**Graduate School Action Plan**

# RECOMMENDATIONS:

## **Ask:** the person you are seeking a recommendation from if that person will be able to provide you with a strong recommendation. If not, find someone else.

## **Provide:** Plenty of time; do not ask for letters at the last minute.

Send an email that includes the following information to each person you ask to provide a recommendation:

* + - * An unofficial transcript and your resume or CV
      * A draft of your essay/personal statement (or at least your goals for graduate study)
      * Program requirements
      * Submission deadlines for each school and the submission link with instructions
      * If submission must be mailed provide an addressed, stamped envelope
      * If the school requires you to submit the entire application as one packet, provide an envelope with your name on it. The recommender seals it and signs the seal

## **Follow Up:** Check the progress of your recommendation letters and forms. Make sure they arrive on time.

# APPLICATION ESSAYS:

## **Begin:** Each program has a unique writing prompt. Draft your essay without considering word- counts.

* Edit to size with LRC assistance

## **Finalize:** Essays must be grammatically correct, original, and the required length.

* In general, use at least .5 inch margins and 10-point font but check for specific requirements.

# PARALLEL PLANS:

## **Job Search:** Start the job search process because graduate admittance is not guaranteed.

* Apply to several positions. Participate in career fairs and interviews.
* Prepare tailored resumes and cover letters for each opportunity.
* You may find a great job, and your new employer may pay some or all graduate school costs.

# APPLICATIONS:

* Consider creating a spell-checked, text-only document of your key information (name, address, major, school, etc.), to use for pasting into online forms.
* Never leave anything blank when filling out an application.
* Make sure that the application is completed accurately and is free of errors.
* Convey your sincere interest in the program, as well as your future goals, direction, and greatest strengths.
* If you have a high-quality writing sample directly related to the program, include it if attachments are allowed or reference it in your essay, (after fixing any errors based on faculty comments).
* Use working titles to refer to your research projects in essays and on applications.
* Always be truthful. Fabricating information will come back to hurt you.

# DETAILS:

## Deadlines: Common deadlines occur January to March for the following academic year.

* Enhance chances for success by applying early to schools with rolling admission.
* Apply as early as possible. The first applicants usually have a slight advantage.

## Official Transcripts: Request transcripts early as they can take up to several weeks to arrive.

# DECISIONS:

## **Offered Admission?** Evaluate offer(s) carefully for fit even if you have only one.

* Pay attention to any response deadlines. If you don’t accept on time, the offer may be withdrawn.
* Create an Excel spreadsheet to organize options and program characteristics
* Review all information. Costs to attend, any assistantships, tuition waivers, health care, etc.
* To accept the offer, send back any required forms or write an acceptance letter.
* Decline other offers immediately after your decision, so that they can offer the space to another candidate.

## Application Declined?

* Consider contacting the program(s) to ask for feedback on what would make you more competitive.
* Improve your credentials before reapplying:
* Take a non-degree Penn State course or courses related to your field to possibly increase your GPA and show additional relevant knowledge.
* Leverage your “gap year” job or volunteer experience by making it relevant to your field.