



Applying to Graduate School

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When?

- Graduate school application deadlines begin as early as December 1st with many on January 1st and deadlines continuing into February.
- Generally, weaker schools have deadlines later than Jan 15th.

How many?

- I recommend applying to 10 graduate programs.
- 1-2 pie in the sky programs (Rank 1-10)
- 6-8 solid programs (Rank 10 – 50)
- 1-2 backup schools (Rank > 50)

How much?

- Application fees are not cheap. You should plan on spending upwards of \$1000 on the application process.

GRE

- Most schools require the general GRE.
- Most of the better schools also require the physics subject GRE which is only offered three times a year.
- There are many schools who do not require a subject GRE score.

Letters

- You will need usually 3, sometimes 4, letters of recommendation.
- Plan to use your research adviser, your academic adviser, and faculty from which you have had advanced classes.
- If you have a double major, you may use one letter writer from the other major.

Selecting Schools

- US News Physics Graduate School Rankings [link](#).
- NRC Physics Graduate School Ranking [link](#)
- AIP Graduate Programs Summary – On reserve.
- Grad School Shopper – Using AIP data [link](#).
- Ask your research adviser if you wish to continue doing research in the same field as your undergraduate thesis. (Most students don't)

When will you hear?

- Some programs do offer early acceptance and you know by February.
- Most programs let you know from March 1 – March 31st.
- You must decide by April 15th

General Advice

- Don't assume you know what kind of research you want to do; the environment at an elite program is profoundly different than what you are used to.
- Most students choose something completely different for their first research project.
- This means a big programs with lots of variety is better.

What's it like?

- You start with an orientation that usually lasts about one week.
- You take a maximum of three classes (all physics) each semester).
- Unless you have a fellowship, you are a teaching assistant (TA) for the first year, teaching usually introductory labs.
- You choose a research adviser in the same way you chose an honors thesis adviser, usually with more help from the department.
- Before the end of your second year, you take and pass a qualifying exam.
- In 5-6 years, you defend a PhD thesis.
- Somewhere along the way you get a master's degree.