# Preparing & Applying for Graduate School

"Whether or not you reach your goals in life depends entirely on how well you prepare for them and how badly you want them"

-Ronald Erwin McNair, Ph.D.

**UCF**

McNair Scholars Program

# Session Overview

- Types of Degrees
- What Does Graduate School Cost?
- The Application Process
  - How do I Choose a School/Program?
  - What Types of Qualifications Do I Need?
  - How Do I Best Represent Myself?



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# Graduate School Myths

- Only people a 4.0 GPA get in

- Only people with perfect GRE scores get in

- If you have a bad grade in any class you will not be accepted

- You won't be able to afford grad school

# Race and Ethnicity of 2011 Doctorate Recipients

| | Number for all races | White | Asian | Black | Hispanic | American Indian | 2 or more races | Other or unknown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Life sciences | 7,855 | 73.4% | 10.8% | 5.7% | 6.0% | 0.3% | 2.3% | 1.5% |
| Physical sciences | 4,730 | 77.3% | 10.7% | 3.0% | 4.5% | 0.3% | 2.4% | 1.9% |
| Social sciences | 5,981 | 73.5% | 6.7% | 6.6% | 8.4% | 0.6% | 2.5% | 1.8% |
| Engineering | 3,325 | 69.1% | 16.9% | 4.0% | 5.8% | 0.2% | 2.2% | 1.8% |
| Education | 3,895 | 71.7% | 4.8% | 13.0% | 6.0% | 0.8% | 2.2% | 1.6% |
| Humanities | 4,191 | 80.0% | 4.7% | 3.9% | 6.9% | 0.4% | 2.2% | 1.9% |
| Other | 1,812 | 71.2% | 9.3% | 9.3% | 6.0% | 0.3% | 2.1% | 1.9% |
| All fields | 31,789 | 74.1% | 9.0% | 6.1% | 6.3% | 0.4% | 2.3% | 1.7% |

Source: Survey of Earned Doctorates, National Science Foundation and five other federal agencies

# Levels of Graduate Study

- Master's degree, 1-2 years of FT study
  - Plan A (Thesis master's)
  - Plan B (Coursework master's)
  - Professional master's (MBA, MPH, etc.)
- Professional doctoral degree (MD, JD, PharmD, etc.), time is variable
- Research doctoral degree (Ph.D.), time is variable

# What Can I Do With a Graduate Degree?

- A Master's Degree can be an entry into new or better jobs in business, industry, government, and education

- A Ph.D. is a teaching and research degree, providing a range of options in college and university teaching, as well as in corporations, government service, and administration

# Factors to Consider

Choosing a Program
- Geographical area
- Finances
- Reputation & quality
- Demographics & culture
- Publications and research of faculty
- Requirements
- Preparation/placement record

