Applying to grad school in the life sciences: some unasked for advice

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Why go to grad school?

- Some jobs require higher degrees
  - Academia, industry, gov. jobs
- Be useful in another career
  - patent law, business
- Not always a good idea
  - pays poorly, stressful, long
  - academia is a tough gig

How to choose a program

- Do lots of googling
- Read
- Apply to several
- Multiple faculty of interest?
- Other students/pdocs?
- Curriculum
- Funding
- Location
- Alumni success rates

How a program chooses you

- GREs
  - higher good, but don’t stress details
- GPA
  - see above
- Letters of rec
- CV
- Publications, research experience
- Writing statement (do you suck?)
- Interview (yes it’s an interview)

Funding

- You shouldn’t pay
- Who does (program, PI)?
- What does it cost (tuition, out of state, etc.)?
- What are your options?
  - rotations, RA, TA, grants
- Find & apply for fellowships

How to choose a lab

- Other people in lab
- Research interests (read)
- Funding
- Project details (flexibility, funding, wet bench, computer)
- Expectations of students?
  - work hours, papers, funding, supervision, etc.

How to choose a lab

- Publication rate
- Alumni success (industry, academia)
- Other resources (lab, office space)

Talk to People

- Get to know their work (read)
- Talk to potential PIs
  - Email, Skype etc.
  - Avoid form emails
  - Ask questions of PI, lab members

Letters of Recommendation

- You'll need ≥3
- Find someone who knows you
- Cultivate letter writers
- Ask ahead of time
- Don't offer bribes

Read some papers

- Why read?
- Google Scholar
  - search for papers
  - cited papers
- What authorship means, why it matters
- Slow speed of science

Other advice

- Learn to program (R)
- Learn to publish w/o data
- Write. Every day if possible
- Take most awesome notes
- Read. Lots
- Plan ahead, set goals (timeline)
- You’re on your own
  - stand up for yourself
  - you’re responsible to get stuff done