

Best Sources to Learn about Graduate Programs

Professors

This is your best source. Professors know you, they know which programs favor students from your school, they know the relative quality of graduate programs in their fields, and they even have personal friends at graduate programs where you might like to apply.

Other Students and Alumni

Students and alumni have similar information. Alumni at graduate programs will give you the most honest information about the quality of the program and the faculty.

Peterson's Guides

Peterson's guides have every accredited program in the United States. They're a little dense and boring, but if you want to learn about programs there's no other complete resource. All major university libraries have a full set of Peterson's guides.

Specialty Guides

Find specialty guides for your field, for example, *Graduate Programs in Neurosciences*, by asking professors for reference to them, by using the subject search engine at amazon.com, or by using the subject search engine on CD from *Books in Print*, available from your university bookstore. Some associations also print guides to graduate programs. Find out about them by looking up the association's HQ phone number in the *Encyclopedia of Associations*; then just call them and ask them.

Academic Journals in Your Field

Top students should get grad school ideas directly from the academic journals. The best programs generate the best and the most articles, so look in the journals for writing and/or research that interest you. Then find out where the article writer teaches.

Research-Doctorate Programs in the United States

This is the best source for unbiased, multivariable analysis of graduate programs. It is the result of a National Research Council-funded study, limited to the top programs in 41 major subject areas. This is a much more sophisticated resource than the "beauty pageant" unilinear rankings of business magazines (see below).

Educational Rankings Annual

A compendium of data from other sources. Expensive, but can be very useful. Check your library.

The Gourman Report

Another "ranking" book, with methodologies that are never fully explicated. Can be useful.

The Business Magazine Rankings

Business magazines are in the business of selling business magazines. Their editors usually know less about higher education than they know about automobiles, which is not a lot. These "rankings" are not useful *per se*, but you can get ideas to investigate further.

World Wide Web (www)

Online data are voluminous but shallow, and can be downright misleading (for example, some sites list schools in order of having paid a subscription fee). Use the Web to investigate schools you're already interested in, in this order: university-department-faculty-specific faculty member's research interests-his or her advisees (i.e., currently enrolled graduate students). Also, watch carefully for information on related labs and institutes, which might interest you more than the main department.

Grad Fairs

One of the only places to meet a lot of graduate professionals quickly, but don't fall in love on the first date! Check out other schools.

Writing Exercises

for the

Graduate Admissions Essay, Statement of Purpose, or Letter of Intent

Answer each question with a narrative essay of any length, from a paragraph to several pages, whatever feels right.

1. How did you first get interested in this field of study? Can you remember the very first time you had this interest?
2. What has influenced this interest over time? What professors, classes, labs, papers, research projects, books or ideas have influenced you? What out-of-class experiences have influenced you?
3. If your interest has changed over time, how has your prior interest contributed to your understanding of/approach to your current interest?
4. Make a list of all your undergraduate papers, labs, and research projects. If you cannot remember their exact names, approximate or paraphrase.
5. Do you have any publications or presentations at academic conferences? Are there publications you can submit or any academic conferences you can attend (in any capacity) between now and when you would begin your graduate studies?
6. What will you do between now and when you will arrive at your graduate institution? Which classes will you take? What skills will you acquire? What internship, work or community service experiences will you complete?
7. How have you researched your graduate school options to date? Have you visited schools, researched them on Web sites, written to professors, attended conferences?
8. Can you remember encouraging words you have received from professors, employers, coaches, or peers? If others have encouraged you to pursue your goals, can you remember, as exactly as you can, what they said to you? If so, make a list of quotes.
9. What is your GPA in the following categories: overall, year by year, over the last four completed semesters, in your major, since you declared your current major, in math and sciences, not counting math and sciences, not counting semesters abroad, etc.? Look at your transcripts and see if there are other ways of analyzing your GPA that might be of interest to admissions readers.
10. How have you prepared yourself for success in graduate school? What body of relevant knowledge will you take with you? What study or laboratory skills will help you succeed? What personal attributes will help you?
11. Have you overcome adversity to get where you are? (Be brief.)
12. What makes you unique or unusual? List several things.
13. What are your leisure activities? What do you do when you are not being a student? What do you do to relieve stress?
14. How might you contribute to the academic community you intend to join? How will that community be benefited by association with you?
15. Can you name specific professors of interest at your top three graduate programs? If so, list them along with their research/academic specialties.
16. What will you do with this degree? Will you teach, do research, work in industry or government? All of the above? (If you don't know, don't invent.)

