

# 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.