

Advice about MS Applications

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About me

- ▶ Area of Interest: Systems Security (?)
- ▶ GPA: 9.52
- ▶ GRE: 170+167+5.0 (337), TOEFL: 120
- ▶ Internships: IISc (IAS), UBC-Vancouver (Mitacs)
- ▶ Publications: 2 (minor)

About me

- ▶ Applied to (in CS):

Stanford (MS)

MIT (MS+PhD)

CMU (MS)

Berkeley (MS+PhD)

UIUC (MS)

Harvard (MS+PhD)

UT-Austin (MS)

UPenn (MS)

GATech (MS)

- ▶ There are specialization programs available in good colleges, but be sure you're ready to commit to the area.

Topics I'll deal with today

- ▶ GPA
- ▶ Area of interest
- ▶ Projects
- ▶ Internships
- ▶ Resume
- ▶ GRE/TOEFL
- ▶ SOP
- ▶ LORs
- ▶ MS vs PhD
- ▶ Choosing colleges
- ▶ Funding
- ▶ Waiting and rejections

GPA

- ▶ Really important!
- ▶ Rank is important too
- ▶ Keep it as high as you can
- ▶ Pay attention in class, etc etc

Area of interest

- ▶ Don't commit too soon!
- ▶ Choose a broad area first, and then jump around within it
- ▶ It's always good if you can somehow link your best projects to one area of interest (especially your internships)
- ▶ You can change this later.

Projects

- ▶ Always try to do a good job
- ▶ You can convert a good project into a publication!
- ▶ Getting a publication under a prof also increases the quality of the LOR they give you
- ▶ Major project: in your area of interest, choose something you think is worth one full year of effort.

Internships

- ▶ Grad schools look for your capability to do research, and this can be shown through research internships
- ▶ Scholarships like IAS, Mitacs, DAAD, etc showcase that you've been selected for your research potential already
- ▶ In an industrial internship, try to think out of the box and put a research spin on it
- ▶ Work on great projects, especially in your area of interest. Go above and beyond what's asked of you – it's worth it.
- ▶ **KEEP IN TOUCH.** Recommendations!

Resume

- ▶ Make sure it highlights all your internships, publications, etc
- ▶ Write your GPA, and your rank if you're proud of it
- ▶ Mention class strength ($\#x/110$), it adds weight to your rank
- ▶ Mention extra-curriculars too: Clubs, posts, interests.
- ▶ Have a clean format. The important parts should be easy to pick up at a glance.
- ▶ NEVER LIE.

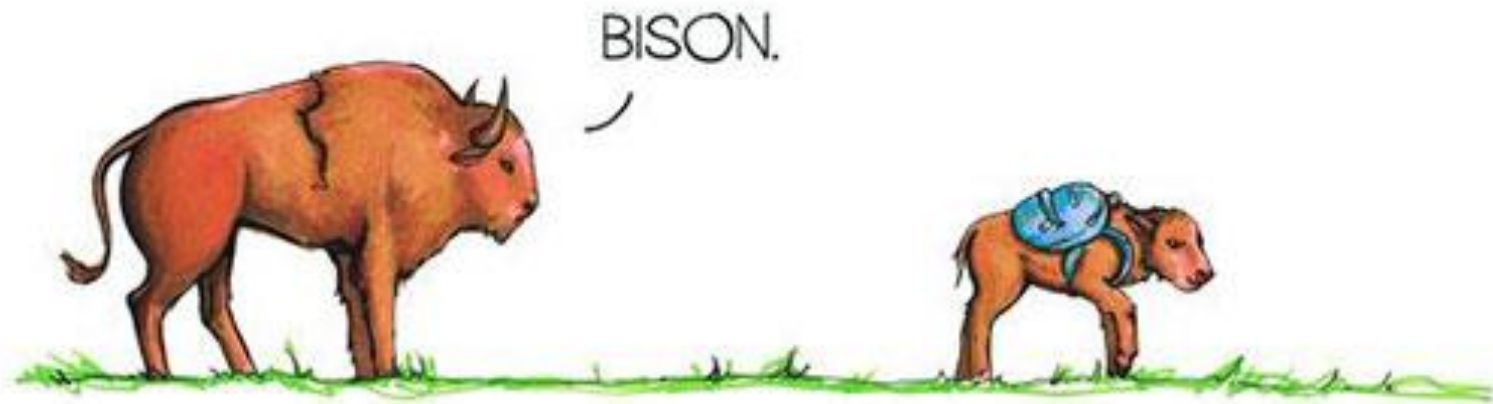
GRE (170 + 170 + 6.0)