Questions to ask any graduate program:

1. What do you teach here?
2. What is the largest and the most typical class size for a graduate class? Are classes restricted to graduate students or are undergraduates common in your graduate classes?
3. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of going to grad school immediately after completing the undergraduate program? The advantages and disadvantages of waiting a few years? The best use of the interim time?
4. What are the criteria and process for selecting teaching assistants, research assistants, and fellows?
5. I will probably need financial assistance. Can you tell me how most students fund their studies here?
6. Will I get to develop my own topics, or will I be expected to work on a professor's ongoing research?
7. What is the mean time to complete (a) class work, (b) research, (c) dissertation? (I.e., what is the mean time to complete the Ph.D.? Ask about the program as a whole, but perhaps more importantly, *by professor.*)
8. What is your attrition rate? Of those who don't finish, what are their reasons?
9. What kind of student thrives in your program?
10. How reliable is your financial support year to year? Is the first-year offer always sustained given attainment of academic goals?
11. What is the age, race, gender balance, ratio of married/single, and geographical origin of graduate students in the program? (In other words: Are there any other people like me?)
12. May I have some bibliographies of recent publications by faculty? Which professors have won awards and grants lately (and presumably need graduate assistants)? [Or do this on your own before the meeting!]
13. Can you tell me about your placement rates and types of jobs obtained by recent graduates? (*Avoid* relying on testimonials and anecdotal evidence.)
14. May I meet some currently enrolled students (in person or via phone or email)? (Be sure to ask about their research topics and *be sure to take notes on specific profs mentioned.*)
15. How can I be a strong candidate for a program like this?

Adapted from *Graduate Admissions Essays* by Donald Asher (Ten Speed Press, 2000)

1-800-841-BOOK or www.amazon.com

Donald Asher, Asher Associates, San Francisco, 415-543-7130, don@donaldasher.com

Why you need to apply early and to several programs:

(these are actual cases)

- One student was rejected because her portfolio was “accidentally placed on the wrong pile.” The graduate school discovered its mistake later in the season, but had already sent the student a rejection letter. Rather than admit what had happened, they let the decision stand.
- A student applying for a Ph.D. in philosophy received a letter from a major university rejecting his application for a Ph.D. in Germanic languages.
- A student was rejected by an internationally acclaimed architecture program after his portfolio was reviewed by Prof. X. When he called to inquire about the status of his application, Prof. Y picked up his portfolio, glanced through it while the student was on hold, and reversed the decision of Prof X. Thus was he admitted.
- One professor forgot to mail a wonderful letter of recommendation he had written for his favorite advisee, and she was rejected.
- Another professor was not granted tenure, and stopped performing all duties whatsoever that were not contractually required. This included writing letters of recommendation *that he had already agreed to write*. At least one of his advisees was not admitted to a graduate program because of this. The student never knew what happened.
- A student failed to send original transcripts from a community college she attended while in high school. The transfer grades from the community college appeared on her regular college transcript but, through a bizarre chain of events, an overzealous student employee and a 50 cent library fine from six years prior conspired to keep her out of graduate school.
- A student had a wonderful exchange of letters with a department chair, some of which included such statements as “We’re so delighted that you will be joining us next year.” Nevertheless, she was rejected by the graduate school office, which had more authority than the department.

Statement of Purpose Pre-Writing Exercise:

Build a Table of Undergraduate Research Projects

Suggestions:

- list projects in order of interest to your targeted reader
- use working titles to describe your research projects
- name your professor/advisor/supervisor

Sample Undergraduate Research Projects

- Designed original research into the ultrafiltration of proteins, including developing a theoretical model for design, design and actual prototyping of cross-flow ultrafiltration unit, and experimentation to determine optimal settings for maximal permeate flux. A Biochemical Engineering Laboratory senior project under the direction of Prof. L. Hintzer.
- Designed a stream remediation project involving liquid-liquid extraction to remove *m*-xylene from contaminated water; also used EPA QUAL2E to model the effects of DO, BOD, and Nitrogen cycle, under the guidance of Prof. L. Hintzer.
- Conducted research into mathematical models of potential use for codifying chaotic systems such as watersheds, an independent study under NSF grant supervised by Prof. P. Cenczynksy. Abstract and draft findings available at <http://www.HarveyMudd.edu/~czynsky/models2.html>.
- Designed and conducted original research into quantitative and qualitative properties of a meteorite sample using atomic absorption spectrophotometry, emission spectrophotometry, induction coupled plasma, and laser spectrophotometry under the direction of Prof. R. Hull-Wallace. Results presented at the Argonne National Laboratory during annual meeting of the International Association of Amateur Astronomers, 2003.

