Getting into Graduate School

HOST: Russ Coughenour
SPEAKER: Donald Asher
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Should You Go?

- Passion
- Specialization
- Required for Career
- Income Goes Up,
  Unemployment Goes Down
- Creeping Credentialism
- IQ
Start with Your Target

- Narrow and specific, if possible

- Specificity + Flexibility = Admission
Build List of 20+ Schools

- Faculty
- www.petersons.com
- The Scholar’s Way
Specialty Guides

1. AIP’s Graduate Programs in Physics, Astronomy, and Related Fields
2. APA’s Graduate Study in Psychology
3. AAMC’s Medical School Admissions Requirements: U.S. and Canada
4. Boston College Law School Locator
1/3 Safe or Likely
1/3 Probably Maybe
1/3 Reach or Miracle

at least 2 safe...
Exams
GRE General Exam

- Graduate Record Examination (ETS)
- www.gre.org
- CAT
- Offered hundreds of times per year
- Scheduled to change Aug 2011
- General: Verbal, Quantitative, Writing
  scores good 5 years
GRE Subject Exams

- Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Computer Science
- Literature in English
- Mathematics
- Physics
- Psychology
GRE Subject Exams

*NOT* offered all the time

- October
- November
- April
LSAT

http://www.lsac.org/JD/LSAT

Offered 4 times year:
	June
	October
	December
	February
MCAT

www.aamc.org/mcat

- Offered about 25 times year
- Spring/early summer is highly recommended

scores generally good 3 years
GMAT

www.mba.com

- CAT
- New test design release 2012
- Offered 100s of times per year
- Scores generally accepted for 5 years
- NOTE: GRE accepted by hundreds of B schools now
PCAT

www.pcatweb.info

Pharmacy College Admission Test

Offered 4 times year

June
August
October
January
The Calendar

See video...
Four Main Ways to Stand Out

1. Correspond
2. Visit
3. Research/writing/work Sample
4. Faculty intervention
Selection Criteria

- Grades
- Scores
- Essay
- Recommendations
- Research/writing/work Sample
- Resume or CV
- Visit or Interview
Grades

Ways to think and talk about grades
Scores

- How to Make Scores Better
- The 4 Saturdays Model
- How to Make Scores *Look* Better
Best Strategies for Testing

- Go in expecting a certain score
- 10 hours to 30 hours prep
- *Make your first attempt your best attempt*

When to retake
True Test Anxiety

Anxiety is a clinical mental disorder

Symptoms:
- Disorientation
- Heart palpitations
- “Cold” sweats
- Shallowness of breath
- Disruption of sense of time
- Catatonia
Valid Reasons GRE May Not Reveal Your Academic Potential

- Narrow expertise
- Plan laboratory or field research
- Work harder than other people
- Very high IQ
- True test anxiety
- Did not grow up speaking English
- First generation college student
Concerning my GRE score: I believe that my score does not reveal my true potential as an academic performer because (a) I did not grow up speaking English at home, and some of the non-scientific references in the test were confusing to me, (b) my academic career has featured extensive laboratory experience, which this test is clearly not designed to measure, and (c) I have perhaps too deliberative a thinking style, while it seems to me the test works better if one is quick and even somewhat careless when unsure of an answer.
I feel that my GPA in the sciences, my strong recommendations, and my McNair research project (see Writing Sample) are better indicators of the kind of work I will be doing in graduate school. Thank you for your consideration.

Give them solid reasons to believe in you!
WARNING

- May be flexible: GRE
- Usually not flexible: MCAT & LSAT
- GMAT: varies
Essays

- Customize
- Customize
- Customize
Essay Tips

- Public, academic document
- Use graduate-level language
- The Academizer
Essay Tips

- As much about the future as the past
- Consider featuring a particular experience…
- Write with confidence, with an upbeat tone
- Predict your own success
- Link graduate study to career ideas; the big three:
  - Original research in the field
  - Instructor of next generation of students
  - Consult, contribute to private industry, government, policy…
Essays

- Sell your educational experiences
- Mini-abstracts of scholarly work...
More Essay Tips

- QUOTES: En-COURAGE-ing Words
  (in particular for law and medicine)
- No more than 10-30% personal
Names that Belong in Essay

- Faculty at the targeted institution
- Your mentors and advisors
- Major theorists in your field
Most Prestigious Undergraduate Experiences

- Extended independent research project resulting in a written work
- Independent study with “A”
- Publications, presentations at academic meetings
- Research assistant to professor
- Tutor, teaching assistant, test proctor
- Residence hall advisor
- Admissions tour guide
More Essay Tips

“Gonna do”

Bold opening lines…

Big Finish
Special Cases

- Faculty champion
- Provisional admit
- Special admit
- Recruited category (underrepresented minority or gender, first-generation or low-income, all of the above...)

Stop self-selecting out! Look for the graduate program where you belong and go for it!
Right Way to Deal with Adversity

- Show drive and triumph over challenges, not victimhood.
- Unemotional, matter of fact.
- Brief, a sentence, or a paragraph at most.
- Then, get back to showing how you have prepared yourself to succeed in the graduate program, and afterwards.
- Famous disasters …
What They Want

- Unusual
- Thoughtful
- Mature
- Well prepared
- Going to succeed anyway
What MBA Programs Like

- 2-6 years experience with major employer (Fortune 1000 or High Profile)
- Rapid promotions
- High income for age

Note

- You could have your Ph.D. faster
What Medical Schools Like

- Early applications
- MCAT over threshold minimums
- Clinical experience involving bodily fluids
- Recommendations from doctors
  - Letter of recommendation or
  - Quote in essay

Note
- M.D./Ph.D. is a free ride
What Law Schools Like

- Grades and LSAT above minimums
- Realistic understanding of law as a career
  (remember, litigators in court < 5% of time)
- Experience in a law firm!
  (easy access points: plaintiffs firms, criminal defense firms, public defenders offices, legal aid services)
- Recommendations from lawyers
  - Letter of recommendation or
  - Quote in essay
- Note: High borrowings/70% dissatisfaction
Final Thoughts…

Rule of Threes:
- Three drafts
- Do three schools *before* you send the first one
- Get three reviewers, at least one a faculty member

Remember the “gonna do,” i.e., all that you’ll learn or do between applying and showing up at the grad program

Customize, customize, customize
Final Final Thoughts re Essays

Make it *PERFECT*!

- Grammar, spelling, syntax, semantics, punctuation, consistency of style
- Better to be perfect and slightly less ambitious in essay than to have a single error
Stop asking for them!
Portfolio
Advertise due date
Will they be a faculty champion for you?
Card and gift
Let them know what happened!
If We Have Time

How to Pay for All This

- Graduate Assistantships
- Fellowships & Grants
- Waivers
- Loans (Stafford - $20,500)
- Business & Law School for Free
- Med School for Free