Is grad school for me?

Are you fascinated with

– building what was thought impossible?
– clarifying what was not understood?
– teaching or technological leadership?

Do you want to work on an influential project?
or even start a cool new one

Gain qualifications for advanced tech work
MS or Ph.D.

**MS:** 1-2 years. Two flavors:

- Professional MS (soon at Berkeley, too)
- “Research MS”

**PhD:** 4-7 years

- MS typical along the way
- Better if you love it!
Is grad school for me?

How do I know if PhD is for me?

Try it. Dropping out is not a failure.

It's just like changing jobs and getting a raise.

Grad students usually funded from a grant

Tuition + salary of roughly $2000+/month.

More in summer during internship.
My history

undergrad, Tech. Univ. in Kosice, Slovakia

PhD in Computer Science at Univ. of Pittsburgh

Assistant professor at Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison

Accepted a UC Berkeley faculty position in 2002
My application mistakes

• Not enough undergrad research
• No letters from recognized people
• No real statement of purpose
Applying to grad school

A stellar candidate:

- Published a paper in a top conference as a first author
- Impressed her advisor

This advice best taken at the end of sophomore year

- Should start research very early (> 1.5 years before applying)
- Take the relevant upper-level course in 4th semester
- And find advisor during this course or right after
From my experience, standards vary

In some schools,

excellence demonstrated in course projects will suffice

Some research areas more competitive than others

in some areas in top schools, a published paper is a must
Safe Moves

Do well in school, get good scores
  – especially in the major
  – GPA > A- (3.7?)

Specialize a little bit
  – Get ready for your grad school area

LEARN TO WRITE & SPEAK WELL!
Smart Moves

Remember the ideal the applicant!

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!)
Your application

Ideal candidates

Demonstrated they’ll succeed in graduate school
Published research papers

Your goal:

approximate this ideal
stand out from the pile
Less important

Highest GPA, best GRE score, etc.

Not that these don’t matter
  – evidence of research ability more important
  – don’t obsess about the numbers
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
Selecting a school

- Go to the Department Visit Day
  - It will a few weeks before you need to decide
- Talk to students, professors
- Find a match for your interest
- When deciding, listen to your heart
  - Not to a few $k
Evaluating a school

• Good people in your area of interest
  – Are you sure what this area is?
  – Better to have >1 choice of advisor

• How have grads of that school done in their careers?
  – Ask for examples!

• Are students happy there?
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...