This is not just for science students! Similar descriptions can be written about papers and projects in the liberal arts and other fields, e.g., “Designed and conducted an in-depth analysis of the use of lightness and darkness to convey moral authority in Elizabethan poetry of _____, _____, and _____, resulting in a 28-page paper presented in summary to the Anderson College English Department Colloquium, Nov. 1st, 2005.”

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1-800-841-BOOK or www.amazon.com

How to Pay for Your Graduate Education

By Donald Asher, author of *Graduate Admissions Essays*, the best-selling guide to the graduate application process.

You'd love to go to graduate school, if only you could find a way to pay for it, right? Well, maybe you're thinking about it backwards. Maybe you have to decide to go first, and then you'll find the money.

For many types of grad schools, you'll have to apply to the program, simultaneously apply for several internal and external sources of funding, and wait for months to see how it's going to work for you. So step one is clearly to decide to go. Looking for money is just a part of the process.

Next, stop looking for "financial aid." That's an undergraduate term. You want to look for "funding" and "support." In graduate school most people who are called "financial aid officers" are in fact *loan* officers. They're great people, and you're probably going to need them, but they have no idea about all the sources for funding and support. That's what this article is about.

Let's start with **merit scholarships**. If you're brilliant, with the fantastic grades and scores to prove it, many graduate programs, including law and business, will give you a merit scholarship or a full waiver of tuition. Here's the secret: Tier 2 schools poach talent from Tier 1 schools by offering a free ride. So you get into Top Ten School of Law and the Pretty Good School of Law, but Top Ten wants you to pay full fare while Pretty Good gives you a free ride. All kinds of programs do this, but many don't talk about it.

Also, think about taking the plunge and going for the doctorate. Full-time doctoral students at many—but certainly not all—programs automatically get a full waiver of tuition. This is well known among academicians, but not well known by the general public.

Next, look for assistantships. Assistantships are a weird animal. According to the IRS, they are jobs. According to most faculty, they are apprenticeship programs. According to some students, they are a form of modern indentured servitude. They are also an honor and a form of financial aid. The good news is that assistantships almost always include *a full waiver of tuition plus a stipend*. Stipends vary from as little as \$8000 a year to more than \$30,000 per year, but the real value of an assistantship is the waiver of tuition. For ten to twenty hours a week of service to your department, you can go to school for free.

Obviously, if you are not paying tuition, public and private schools cost the same, and in-state and out-of-state tuition is also exactly the same. Because of this, it is frequently cheaper to go to an expensive school! They often have more money to give to students they want to recruit.

There are three types of assistantship. Most undergraduates know about **teaching assistantships**. To get a teaching assistantship, you have to have outstanding grades in the subject, maybe a strong GRE score, and maybe prior teaching or tutoring experience. Departments have stringent rules about who gets selected to be a teaching assistant.

Research assistantships are much easier to get than teaching assistantships. You don't have to have great grades and scores; you just have to have the same passion as a faculty member who needs an assistant. Prior research experience is more important than your grades or scores. All you have to do is convince one faculty member, not a whole department, that you'd be useful to have around. Start by saying, "Dr. Lee, I've read every article you've ever written. I think you're a genius...." Well, maybe not literally, but you get the idea. There are research assistantships all

over any campus, including in areas where students might not think to look, for example, in English and education departments.

Graduate assistantships are the easiest to get, in terms of what credentials you need to possess. GA assignments are really just jobs, with less of an academic component. Jobs in administration, clerical, IT support, admissions and records, and program coordinator-type roles are run as graduate assistantships. Department and program heads dole these out.

Here's a secret assistantship often overlooked: If you are a native speaker of a foreign language, you can sometimes get a teaching assistantship in a foreign language department, leading a conversation group or even a whole class, while you are studying somewhere else, say engineering or business. If you speak a truly needed language, such as Arabic, you may find this an easy way to pay for your graduate education. Sometimes there are opportunities to be an instructor in areas where there are shortages, for example, an acquaintance of mine paid for his doctoral studies by teaching statistics in several departments.

One of the few ways to go to business and law school for free is by being a graduate assistant. They take GAs in only a few select areas, typically career placement, admissions, and IT roles. Interest alone won't win these assignments; some kind of prior experience is usually required.

If you want to get assistantships it helps to be a doctoral student, but all these assistantships are available for you as a master's degree student at all universities that do not offer the doctoral degree in your field of choice. Assistantships are common for full-time students at brick-and-mortar institutions, and pretty rare at online and distributed-model institutions and for all part-time students.

