Project Proposal: GradU

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Introduction

Far fewer students apply to graduate programs than undergraduate ones, and as is such, finding information about graduate programs online can be a difficult and daunting task. GradU will address this issue by providing a virtual information and review board for graduate programs across the country, allowing undergraduate prospects to conduct preliminary research about graduate schools to refine their application process.

Purpose

Our software, GradU, will provide a comprehensive online database and review platform for graduate school programs and graduate school applicants' profiles. Our software targets prospective graduate school students who want to learn more about and ultimately apply to graduate level programs, as well as current/past graduate school students who want to review their programs and share their application profiles and results. Additionally, GradU will scrape and compile some general background information for each graduate program it features. For instance, it will display facts such as tuition and average program length to the user. GradU's combined database of general information as well as program reviews will aid prospective graduate students, particularly undergraduate juniors and seniors, to conduct research about schools that interest them and will enable them to refine their graduate program search.

Targeted Users

The targeted user group for GradU is *anyone* who is seeking to apply to graduate programs in U.S. institutions or anyone currently enrolled in such a program who wishes to review it. Particularly, we have identified the following sub-groups in the two categories:

1) Applicants:
    a) Undergraduate students
    b) Graduate students
    c) Working professionals
    d) Others
2) Reviewers:
    a) Current students in graduate schools
    b) Past alumni

These users also vary in the degrees they are pursuing. The programs we have identified are the following:

1) Master degree programs
2) PhD degree programs
3) Professional degree programs (e.g. law schools and medical schools)

Problems

We identified users' needs in the following areas:

1) Difficulties in finding the information about specific graduate programs, instead of the university itself.
2) Avoiding an overwhelming amount of research when trying to find PhD advisors in their areas of interest.
3) Identifying the career trajectories of the graduate programs (e.g. industry, job positions, average salaries, etc.)
4) Evaluating themselves compared to past applicants; in other words, determining how strong an application needs to be.

Key Features

To meet users' needs, the key features of GradU are:

For Applicants:

1) Program search: users can filter by district, program offered, tuition, application requirements, program size, etc. and get general information regarding the program as well as the reviews.
2) Lab search: a program-specific, community contributed database collecting information about labs in all universities, where users can search and filter by university, school, subject, professor, points of contact, and specific area.
3) Professor search: a program-specific, community contributed database collecting information about professors, their openings, areas of interests, CVs, email addresses, and h-index/Google Scholar/ResearchGate page.
4) Discussion forum (applicants): users can discuss applications, school matching, and other application related questions/topics.
5) Profile gallery (applicants): users can check the past applicants' application material, school list, and their application results in the online database.

For Reviewers:

6) School reviews: reviewers may post their own reviews to the program they are currently enrolling in/enrolled.
7) Discussion forum (reviewers): reviewers can post about their current position, allowing users to build connections.
8) Profile gallery (reviewers): users can anonymously post their application material, school list, and their application results.