

Beyond Boulder 3/17/14

How to pick a Grad School

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Q: Most important aspect of picking a grad school?

A: advisor – look for multiple advisors that you would want to work with

E: look at the dept's web site to find what research the advisors are working on

J: There is a book, American Physics something that lists all schools, areas of research, advisors, grad program statistics...

- Gradschoolshopper.com

Q: is it worth applying to school where you did your undergrad?

R: you can try... your chances are not zero

J: advisors will tell you not to

Q: If you are happy where you are or have little research experience how do you apply somewhere else for something specific?

J: make something up for your application, because chances are you will not be doing what you think you want to do

A: Stay flexible, choose an advisor

E: look around at projects, some just outside your research area could peak your interest later if your advisor is passionate about it

Q: As an undergrad should you stay on one project?

R: It depends, longer projects could result in a paper, but I worked on 5 as an undergrad

J: You have to ask yourself if you are still learning from the project, if you aren't it might be time to switch

Q: What would be some typical red flags?

E: When you go to visit a school, talk to the current grad students, if they are miserable or if the school is hiding some students from you – red flag

R: I choose where I did because I liked the boulder area

A: I was deciding between some schools and visited one school where the grad students were complaining, and another where I just didn't vibe

J: It is hard to figure this stuff out before hand, I visited Caltech and the visiting weekend was over spring break, so there was no one there for me to talk to

E: Hawaii had a really good visiting weekend, I liked the research, there was a general happiness of the students, and there was a classic 2-body problem

Q: TA/research?

J: I taught a lot, but I really liked it, I personally think that every grad should TA

E: in terms of funding – APS doesn't have labs, but you need to find someone to work with that brings in grant money

J: Find an advisor that brings in money

Q: Do you live comfortable on a stipend?

R: Money wasn't an issue for me ~18,000 for engineering at boulder

A: I was getting about 30,000 in APS

E: Hawaii was about 30,000

J: Sciences have it better than the humanities

Q: Engineering grad school – what would a PhD be in?

R: A lot of physics majors work in the engineering center, NOAA, NIST... I am going to get a PhD in Electrical Engineering and my advisor is in Phys

Q: Is there a good way to get into a school that you really want to go to?

J: you should apply to a lot of places

A: Shape your application to fit the school, say who you would like to work with and why

E: talk about telescope access, labs, know someone, when you visit talk to people so that when they get your application they know who you are

R: The schools that I got into, either I knew someone or my advisor knew someone

Q: For different physics disciplines (engineering...) how do I apply with very little research?

E: If I saw someone w/engineering try to come into astronomy, I would want to make sure they knew what they were getting into, the application should say, because of this unique background I can bring this knowledge, and apply it to this...

A: last year admissions looked at upper E&M as an indicator for "knowing physics"

J: there are a ton of people applying to a ton of places, so you need to apply to a lot of places

E: Apply to where you want to go, not just where you think you will get in, don't count yourself out

J: Safety schools don't exist for grad school

Q: paying for grad school applications?

A: Rice will waive your application fee

E: GREs cost to send to more than a certain number of school but will waive if needed

J: look into it – some will waive, some don't

- Email the graduate program assistant

Q: How time consuming is it?

A: I treated it as an extra class, between applying and studying for the GRE...

Q: What is the least important aspect of apply to grad school?

E: how long they will say it takes to graduate...

J: its highly personal; geography, social aspects... our should make a list and go through that reflection process

R: Some will say it doesn't matter where they go geographically, others it will matter the most

Q: Women in Science / get female advisor?

A: I have a real lack of female role models, I can't look to the people I work with and say that is what I want in 10 years – I don't have a lot of interaction with the few female profs that are here

E: you should have a lead advisor, but also a group of advisors – if you are concerned about anything, make sure you have an advisor that you jive with

J: make sure you have a team of advisors, one person cannot do everything for you

Q: What do you wish you knew?

J: have multiple advisors, you are in grad school for yourself – make sure you know why you want to be there – not just the next step, grad school is isolating – it is social during the first couple years but then people start disappearing into their work/offices never to be seen again – make sure you can deal with that

R: Take your time, you don't need to go straight to grad school, get in and defer – do you actually want to go

Q: what classes did you not take that you should have?

Programming, stats

Q: did you have to make up “deficiencies” in undergrad work?

J: Berkeley makes sure you have taken classes that you will need previous to the grad classes

E: MIT has entrance exams to determine if you need an undergrad course before starting grad work

A: I came from a liberal arts school not taking nearly the amount of physics required by CU, and got in

Q: how many schools did you apply to?

Applied to 8 got into 3

10 4

8 6

7 3

Q: Does prestige of a school matter?

E: It is not fair but it could

A: It is up to you to get through grad school

Give your recommenders info about yourself to work with