If you want to go to school for free part-time, one of the better ways is through some type of **employer-sponsored educational benefits** program. Many universities themselves have outstanding educational benefits for full-time employees, so making a career move to working for a university may be your best way to get additional degrees and credentials part-time without taking out any loans. Of course, other types of employers subsidize the educations of their employees. Watch out for complicated rules! For example, some employers only reimburse you for completed courses, or for courses directly related to your ongoing assignments, some cover books and fees and others only tuition, and you may have to pay back every dime if you subsequently leave the company within a specified time of using these benefits.

Suppose you have to pay for your own education. Wouldn't it be nice to have a scholarship for 25 to 30% or more of your tuition? You can! If you'll study something that helps you advance in the career you already have, your tuition is tax deductible. So the government in effect gives you a scholarship equal to your combined federal and state income tax rate. Be careful, though. If an auditor decides your investment in a part-time master's degree in poetry has no bearing on your career in corporate finance, it's not deductible at all. Consult a tax professional before trying to deduct any educational expenses.

Many people pay for their graduate educations through loans. If you stand to earn significantly more money upon completing a degree or credential program, it makes sense to borrow money and pay it back later through increased income. In fact, education is one of the best investments you'll ever make, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. People who complete a master's degree will earn \$400,000 more than people who stop at the bachelor's degree. A Ph.D. is worth \$1.3 million more, and doctors and lawyers earn \$2.3 million more. Individual results will vary, but on average, borrowing money for tuition does make sense.

Raul Aldama, financial aid officer for Fielding Graduate University, says “Seventy-five to 80% of our students take out loans, depending on the academic program.” His school uses a distributed learning format, and has students all over the country. Faculty and deans manage the fellowships, but true to his title, Mr. Aldama focuses only on student borrowing. “You’re allowed \$20,500 per year through the federally funded Stafford Loan Program, and additional monies up to the total cost of attendance through the Graduate Plus Program.” Even if you have a high income and tons of assets, you can qualify for these programs if you are a U.S. citizen and not in active default on a prior student loan. The terms will vary by your circumstances. You start by contacting the financial aid office of the program of your choice, and it’s a good idea to consult with them *before you even apply*.

To learn about third-party scholarships, grants, and fellowships, check out these sites:

www.finaid.org

www.fastweb.com

www.blackexcel.org

www.cos.com

www.hsf.net

There are some other good sites, but be sure never to pay for a scholarship search. If it’s not free, you’re in the wrong place.

I like these books better than the web sites, because you can browse your way to money:

Foundation Grants to Individuals

Annual Register of Grant Support

Dan Cassidy’s Worldwide Graduate Scholarship Directory

In these books you can learn about weird money specifically reserved for women over 5’9” tall, for people with a certain Italian last name, and for people with bad grades. There’s a *lot* of weird money out there.

In the sciences it’s expected that you will apply for three or four third-party funding sources and, frankly, that’s a good practice for everybody. Just make it part of your application process.

My final piece of advice is to remember how to be poor. You’ll need a lot less money for your graduate studies if you’ll give up vacations in Europe, new cars, premium cable, and eating out all the time. If you want it bad enough, there are myriad ways to put together the money you need for graduate study.

NEW BIO:

Donald Asher is a public speaker and writer specializing in careers and higher education. He is the author of ten books, including *Graduate Admissions Essays*, the best-selling guide to the graduate admissions process; *Cool Colleges for the Hyper-Intelligent, Self-Directed, Late Blooming, and Just Plain Different*; *How to Get Any Job with Any Major*; and *Who Gets Promoted, Who Doesn’t, and Why*.

How to Shave a Year off a Ph.D.

(by Donald Asher, author of *Graduate Admissions Essays*, © 2007, used with permission)