- ▶ Takes 1-2 months
- ▶ Share material with your friends, it works out cheaper for everyone
- ▶ Magoosh
- ▶ Practice tests: sit for the entire duration, including essays. It'll build your stamina.
- ▶ Powerprep
- ▶ Take it as soon as possible (Aug-early Sept in 7th sem is ideal)
 - ▶ A good score: 160+ in Quant, 155+ in Verbal
 - ▶ A very good score: 165+ in Quant, 160+ in Verbal
 - ▶ A great score: 170 in Quant, 165+ in Verbal
- ▶ Some schools have cutoffs
- ▶ Not very important to the top-ranked colleges, more important to others

TOEFL

- ▶ Just a basic test of your English skills
- ▶ Not tough after you've prepared for GRE
- ▶ Practice the listening and speaking, because those sections weren't covered in the GRE
- ▶ Try to get a good speaking score, because it'll help you apply for TAships (>24)
- ▶ Some colleges have cutoffs
- ▶ Aim for a 115+
- ▶ For this and GRE, take into account time needed to send scores (get them in before the deadline!)

WHAT DID THE BUFFALO SAY TO
HIS SON WHEN HE LEFT FOR COLLEGE?



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Statement of Purpose

- ▶ Very important!
- ▶ It's really hard to make your SOP stand out from an ocean of applications. Find your USP and highlight it.
- ▶ Don't let it be a list of projects, but talk about the things you've done that you're really proud of and passionate about
- ▶ A fine balance between technicality and personality.
- ▶ Tell them things they can't see in your transcript/resume, like why you did a project in a certain way, or something that really excited you while you were working
- ▶ Show growth, curiosity, flexibility

SOP - Continued

- ▶ Tailor it to the university! You have to make sure they think you're a good fit, not just a good student.
- ▶ Get inputs from as many people as possible, particularly your seniors.
- ▶ Try not to look at others' SOPs/online advice initially, until you have a good working draft. It'll limit your creativity.
- ▶ Never lie (here or in your resume!). The admissions committees can always tell.
- ▶ Avoid clichés like “I've been passionate about this since grade school”, etc.
- ▶ Make them want to keep reading
- ▶ Have a GREAT conclusion

Letters of Recommendation (LORs)

- ▶ Arguably the most important aspect of your application
- ▶ Plan ahead! Try to get referrers who will write you a great one (and won't make you write it yourself).
- ▶ Diversity is always appreciated (internships as well as college) – but don't send extra!
- ▶ Always better if the referrer has a PhD
- ▶ The better they know you, the more weight their letter has

LORs - Continued

- ▶ Make sure you tell them what you want them to mention (your rank, etc)
- ▶ Quote examples. A list of adjectives (intelligent, passionate, hard-working) should be backed up by concrete instances where they've seen those qualities in you
- ▶ Be specific: instead of saying “does well in class”, say “is in the top 5% of his/her class of 60”
- ▶ Publications add weight

Choosing colleges

- ▶ Rank, program, faculty, location, funding
- ▶ The number of places you can apply to may be limited by your funds or number of LORs, so apply smart
- ▶ Be ambitious, but also be realistic
- ▶ Have at least one safe school, but apply ambitiously – you never know!
- ▶ Split-up between ambitious, moderate and safe (4-4-2)
- ▶ Talk to people who know about these places: faculty, or seniors who are currently doing grad studies abroad
- ▶ Visa may be a cause for concern, so you could consider Canada, Germany, etc.

MS vs PhD

- ▶ Are you sure you're ready?
- ▶ Area of interest
- ▶ Research potential
- ▶ Talk to seniors!



College Student @CollegeStudent · May 30

Thank you so much, student loans. I don't know how I will ever repay you.



2.1K



3K



Funding

- ▶ Not always easy to get
- ▶ Fellowships > RAships > TAships (desirability)
- ▶ Offered after the first semester
- ▶ Some places offer a tuition waiver, insurance and stipend
- ▶ Some places offer partial scholarship
- ▶ Look into it in advance, US education is very expensive!
- ▶ Places like Canada are cheaper, so you may want to consider applying there as well.

Waiting and Rejections

- ▶ Almost as bad as the tension of applying
- ▶ Stay strong!
- ▶ Having a safe school will always make you feel better
- ▶ Rejections are a part of the process for everyone
- ▶ Just try to make sure you have a failsafe: a job, or a place you know they'll let you intern for a year. These things will strengthen your application the next time you apply.

Conclusion

- ▶ Applications are based on a LOT of things: GPA, SOP, Recos, etc etc.
- ▶ Put your best effort in, and make sure your guides know you're working hard. It'll pay off.
- ▶ Contact seniors! They can help you a lot.
- ▶ Let me know if you have any questions!

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