expertise

- ISI Web of Science

- Quality & reputation of your chosen **program**
- Financial support (start to finish or year to year?)
- Can ask to waive application fee and official GRE scores
- Do you qualify for a GEMS/NSF/DoD fellowship?
- GPA & test scores for the average admitted student
- Time required to degree completion

You should not pay for a Ph.D. in a STEM field

- Why do you want to undertake graduate study @ this university?
- With whom do you wish to work?
- Be familiar w/ their research?

- Why is this particular program the right fit for you & your interests?
- What do you bring to the program, what is your contribution?

- Some PIs like it, some ignore it, some don't like it
- IF you email, be polite, objective and to the point
- If you don't hear back, don't worry
- Avoid the thought "tl;dr"
- Use a professional email address For example:

Dear Professor X, I am currently a senior undergraduate and planning to apply to XYZ University to pursue a PhD in chemistry, starting fall 2016. As your research on Blah is of great interest, I was wondering if you plan to take PhD students during this time. I have attached my resume with more information about my experience and interests. Thank you very much for your time! Best Regards- Emily

There is a lot of help available, **USE IT!**

- If you know people who applied in previous years contact them

- Be honest
- Input from different sources: writing center (set up time), labmates, grad students, etc.
- Specify- why, with whom
- Provide near-complete draft to letter writers!
- Excellent overview:

<http://grad.unm.edu/resources/gs-forms/letter-of-intent.htm>

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*Be professionally personal and matter of fact; talk about how your experiences qualify you for graduate school (engaged in research, what you've learned about the research process etc.) If sensitive issues are relevant (such as low GPA due to medical diagnosis), consult with your advisor.*

- 1 page is good
- Emphasize strengths, explain anomalies
- Why you're interested in the field and why a PhD (MS)
- Your credentials (not repeating CV)
  - You did research, what did you actually do



- Include any publications
- Teaching or TAing
- Writing and oral presentations
- Why their program is good for you
- Is it their specialty?
- Mentioning location is fine, as it pertains to your goals
- Overall career goals
- Don't have to know exactly

P1. Intention to get an advanced degree, area of interest **P2**. Summarize previous experience (school and research/lab, internships), how it prepared/motivated you for grad school **P3**. Outlook for what you want from your graduate experience (skills, career goals) P4. Conclusion - reiterate goals, why you want to go to this school,

which professors/area you are interested in

Why the program fits you & your interests

Why you are a good fit to the program

- Spell check
- Read it out loud
- Make sure the name of the school/department/professor is correct
- DO NOT plagiarize

**\*\*Think about what differentiates you\*\*** **\*\*Show that you have the potential to succeed in the program\*\***

While I had been interested in science throughout my childhood, I didn't decide to major in science until junior year of high school. When I realized I wasn't satisfied with my current knowledge of science, I immediately decided to major in chemistry in college.

When I started my freshman year at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU), I chose chemistry because it was what I was best at in high school. I had no profound love of the subject, and thought I would figure out what I loved to do as the time passed, and exactly that happened. I started doing research in a chemistry lab at the beginning of my junior year of college, and soon realized that I love doing research and want to get a PhD in chemistry.

I write to you to declare my intent to pursue a doctorate in the Materials Science Department at UWisconsin-Madison. My interdisciplinary background and familiarity with the fast-paced nature of working in a start-up biotech lab lay a strong foundation for a research project focused on biologically-inspired polymers and targeted drug delivery. My specific interests fall within the groups of ...

## Who to contact?

- Someone you feel is responsible and knows you well enough to speak of

your character and abilities as a researcher and potential for success.

Should be professor (or have a PhD) **When to contact?**

- At least 1 month ahead of time. **What to say?**
- Can you write me a strong letter of recommendation, what can I provide to help? (CV, personal statement, etc.) **Make it as easy as possible!**

● Provide all information as early as possible and one document with all schools/deadlines **When to remind them?**

- Many PIs don't write until week/day it's due. Be patient. Ask if you can help.

**How to approach:**

- Email, address as: Dear Dr. or Dear Professor
- If you request a meeting give times you're available
- Keep things short and sweet ("TL;DR")
- Be direct- don't "bury your lead"

**After they've agreed:**

- Provide excel (or google sheet) table of information on where you're applying (or whatever they request)
- Let them know when they'll have your "package"
- Ask if they want a reminder email (1 week before?)