- 1. Follow your Program of Study. Your Program of Study is the sequence of classes, milestones, and events that leads to completion. You create your Program of Study with your advisor. In graduate school, the milestones and events are more important than the classes. E.g., if you miss a deadline to file a form, it can cost you a whole year. Update your Program of Study often, and post it over your desk. Look at it every day.**
- 2. Come in the door with at least a vague dissertation idea, *but do not rigidly hang on to it*. Grad school is a transformative process, so your initial idea is a jump start, not a printed road map. Write all your papers for every class, as many as you can, on some aspect related to your dissertation interest.**
- 3. Pick a mentor with a high completion rate. This is a professional relationship. It is irrelevant whether you are “buddies” with this person. Then, let your mentor suggest other people to serve on your committee. Start shopping, casually, for committee members right from the first day of grad school. Watch out for young professors out to make a name for themselves; they can be hardasses. Watch out for old profs that might not survive your dissertation. Keep an eye out for your external reviewer; they are hard to find and hard to recruit, and be sure to check to see whether they dislike your mentor, school, topic, methodology, epistemology, or politics. In fact, check all members of your committee for reservations like this.**
- 4. Think up a very narrow question that has an experimental answer. Very narrow. Definitive answer. Most research has these three components: population, problem, theory (or topic, problem, theory). Remember, a dissertation is a training process. This is not the most important work you will ever do. In fact, it should be some of the least important work you will ever do. What’s better: A perfect dissertation or a done dissertation? Duh.**
- 5. Write a paper that is a dry run of your dissertation idea in the first two years. Ask a professor for (a) permission to do this, and (b) feedback on your idea, research question, methodology, etc.**
- 6. Students who finish theses have higher completion rates for completing dissertations. If your program offers a thesis as a master’s option, take it. It may slow you down for a bit at the time, but when you get to the dissertation you’ll go faster.**

- 7. Do your own research before you get to the proposal stage. This sounds obvious, but a lot of students don't do this. They work on other people's projects, and don't get their feet wet as the director of a project.**
- 8. Go through the IRB (Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects) process before you get to your dissertation project. Same reasons. IRB is like learning a new language, and you want to get through unscathed and with minimum delays. (A smart student *expects* IRB delays, by the way.)**
- 9. Take an independent study and use it to do the entire literature review for your proposal *before* you submit your proposal. (Some proposals require lit review and methodology chapters anyway, but you'll have the whole lit review done rather than a prelim version.) You'll probably have to rewrite your proposal (this is normal), but if you're smart you'll be able to salvage almost all of your lit review even if you have to refine your question or methods.**
- 10. Write your proposal before you take your comps. Most places you cannot submit the proposal before passing comps, but this allows you to drop the proposal the day you receive notice of passing comprehensive exams. This, alone, saves as much as six months.**
- 11. Stay on campus! If you stay on campus through your research and writing stages, you have a much higher chance of finishing in a timely manner, and you'll have access to your committee, campus resources, etc. It may be tempting to go get "a real job" and do your dissertation while you work, but that's a much higher risk factor for completing.**
- 12. Keep your eyes on the prize! Have a life plan that requires the Ph.D. to be behind you. If you lust for that future, you will finish the Ph.D. If grad school is more attractive to you than that vision, or if you don't have that vision, you're at great risk of not finishing.**

These tips could shave a year, or more, off your process.

Sample Letters to Faculty

Write these letters to be sure you have identified a good program for your interests, to build bonds with faculty members who will be evaluating your application later, and to learn more about being comfortable as a scholar in your field. *Do not be afraid to write to leaders in your field.* Email is ok instead of snail mail, but snail mail has higher response rate.

Typical content:

- Ask for a clarification of the program.
- Comment on something the professor has written, and ask a question about it.
- Propose an area for further study, and ask if the program would be an appropriate sponsor for such research.
- Write, “I read _____, _____, and you. Who else is doing important work in this area?”

Suggestions:

- *Always* check faculty member’s home page and read some articles or abstracts before contacting that faculty member.
- **Ask a question that has an answer!**
- Don’t expect every faculty member to respond, and if they don’t respond, don’t let that fact alone keep you from applying there.

NOTE: These examples are the result of a ten-minute, speed-writing exercise, and you would want to edit them further before releasing them.

Also see pp. 26-27 of *Graduate Admissions Essays* for more instruction.

Donald Asher, presenter, Indiana University Summer Senior Camp for McNair Scholars, 2003. Samples provided by brave students. Please remember that these are first drafts. It is a good idea to get faculty edit and review before mailing letters such as these.

Your Name Here
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June 6, 2003

Toni R. Davis, Ph.D.
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Ruth Ann Wilson Distinguished Scholar of Poetry Composition
Wilson Hall, Room 408
University of Arizona
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(719) 321-3859, ext. 4081

Dear Dr. Davis:

I am a Ronald E. McNair Scholar presently studying at Texas A&M University in Kingsville. I am interested in pursuing graduate study in the Neurosciences Department at U.T.-Austin. My research interest is investigating whether there are hormonal correlates to acquisition using the conditioned stimulus model. I am very interested in both the research you are conducting and the research being conducted by your colleague, Dr. Delville. I am inquiring about the possibility of combining both research models to continue my research experience. Is this something that your lab is considering? If this were my primary interest, would your lab be willing to host these types of studies as part of my graduate program? Would you or someone you recommend be willing to be the P.I. or supervisor for research like this?

