

# BEYOND BOULDER

## The Timeline

What do you want to be when you grow up? Do you want to get a job after graduation? Do you want to go on to graduate school (and what after that)? Big questions that require serious thought. However, there are a lot of things you can do throughout your undergrad years that will help you make informed choices when the time comes to decide.

### **Freshman/Sophomore years**

It may seem way too early to worry about this stuff, but your freshman and sophomore years are really the times that you should start thinking beyond Boulder. You don't have to make up your mind now, but follow the suggestions listed here in the Freshman/sophomore section of the timeline. By the time you need to make decisions, you'll be in good shape to make the best choices for you and you'll be prepared for whatever comes next.

Your first couple of years at Boulder you want to start thinking about what areas of science you are interested in. The steps listed here will help you find what areas you may want to pursue – or at least what areas you are *not* interested in, which is just as important. Attending Beyond Boulder activities will help you find out what kind of career options there are and what graduate school is like. This is also the time to start participating in undergraduate research. It is best to start as early as possible; you will find out what research is like – and if you enjoy it – and you can test out different fields. Even if you know you don't want to be a research scientist eventually, hands-on, real science experience is useful. It is the best way to pinpoint what areas you actually may want to work in.

### **Fall/spring semesters**

- Meet with faculty mentor(s)
- Begin attending the department seminars and colloquia

- Investigate the research groups on campus
- Make a habit to frequent professor office hours
- Sign up for student membership in the professional societies in your field (e.g. APS, AAS, AGU, etc.)
- Investigate and participate in undergrad research opportunity on campus
- Apply for an REU or other summer research program – make an appointment with the CU Writing Center to go over the applications

## Summer

- Participate in a summer research program
- If in Boulder, talk with a professor about undergrad research position

## Junior year

During your junior year you want to start thinking more seriously about your goals. What careers are you interested in? Is graduate school something you want to pursue? By the spring semester you want to have a good idea of a couple of fields you are interested in working in – continuing undergraduate research is a great help here. You also want to decide if you are going to apply to grad school by spring and if so, you need to define the criteria for schools. Near the end of year you'll want to start preparing for the GREs and narrowing your list of schools. It's important to use the summer after your junior year wisely!

If you are looking into career options you should be investigating industry internships and the like. Start working on your resume now. Make an appointment with CU Career Services to go over your resume and get suggestions on improving it. Attend the Beyond Boulder sessions that include guests from industry and outside academia.

## Fall semester

- Start studying for the Physics GRE
- Continue with undergraduate research and narrow down the fields you are interested in
- Get your resume together and identify areas where you could improve it – you have a year to fill in the weak spots now!
- Look into internship programs
- Start reading (a lot and outside your field) and building your vocabulary for the general GRE (The New Yorker, The Economist, Scientific American, The New York Review of Books, etc. are good resources)
- Apply for an REU or other summer research program

## Spring semester

- Apply for career internships
- Define your grad school goals: What do you want out of graduate school? What are the areas of research you are interested in? Where do you want to live?
- Begin investigating grad schools
- Practice for the general GRE and sign up to take it ASAP (in the summer if possible!)

## Summer

- Create a shortlist of grad schools
- Make an intensive study schedule for the physics GRE and stick to it
- Read the Feynman Lectures
- Practice for the general GRE
- Find scholarships and fellowships you can apply for
- Participate in summer research program
- Register for the first physics GRE
- Take the GRE general test at the end of the summer – it will make your life easier in the fall

## Senior year

This is it! The fall semester will be a very busy time for applications. Hopefully the work you did in the summer will help. If you'll be applying for jobs, fall is the time to begin polishing the resume and making contacts. The spring will extremely busy with your job search.

### Fall semester into the beginning of spring semester

- Finalize your list of schools and scholarship/fellowship programs
- Mark all deadlines on your calendar!
- Craft your statement of purpose; it **must** be personalized and specific for each school, but you can work from a general draft
- Make appointment(s) with the CU Writing Center to go over your personal statements
- Attend Professor Michael Dubson's Physics GRE prep seminar
- Schedule and take the general GRE if you haven't already
- Take the first available physics GRE if possible so you can take the second if necessary
- Ask professors/advisors about letters of recommendation; select 4 that are willing to write a strong and detailed review
- Give letter writers required information, materials, and deadlines and your CV
- Submit FAFSA
- Make an appointment with Career Services to discuss your job search
- Determine career fair dates
- Polish your resume

### Spring semester

You want to ramp up your job seeking efforts now. Grad school offers start to arrive and you'll need to weigh your options.

- Consider taking a deferment for AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, Teach for America, work, etc.

- Make sure your resume is spotless
- Make appointment(s) with Career Services for help with interviews, cover letters, and your continued search