# Sample Graduate Spread Sheet

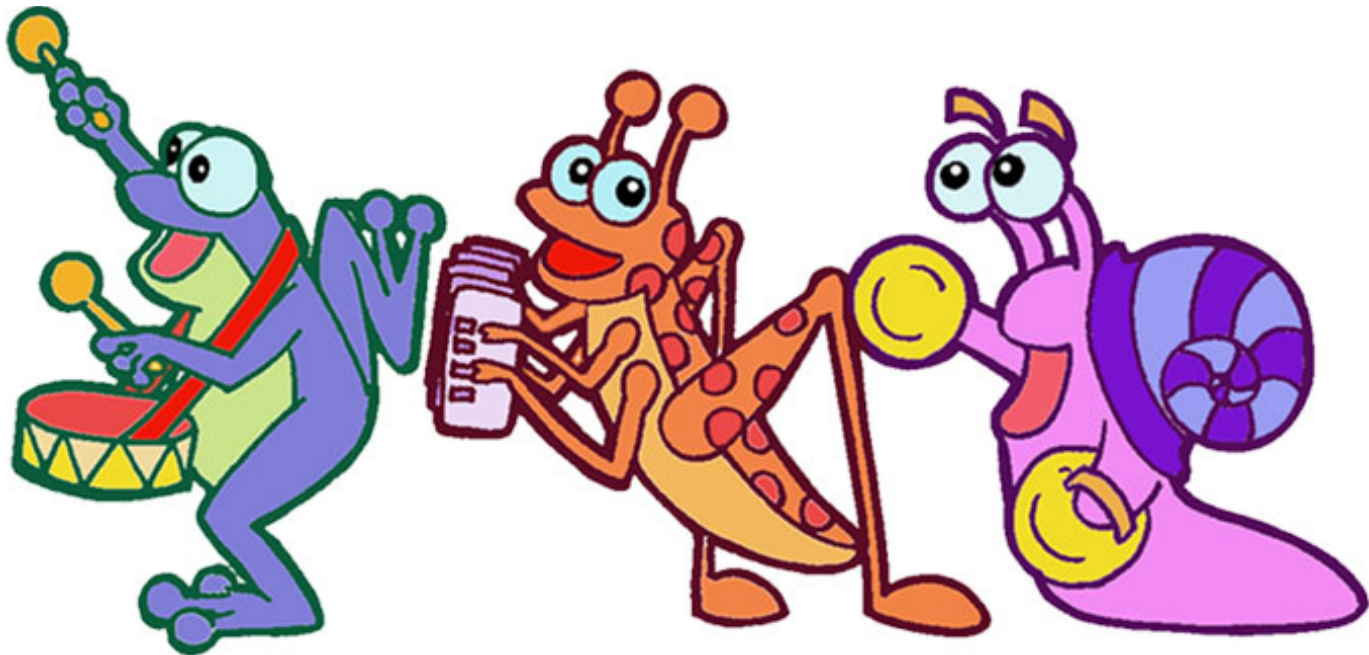| Name of Institution | Name of Program, Type | Mailing Address for Application (and primary contact) | Application Deadline | Application | Personal Statement | Writing Sample | Rec Letter 1 | Rec Letter 2 | Rec Letter 3 | Addl Rec Letters | Fee/Waiver | UCF Transcripts | Other Transcripts | Comments: (online/paper? Copies needed? Priority deadlines? Recommendations sent directly to school? Etc.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

# Application Overview

- Paper or Online Application Form
- Deadlines
- Required Components:
  - Application fee
  - Official transcripts
  - Standardized Test Scores
  - Writing Sample
  - Statements
  - Letters of Recommendation
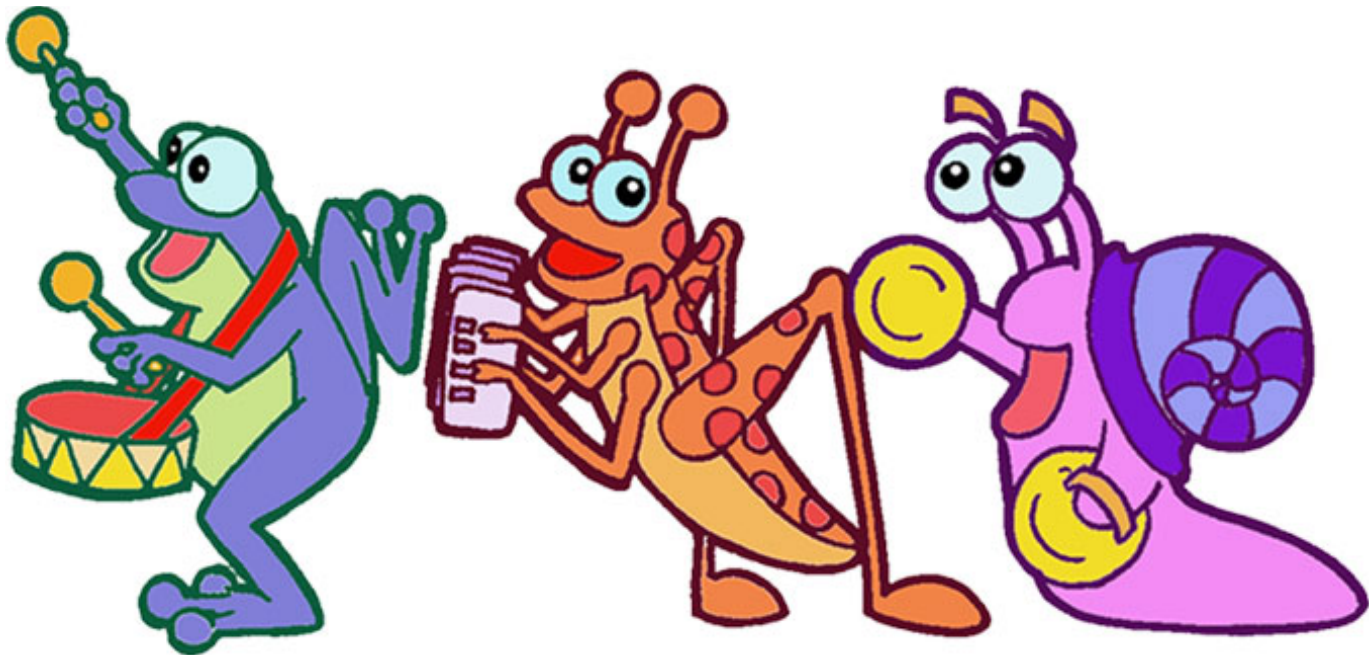- Campus Visit and Interview