I would greatly appreciate any information on this matter, and thank you in advance for your time and consideration. If it is more convenient for you to contact me by email, please do so. My email address is kxapr@tamok.edu.

Sincerely,

Your Name Here

Enclosed: Letter of introduction from my mentor, Dr. P. Alhambra, providing overview of my research projects to date.

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Dear Dr. Davis:

I am a Ronald E. McNair Undergraduate Achievement Program Research Scholar at Indiana State University. I am very interested in studying in your department at the graduate level. I have read your book, *Race Matters*, and enjoyed your theoretical and reality-based approach. I too study African Americans, under the auspices of Dr. S. Alvarez at Indiana University, and want to continue studying this population at the graduate level.

I am writing with two queries: (1) Does your department have any other professors interested in the sociological understanding of African Americans, and how they have been affected by prejudice, racism, and oppression? May I know their names? (2) Are there any professors in your department who would be willing to mentor and teach individuals outside the classroom, perhaps via email, prior to actual matriculation into your program? I have a great interest in mentorship across organizational boundaries, and in the concept of academic community that transcends *quid pro quo* interactions. Is this something that you or others in your department would have an interest in?

If you could please reply, or divert this letter to someone who could answer my questions, it would be greatly appreciated. If it would be more convenient for you to respond by email, then please do so. My email address is located in my contact information.

Thank you for your time,

Your Name Here
(enclosures)

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Dear Dr. Davis:

I recently came across your article on the effects of smoking as a predictor of future drug use. As you may recall, I conducted research with a team under your supervision in 1998, 1999, and 2000, when I was an undergraduate. Additionally, since I left your guidance, I have worked extensively on evaluation and the planning and evaluation of improvements in the field of informatics, and the use of informatics for improving performance and utilization of health services.

I wonder if you could help me with two things: (1) I would be interested in a bit of clarification of the standard error of the mean as a predictor of cocaine drug use, as used in your article. Would you be willing to speak with me by telephone to clear up a specific question? (2) Do you see an extensive use of healthcare informatics and information systems in research that involves modeling future drug use? I would be particularly interested in your opinion regarding the use of informatics in this and other aspects of drug use prevention.

Please feel welcome to call me anytime on my cellphone (213) 555-1894, or if it is your preference to respond via email please contact me at jose@aol.com.

Thank you for your guidance,

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Dear Dr. Davis:

I am a McNair Scholar conducting an undergraduate research project this summer. As part of this project, I have been conducting a literature survey, and came across your name from multiple sources. I am interested in the types of research that you have been participating in. Upon reading some of your work, I noticed that you are involved in many areas of equine nutrition. For example, I know that you have done extensive work with foals and endurance horses in all aspects of nutrition. I am assessing graduate programs, and I must say that I am very attracted to your work. However, the very breadth of your interests leaves me uncertain of where your lab will be concentrating in the future.

Would you mind answering the following questions for me, even if briefly: At the current time, what directions is your research headed in? What topics of research are you currently pursuing? What topics of research do you have in the development stage? Again, I know what you have been doing in the past, and I hope you won't think me too pushy for wanting to be sure that your future direction aligns with my intellectual interests.

Your responses will help me to determine whether there is a good fit between your research plans and my interests.

Thank you so much for your help!

Sincerely,

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(719) 321-3859, ext. 4081

Dear Dr. Davis:

I recently came across your article, "The Roots of Ethnic Conflict," while doing research for a paper on the ethnic conflict in Rwanda. I particularly focused on your point that ethnic conflict was created out of the European colonization of Africa. Have you already considered a comparative analysis of the ethnic conflict in the Congo to the recent ethnic conflicts in Liberia, and the effects of the 1993 genocide, which took the lives of 800,000 Congolese civilians? Do you know of good papers in these areas that I should consider?

I checked your office hours on your Web site and will try to reach you this Friday between 1:00 and 3:00 p.m. or, if you wish, you could respond prior to that via email (my email address is in the heading to this letter).

Thank you in advance for your consideration. I look forward to communicating with you and learning more about your thoughts on the commonalities and differences among these conflicts

Thank you so much for helping me advance my project. I promise not to take up too much of your time.

