Grad School Info Session

Summarizing this fantastic document.

What is grad school

- 5-6 years of additional study/research in the subject area you love
- Get paid, either as research assistant or teaching assistant (usually alternates)
- Usually classes for 1st 2 years, then Masters, then research until finish thesis
- Many students work with same advisor for full PhD process
- First few years in some schools you swap advisors
- Future careers in academia and outside academia (note PhD is required for e.g., professor but not required for e.g. Google, finance)

How to apply

- Applications usually require a statement of purpose, CV, transcripts, (3) letters of rec, GRE
- Statement of purpose should be customized for each program
- Letters or rec are VERY important : good to ask research advisors, e.g., your REU advisor!
- GRE (and especially the subject test) is going out of fashion in astronomy, but you may still need to take it
- GRE usually early Sept. senior year
- Sept.-Nov. senior year gather application materials
- Dec.-Jan. senior year submit applications
- Jan.-Apr. senior year, consider going to conferences (e.g., AAS meeting) and meet with faculty
- Mar.-Apr. hear back from applications

How to choose schools

- Best to ask your advisors and their collaborators which schools to apply to
- You can look at rankings, but note that they will be different than undergrad rankings and also are very dependent on who exactly is there doing the research that you want
- Ideally you will find a place that has a few faculty members you are interested in working with (e.g., in case one does not have time/funding for additional students, or there is a personality mismatch)
- Location of the school may be important to you – you'll be living there for 5-6+ years.
- Typically students apply for ~10 schools, but that is completely your choice
- Best to have some "reach", "match" and "safety" schools (though this is all subjective, and "safety" may not actually exist!)

After getting accepted to grad school

- Perspective student visits – super important in determining if this is a place you actually want to go to
- Ask yourself: Would you be happy living here? Is the stipend enough to live on? Is there a social scene that matches your interests?
- Ask other grad students: Why did you choose to come here? Who are the best (and worst) advisors? Mental health and feeling supported?
- Ask faculty: Process of picking thesis topic? What research they will be doing over the next 5 years? What resources are available to grad students? Where do PhDs go after graduating (jobs)? Do you have funding/time to take on a student (me)?
- Make decisions based on fit with advisor(s), fit within department, stiped vs. cost of living, location
- Be prompt with your decisions: other students are on the waitlist and will benefit if you turn a place down.

Handling rejections

- Don't panic! Everyone in academia gets rejected, gets grant proposals turned down, etc. This is a VERY competitive field. Most people get more rejections than acceptances, so you need to learn to deal with that. For grad school, you only need one acceptance (as long as it is a place you want to go).
- If you don't get in anywhere, and really want to go to grad school, you can apply again in the next job cycle. In the meantime, look for postbac positions or other research/industry related jobs that can build your resume.
- Alternatively, maybe you would simply prefer to leave academia and get paid a real salary! Grad school is always possible later in life.