**School Dept. Profs GRE Subj. GRE Due date How?**

North- western  
Chemistry Mirkin,  
Scheidt, Nguyen

Required Required 12/1 emailed  
link  
Required Required 12/1 emailed  
link

530 Goodell Building University of  
Massachusetts 140 Hicks Way Amherst,  
MA 01003-9272

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UMass Amherst  
Polymer Science  
Emrick, Hayward,C rosby  
Emrick, Hayward,C rosby  
Required No 1/01 Mail to:  
Required No 1/01 Mail to:  
Required No 1/01 Mail to:

Case Western  
Chem Sauve, Burda, Pentzer  
Required recommended 1/31  
Required recommended 1/31  
(Rolling)  
(Rolling)  
emailed link  
emailed link  
emailed link

\*if no official due date, it's good to make it the same as one of the others...and order them chronologically! \*provide a stamped envelope if required to send it in by mail

- Visits are in the spring, many overlap; 4 is comfortable
- Visits are often Thursday night to Sunday morning and on assigned weekends, meet with profs and social events
- A great opportunity to meet prospective roommates
- This is your opportunity to explore the environment
- Talk to students!
  - where recent grads have gone
  - average time to PhD
  - how is the group run?
  - What they like/don't like (best part/worst part of the program)

- Can you picture yourself working and living there?

- Make sure you know point of contact at schools and work with them (probably not a professor)

- If you get into one school with a deadline for acceptance before hearing back from others, you can negotiate an extension

  - nat'l deadline 4/15

- You can ask *when* they will make decisions

Acceptance is based on numerous factors, many are independent of your qualifications

## **Graduate School Application Cycle- The Good, The Bad, The Ugly Junior Year: *Start to think about where you will apply***

- Look at schools in locations you like
- Look at schools with high quality research
- A good starting place is US new & world reports
- The Dean's offices have subscription, ask faculty for the list *Make a list of what you value in graduate school*

- Location
- Research
- Work/life balance
- Close to home

● Go to as many guest lecturers as you can! They are a great way to see the research that is out there and make connections

● Figure out when you are going to take the GRE and if you are going to study for it.

● Consider taking a business class or two.... It is important to be a well rounded human and the business school offers great classes that will help you learn networking and social skills. I highly



recommend ORBH 303 Interpersonal Relationships or ORBH 370 Women and Men as Colleagues

- Search on LinkedIn (MAKE A LINKEDIN IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE!!!!) to see what kinds of places people from grad schools you are interested in are going after
  - Cultivate relationships with your 3 letters of recommendation and ask early!
  - Decide if you will take the Subject GRE because it's only offered early in the fall semester - you should definitely study for it if you are going to take it
- 
- Write your personal statement: This is a big task, but doable assuming you don't procrastinate and are actually passionate about going to grad school
  - Don't make the personal statement too personal! Scientists don't generally have too many feelings, they more so want to know why you want to pursue a challenging degree and why you are qualified.
  - Write lots of drafts and have lots of people review it
    - the writing center, who helped with sentence structure and grammar)
    - several mentors and letter writers

- **Time management is key:** set aside a few hours every week that are purely dedicated to grad school things (and don't sacrifice them for other things!). It can be really easy to get behind, but working on a little bit each week makes the process easier.

### **Reaching out to professors:**

- Consider reaching out to professors at schools that you're really interested in (I'm convinced that's why I got into Vandy!!), however don't be sad if they don't respond (some profs don't like it/are too busy)

Example email: Hi Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, I am \_\_\_\_\_, a senior at Case Western Reserve University. I'm currently studying chemistry and applying to \_\_\_\_\_ this application cycle. I find your research very interesting. I currently do research with solar panels in a more inorganic/materials science context and the water splitting approach is fascinating. I was hoping you would be willing to further discuss your research in an informational interview. I have attached my resume for your reference. Look forward to learning more!

- Congrats!!! Now you'll get to be wined and dined :)
- Do your research ahead of time
  - which professors you are most interested in
  - what you want to know about the program,
  - what you want to know about student life
- There will be lots of free alcohol, remember this is a professional setting, so keep yourself together!
  - the best time to ask the grad students questions you want honest answers to is when they take you out
- Send thank you emails to each professor you met with and the coordinator, it leaves a good impression!
  
- I made a spreadsheet with my original "grad school values" in order to compare them
- Look at the cost of living in the city and make sure that the stipend/your personal finances will cover

that (some stipends are not sufficient to cover the cost of living)

- Make sure you will be happy at the school because you will be working constantly
- Good Luck!!!

- Website of your chosen academic program
- Resource Guide: Suggested career websites every prospective PhD candidate should visit:
  - [www.phds.org](http://www.phds.org)
  - [www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com)
  - <http://versatilephd.com/>
  - [www.admissionsessays.com](http://www.admissionsessays.com)
  - <http://community.livejournal.com/applyingtograd/>
  - <http://www.studentdoctor.net>
  - [www.academiccareers.com](http://www.academiccareers.com)

- [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)
- [www.gradview.com](http://www.gradview.com)
- [Gradschool.about.com/cs/financialaid/index.htm](http://Gradschool.about.com/cs/financialaid/index.htm)
- [www.college-scholarships.com](http://www.college-scholarships.com)
- [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)

**Good Luck!!!!**