Sincerely,

Your Name Here

Your Name Here
100 Main Street
City, State zip
donasher@ix.netcom.com
(415) 543-7130, ext. 203

28 June 2003

Michael DiPersio, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor and Graduate Studies Director
Center for Cell Biology & Cancer Research (MC-165)
Albany Medical College
47 New Scotland Avenue
Albany, NY 12208
dipem@mail.amc.edu
518-262-5916

Dear Dr. DiPersio:

I am an undergraduate student at the University of Arizona. I am currently investigating graduate program options, and I have come across your name and Albany Medical Center many times in my literature research.

As a student in the Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC) program, I have gained research experience under the mentorship of Dr. M.H. Brilliant on the roles of a number of genes affecting pigmentation. I believe that my research experience, combined with a cumulative 4.0 G.P.A., might make the Center for Cell Biology and Cancer Research program a compatible match for my qualifications and interests.

I have a strong interest in the etiology of insulin resistance in type 2 diabetes, and would very much like to conduct research in this area during my graduate studies. I see from your website that students in the CCBCR program are mentored by faculty whose interests lie in signal transduction, among other topics. My questions for you are: 1) Is an academic interest in insulin signaling failures compatible with the curriculum of the CCBCR program? And 2) Are there CCBCR faculty who might be interested in mentoring a student with these interests? If so, might I have their names and contact information?

Please feel free to respond to the above address, or to contact me via email at msh@email.arizona.edu if that is more convenient.

Thank you very much for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Your Name Here
100 Main Street
City, State zip
donasher@ix.netcom.com
(415) 543-7130, ext. 203

28 June 2003

Dr. Michael Ramsey
Professor
Geology and Planetary Sciences
University of Pittsburg
Pittsburg, Pennsylvania
(412)624-8776
ramsey@ivis.eps.pitt.edu

Dear Dr. Ramsey:

I am a Ronald E. McNair Undergraduate Achievement Program Research Scholar at the University of Arizona with a 4.0 GPA. I am a geology major with a passion for planetary science, and Mars in particular. My current research, under the direction of Dr. E. Turtle, focuses on the problem of ground ice in the Martian regolith, specifically as it applies to debris aprons.

In my search for potential graduate schools, at which I intend to pursue a Ph.D. in planetary geology, I noticed that the University of Pittsburg has both a planetary geology component to their program, and a new GIS laboratory. The possibility of applying GIS technology to Martian datasets intrigues me. Does an opportunity to conduct this type of research exist at your institution? Could you recommend a professor whose interests might be a good fit to mine?

Thank you in advance for any assistance you might give me in this matter. Please feel free to contact me at the above address or directly by e-mail if you prefer.

Thanks again,

Your Name Here

Your Name Here
100 Main Street
City, State zip
donasher@ix.netcom.com
(415) 543-7130, ext. 203

28 June 2003

Professor Geoffrey Miller
University of New Mexico
1 University of New Mexico
MSC03 2220
Albuquerque, NM 87131-1161
(505) 277-1967
gfmiller@unm.edu

Dear Dr. Miller:

I am a senior at the University of Arizona and I am very interested studying in your research program. I have read your book, *The Mating Mind*, many of your recent publications on the subject of fitness indicators, and heard you speak at a colloquium at the University of Arizona in the spring of 2003 and find the idea of sexual selection driving evolution on the basis of fitness indicators very intriguing and useful theoretical approach when studying other areas of interest in the field. As a Ronald E. McNair Research scholar I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Professor Aurelio Jose Figueredo on the relationships between sensational interests and antisocial behavior with promising initial results. Although fitness indicators are not part of this study I believe that further investigation may find that sensational interests are fitness indicators for short-term mating strategies.

While looking at your published works I found that although I am very interested in your theoretical approach my interests seem to differ from yours. I did not find very much research dealing with the darker side of human behavior like psychopathy, antisocial behavior, or criminality, areas in which what I am very interested. Would your research program allow me to pursue those types of interests?

I would like to thank you in advance for an answer to this question. If it is more convenient you can respond via email at wollon@email.arizona.edu.

Thank you,

Your Name Here

Your Name Here
100 Main Street
City, State zip
donasher@ix.netcom.com
(415) 543-7130, ext. 203

28 June 2003

Prof. Vincent C. Bond
Morehouse School of Medicine
720 Westview Dr., MEB 1222
Atlanta, GA 30310-1495
Phone: 404-752-1862
Email: bond@msm.edu

Dear Dr. Bond:

I am currently a junior undergraduate studying at the University of Arizona in Tucson. I am majoring in biochemistry. I am interested in attending the Morehouse School of Medicine in your department. I have read the type of research that you perform in your laboratories. At this point in my life I am assisting Dr. Tim Bowden conducting research on skin cancer the research that I am involved in is apoptosis I am mainly looking for new drugs that will cause programmed cell death, which I find very interesting.

