

Applying to Graduate School: Answers to FAQs

Marine and Natural Sciences

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Background and Opening Remarks

- Taylor professional training background:
 - B.A. Biology (Bucknell University, PA)
 - M.S. Marine Science (North Carolina State University, NC)
 - Ph.D. Oceanography (University of Rhode Island, RI)
 - Postdoc. Marine Ecology (Rutgers University, NJ)
- Mattaini professional training background:
 - B.S. Chemistry (Providence College, RI)
 - Postbac. Fellowship (National Cancer Institute, MD)
 - Ph.D. Biology (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MA)
 - Postdoc. Bio Research & Teaching (Tufts University, MA)

Background and Opening Remarks

- Miscellaneous points:
 - Origin of presentation
 - Not all grad programs are structured the same
 - “Fact” vs. “Opinion”
 - Seek input from other faculty and people in positions of interest
 - Request presentation by emailing dtaylor@rwu.edu, or access via the MNS Seminar Series website:

<https://www.rwu.edu/academics/schools-and-colleges/fssns/mns-seminar-series>

Should I go to grad school?

- But, consider the following:
- What are your short- and long-term career goals?

Should I take time off before going to grad school?

- No right answer. It's a personal decision.
- Advantages of taking time off before grad school:
 - Recharge batteries
 - Better define areas of interest
 - More experience to improve application
 - Devote more time and focus to applications
 - Earn a more substantial income and pay off student loans?
- Advantages of starting grad school right away:
 - Maintain “academic momentum”
 - The quicker you start, the quicker you'll finish – maybe?

Should I pursue a Masters (MS) or Doctorate (Ph.D.)?

	Time	Credits	Expectations
MS	2-3 yr	42 credits (12 research)	1 manuscript
PhD	4-7 yr	72-75 credits (30 research)	>1 manuscript

Job prospects

MS	Improves research, analytical, and computational skills In <u>some</u> fields: Expands job opportunities (industry, education, government); Prepare for a PhD
PhD	Preparation for academia; High level positions in industry and government

What is the structure of grad programs in my field?

- Option 1: Enter grad school with advisor identified:
 - Often includes programs in:
 - Ecology & evolution
 - Organismal biology
 - Some chemistry programs
- Option 2: Enter program first & identify advisor later
 - Often includes programs in:
 - Cell & molecular biology
 - Some chemistry programs
 - Math
- Check far ahead for any programs that interest you

What's important when identifying grad schools?

- Quality of school/department
- Research advisor:
 - Type of research conducted in lab
 - Productivity of lab (grants, publications, presentations)
 - Success of grad students (see above, job market)
 - Average length of MS/PhD
 - Advisor and lab personality
- Funding opportunities
- Geography

OPTION 1: Should I contact potential grad advisor(s)

- Why?
 - Learn more about program and advisor's research interests
 - Identify advisor's interest and willingness to accept new students
 - Have an important advocate for your grad application
- What?
 - Initial communication:
 - Identify your interests and how they complement advisor's lab
 - Ask if they are accepting students the following year
 - Later communications:
 - Funding availability
 - Possible projects

OPTION 1: Should I contact potential grad advisor(s)

- How?

- Brief email (attach CV)
 - Phone call
 - Campus visit
 - Meet advisor, other faculty, and students
 - Gives valuable insight into people and place
 - Note: Some programs/schools cover visitation expense
- Be prepared for no response



- When?

- Start in summer and early fall of senior year
- Too early = advisor doesn't know if they are accepting students
- Too late = advisor has made a commitment to another student

What's considered in a grad school application?

- GPA

> 3.0 (> 3.5 preferred)



- Research experience

- Courses taken

- GRE

Almost always “General”

Sometimes “Subject”

- Personal statement

- Letters of recommendation:

Typically 3 are required

- Connections:

“It's not what you know, but who you know that's important.”

- RESEARCH ADVISOR (OPTION 1)

Need a research advisor to accept you into a lab

FAQ about the GRE

- What is it?
 - Graduate Record Examination = computer-based, standardized exam (offered monthly at designated testing centers)
 - Admissions requirement for many schools
- Do all grad schools require the GRE?
 - Majority require “General” GRE, but trend toward “optional” testing
 - Some others also require “Subject” GRE (e.g. *Biology*)
- How important is the GRE?
 - Varies greatly across schools and programs, ranging from: (i) not required, (ii) mere formality, or (iii) important selection factor

FAQ about the GRE, continued

- What's tested on the GRE?
 - Verbal Reasoning (2 sections, 20 ques each, 30 min per section)
 - Quantitative Reasoning (2 sections, 20 ques each, 35 min per section)
 - Analytical Writing (2 essays, 1 hour total, external review)
 - Experimental (1 section)
- Can you study for the GRE?
 - Yes – review of math and vocabulary?
 - Yes – develop comfort level with test!
 - Test prep courses are not necessary. Borrow test prep books from a library for free!

FAQ about the GRE, continued

- How much does the GRE cost?
 - Usual fee is \$205
 - Those who meet criteria of demonstrated financial need can apply for a 50% Fee Reduction Voucher:
<https://www.ets.org/gre/subject/register/fees/reduction/>
 - On test day, you can select 4 programs to receive your scores. Each additional score report (ordered later) is \$27
- Note:
 - Many grad programs may also have an application fee waiver for those with demonstrated financial need!

FAQ about the GRE, continued

- What's a good score on the GRE?
 - 60th percentile = Fair
 - 80th percentile = Good
 - 90th percentile = Very good
- Should I retake the GRE if I am not satisfied with my score?
 - Yes, but consider the cost
- Should I send my GRE scores to a grad school?
 - GRE scores will need to be submitted to a grad school to complete your application package
 - But, recommendation is to send scores after you know exam outcome (this comes at an additional cost)

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http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/powerprep2/

The screenshot shows the ETS POWERPREP website for GRE General Test preparation. The main heading is "POWERPREP® Practice Tests: Preparation for the GRE® General Test". Below this, there is a navigation menu with "General Test" selected. The page content includes a section titled "help you" with a sub-heading "About the Test". The text describes the test's purpose: "to gain familiarity with the various question types" and "to understand scoring". A "view Tool (FREE)" button is visible, along with a "Test Preview Tool" button. The footer contains "System Requirements" and "Test Services" links.

General Timeline

Take GRE

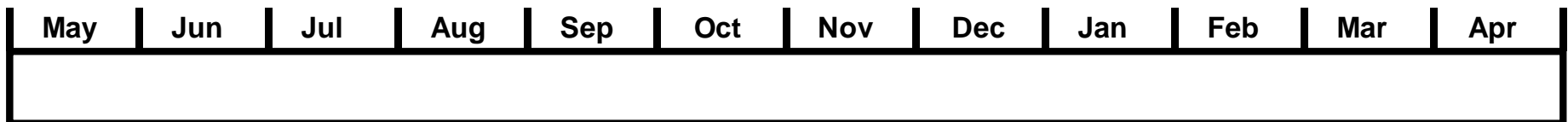
Research schools

Contact grad advisors (Option 1)

Visit grad schools

Applications due

Decision



Note: Timelines vary across disciplines and schools.
Check your programs of interest for exact schedule and deadlines.