Fundamentals of Applying to Grad School

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My story

- CS undergrad @ Harvard
- 1 year internship at IBM Research
- “Mixed results” applying to grad school!
- PhD admit to Berkeley, only did MS
- Transfered to Wisconsin for PhD
- Faculty position at Berkeley
Why Grad School?

☐ Career development
☐ research, teaching, tech leadership
☐ Fascination/Fun

☐ Alternatives?
☐ short- and long-term...
M.S or Ph.D.

- MS: 1-2 years. Two flavors:
  - Professional MS (e.g. Stanford)
  - “Research MS”
- PhD: 4-7 years
  - MS typical along the way
  - Better if you love it!
Getting into grad school

☐ Try to imagine you're a professor on the admissions committee
The “ideal candidate”

☐ Has already demonstrated they’ll succeed in graduate school

☐ published research papers

☐ influenced other scientists of note

☐ Your goal:

☐ approximate this ideal

☐ stand out from the pile
Note what wasn’t there

- Highest GPA, best GRE score, etc.
- Not that these don’t matter
  - just evidence of research ability
  - better to have the real deal
  - don’t obsess about the numbers
Safe Moves

- Do well in school, get good scores
  - especially in the major
  - GPA > A- (3.7?)
- Take advanced courses in areas you'd like to pursue in grad school
- LEARN TO WRITE & SPEAK WELL!
Smart Moves

☐ Remember the ideal!

☐ Get involved in research
  ☐ Approach your favorite instructors and TAs
  ☐ Tinker
  ☐ Look into URAP, etc
  ☐ Prioritize research time!

☐ Take graduate courses

☐ Summer internships (esp. in Research!)
Applying

- Apply lots of places
  - Randomness in the process
  - You hope to choose among a few
  - “Stretch” and “safety”
Get Good Letters of Rec

☐ You need Profs who know you

☐ See “Smart Moves” above!

☐ Question: “Would you be able to write me a strong letter of rec to grad school? I’m considering <School X>, for example.”

☐ You want genuine feedback
Rec Letter Code Phrases

- “More promising than Richard Karp was at this age!”
- “One of the best students I’ve worked with in years”
- “A top student in my CS186 class”
- “Bright and enthusiastic”
Other app stuff

- GREs should be good (90's?)
- Importance of verbal varies widely
- Statement of purpose
  - HAS to be clear and organized.
  - Safe: describe one technical topic in some detail
  - Personal details can help, if they’re really interesting
  - Whimsical things work only if they’re truly superb
  - Usually not worth the risk in engineering
Reaching out

- It is appropriate to approach a faculty member or two at a school you’ve applied to.
- MUCH better if you get an intro from a prof or grad student here.
- Don’t be disappointed if you get the cold shoulder.
After You Hear

- Rejected? It’s not personal!
- In fact, it’s more random than you may imagine
- Don’t let this slow you down in life.

- How to choose among accepts?
  - Visit
  - Work the gossip grapevine: faculty and students
  - Goal: happy and successful
Happiness

- Will school X make you happy?
  - the "feel"
  - size
  - location/setting
  - Intense vs. laid-back
  - good people in your area of interest
    - faculty
    - fellow students!
Success

- Good people in your area of interest
- Are you sure what that is?
- Better to have >1 choice of advisor
- How have grads of that school done in their careers?
- Ask for examples!
Many EECS schools pay for you to live & study.

Don’t choose your graduate school based on a difference of a few K$

You will make 100’s of these every year soon enough.
Have you considered Berkeley?

- Mixed message:
  - Healthier to go somewhere new
  - Though ... if you’re the best, this is probably the best place for you...

- [http://www.eecs.berkeley.edu/Gradadm](http://www.eecs.berkeley.edu/Gradadm)