I am writing with two queries: (1) "T lymphocyte depletion is a result of cell killing (apoptosis) predominantly in uninfected or "bystander" cells, with a distinct lack of cell killing in the productively infected cells themselves. A number of factors, including HIV-1 Nef have been implicated in protecting infected cells." I was wondering if you could give me some information on the mechanism. (2) Are there other members of the faculty who might be of great interest to me?

I would really appreciate any information that you send me you can contact me via email or to the address above

[needs close]

Reasons to Go

- **Passion for Topic**
- **Like Research**
- **Want to Teach**
(at the four-year college level)
- **\$\$\$**
- **Credential**
- **IQ Will Go Up**
- **Obligation or Duty**
- **Extends Work Life**
- **Lowers Unemployment**
- **Associated with Satisfaction**

Ten Things to Do if You Don't Get In

1. Apply earlier (avoid the last six weeks before the deadline).
2. Apply to more schools (six is usually considered a prudent minimum: two safe schools, two middle of the road schools, two reach schools).
3. Apply to more safe schools (even 4.0 students can and do get rejected).
4. Visit and wow 'em (be sure to follow Asher's Law).
5. Go to summer school in the targeted subject and wow 'em (it's easy to get into summer school, even at Harvard).
6. Take one class at a time in the targeted subject and wow 'em (remember: your most recent grades count the most).
7. Get volunteer or internship experiences in the targeted field (even part-time, even unpaid).
8. Work in a "real job" in the targeted field (there's no substitute for actual experience, and recommendations from supervisors in the profession).
9. Get an intermediate degree (such as a master's or even just a credential).
10. Get older and try again (many times, that's all it takes).

**Don't forget that the best time to apply is early in the fall to start graduate school the following fall, so
*be sure to plan ahead!***

Asher's Law: Thou shalt not write, nor call, nor visit any graduate faculty member without having read some of his or her works first.

Scholarship Databases:

The "Bible"	www.finaid.org
The "Bible" also	www.fastweb.com
Bank Loans	www.plato.org
Colleges and Universities	www.college-scholarships.com
Absolutely Scholarships	www.absolutelyscholarships.com
Art Scholarships	www.xensei.com/users/adl
BlackExcel	www.blackexcel.org
CollegeNet Mach 25	www.collegenet.com
Community of Science (COS)	www.cos.com
Fast Aid	www.fastaid.com
FastWeb	www.fastweb.com
Free 4U Scholarship Search	www.free-4u.com
Fund for Theological Education	www.thefund.org
GEM	www.nd.edu/~gem/
Geoscholarships	http://scholarships.geoportals.com
Grants for Minorities	www.lib.msu.edu/
Hispanic Scholarship Fund	www.hsf.net
Scholarships	www.scholarships.com
More Scholarships	www.winscholarships.com
Scholarship Resource Network	www.srnexpress.com
United Scholarship Advertisement	www.collegfunds.net
WiredScholar	www.wiredscholar.com
Xap.com	www.xap.com/getmoney/scholarship

Provided by Donald Asher, author of *Graduate Admissions Essays*, the best-selling guide to the graduate admissions process. Ten Speed Press.

Sample spreadsheet for keeping track

School Name	program/emphasis website contact	Michigan Comm Studies/race&media http://www.lsa.umich.edu/comm/ Chris Matthews
Location	population nearest major city	Ann Arbor, MI Detroit (also Chi is 4 hrs away)
MA or PhD	# avg. years to complete Recent attrition retention/adv for scholars of color	PhD varies by advisor, no one would specify about 40%, which is fairly typical good to excellent
grad program size	male/female ratio minority pop?	small
overall school size	undergrad pop. grad. pop. minority pop. male/female	about 40,000 50/50
faculty/staff of interest		secretary by name specific faculty #1 specific faculty #2 specific faculty #3 etc.
admissions deadline financial aid deadline McNair app. Waiver? Possible fellowships		December 5th November 15th Watkins, Annenberg (early deadline!) two fellowships for under-repped scholars possible R.A. with [faculty #1 above]
Carnegie classification	safe school? probably/maybe? reach school?	Research 1
Require GRE?	Require subject test? Location and date GRE General deadline to register Locatoin and date GRE Subject deadline to register	X (known tough admit) yes recommended but not required
Any published min. GRE? Any published min. GPA?	My GPA O/A My GPA in major My GPA last 4 semesters	3 2.95 3.2 3.45
	other analysis?	high grades on all research
other notes		heard good things looks like a great fit but what about those cold MI winters?