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# Recommendation Letters

# The Fiesta Trio

# Organization & Management

## Letters of Recommendations

- Ability to write a STRONG letter of support

- Have first-hand knowledge of your work

- Can address different characteristics and strengths

- Can write about you with confidence & enthusiasm

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## Recommendation Packet:

- Cover letter and checklist

- CV or resume

- Course History & paper reminder

- Statement draft

- Instructions for submission, including clear deadlines

- Forms, envelopes, postage

# What is a Personal Statement?

- Your opportunity to provide personal information that is otherwise not included on your application.
- A way to set yourself apart from the other applicants who have good GPA's, good GRE Scores and good research experience.
- The place you can answer the question, "Why this program?"

# What is a Personal Statement?

- A chance for you to demonstrate the characteristics admissions committees are looking for:
  - **Reliability** – intellectual and personal integrity, conscientiousness
  - **Motivation** – attitude, drive, initiative, work habits, dependability, ability to set goals and prioritize
  - **Emotional stability** – self control, judgment, consistency, maturity
  - **Intellectual curiosity** – interest in learning
  - **Experience** – conducted research within your field

# Writing the Graduate School Essay

- Reflection of writing abilities (grammar & creativity)
- Clarity, focus and depth of your thinking - maturity
- Reasons for deciding to pursue graduate education
- Expectations of the program and career opportunities
- Motivation, commitment, and enthusiasm for particular field of study or area of special interest
- Immediate and long-term goals
- How previous education relates to your future
- Previous research or work experience
- Personal uniqueness

# GRE Preparation Materials

| Measure | Scores Reported |
|---|---|
| Verbal Reasoning | 130–170, in 1 point increments |
| Quantitative Reasoning | 130–170, in 1 point increments |
| Analytical Writing | 0–6, in half point increments |

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http://www.takethegre.com/prep

# Timing the Application Process

Fall, Junior year:

- Create a list of grad schools & fellowships
- Begin a research project (if not sooner)



Spring, Junior year:

- Seek a summer research experience, ideally at one of your choice universities
- Begin preparing for the GRE exam (if not sooner)

Summer, Junior year:

- Conduct a summer research experience
- Line up recommenders

# Timing the Application Process

Fall, Senior year:



- Request letters of recommendation
- Take the GRE early
- Write and polish your personal statement
- Apply for financial aid & fellowships
- Complete apps; aim for Dec 1st deadline
- Check before deadlines that all has been received
- Communicate with faculty at your choice schools

# Timing the Application Process

Spring, Senior year:

- Communicate with your choice schools; mention that you want to visit when it is convenient

- Expect to receive admission decisions no later than April 15; many will be earlier

- Notify the schools you decline ASAP – another student can use your spot

- Send thank you notes

FOURTH YEAR

The McNair Scholars Program is designed to prepare students from low-income, first-generation and traditionally underrepresented groups for doctoral studies.

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UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

DUKE UNIVERSITY

# For additional information…

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