Keys to Grad School Apps

Planners’ Writing Exchange - Fall 2012
My qualifications

- I’m a two-time grad school applicant!
  - PhD Econ programs
  - Master of Urban Planning programs
- Applications met with varying success
  - So, I have an idea of what works & what doesn’t
- I’m now a (funded) grad student!
  - I’ve been where you are
  - And I am where you want to go (kind of)
Why Grad School?

• What is your motivation to apply?
• Where are you heading?
• How do you envision grad school helping you get there?
Are you ready?

- Academically
  - Relevant coursework
  - Advanced reading & communication skills
- Personally
  - Stress management
  - Maturity level
- Financially
  - Debt?
How to choose a program?

- Faculty interests
- Funding
- Department culture
  - Are its students happy?
  - Teaching, research, mentoring opportunities
How to choose a program?

- Connection to other departments within the University
- Career goals & outcomes of current students
- Location
  - Distance from family, spousal considerations, climate, etc.
  - Informs research of faculty and post-grad professional opportunities—particularly true in Urban Planning
Applications!

- Admissions committee
- 5-15 junior and senior faculty (sometimes a student)
- Read in advance and discussed at a meeting
- Decisions usually made democratically with some discretion of the program director
Applications!

- Elements
  - Personal statement
  - Recommendations
  - Academic record
  - GRE
- Experience (resume)
Recommendations

- Ask at least a few months in advance
- Who to ask?
  - Professors
  - Professional supervisors
  - PhDs who had you in class or advised you in research (if you have to)
- Follow-up with your recommenders
- Stay in touch with potential recommenders if not applying immediately

It’s important they know you well.
Personal Statement

- Tell a story (or two)
  - That connects your experience to planning
  - Show what you’ve done and how you did it (HTWF example)
- Be clear about your career goals
  - Why will this program help you accomplish them?
- Tell how you fit with the department
  - Mention faculty, research centers, or concentrations
Personal Statement

- Potentially address flaws in your application
- Follow guidelines pertaining to length (usually 1-2 pages)
- Ask someone to review it
  - Professor
  - Graduate student
  - PWE!
- Let’s look at one of my personal statements
GRE

- Study!
  - Purchase workbooks, both general and math/verbal specific
  - At least 1-2 months leading up to test
  - Practice tests, practice tests, practice tests!
  - Sign up for a class (if affordable and if you learn well in such a setting)
  - Take it twice if you have to
Grad school resume

- Probably will differ from your professional resume
  - Style varies depending on professional/academic nature of program

- Highlight what the graduate program would value
  - Significant/relevant professional work
  - Academic research
  - Unique experiences: volunteer work or study abroad

- Utilize your resources: PWE or Career Services
Questions?

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