Department of Physics

GRADUATE SCHOOL GUIDE

Freshman/Sophomore Year

- Sign up for the CSUSB Society of Physics Students (SPS) email list server in the physics office. Important information is communicated via this list server.
- Get to know your physics professors. Seek career advice. The better your professors know you, the stronger their letters of recommendation will be.
- Discuss career goals as well as which classes you should take with your physics professor advisor. See him/her early and often.
- Research self-interests and abilities and look into options for majors and activities.
- Investigate possible graduate school paths and requirements and take pre-requisite classes needed.
- Do well in classes, most graduate schools are competitive (A GPA of 3.0 or greater is recommended).
- Look for summer internship opportunities, including opportunities at or through CSUSB. The application period is usually around winter break. Remember that this is the time for you to explore different areas of physics! Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone.
    - Office of Student Research (OSR): https://osr.csusb.edu/funding/osrgrant.html
    - CSUSB Materials Research Center: http://materials.csusb.edu/ (click on "CAFM Application")
    - CSUSB ASI: http://gradstudies.csusb.edu/documents/StudentResearchTravel_App.pdf

Junior Year

- Apply for fee wavier for GRE *(Contact the CSUSB Financial Aid Office for this form)*
- Research programs, request information, investigate application fee wavier programs and double check application deadline dates. Aim for a minimum of 6 programs to which you will apply.
- Talk to your faculty advisor and/or other professors about your interest in applying to graduate school. Talk to them about your preferred programs; seek advice about other programs in your area of interest.
- Register for GRE general. Typically it is offered weekly or biweekly all year, for details and to register visit http://www.ets.org/gre/
- Register for GRE subject. Plan on taking this in April of your Junior Year and again in Sept./Oct. of your Senior Year. To register and specific dates please visit http://www.ets.org/gre/
- Prepare for GRE by completing numerous practice tests. The GRE subject test is about test taking strategies as much as it is about the physics. There are plenty of resources online. You can also form study groups or take a GRE prep course. The best way to prepare depends on how you learn best.
- Create preliminary list for letters of recommendation.
- Write your personal essay(s) and get it critiqued multiple times, including by a faculty member.
- Apply for a summer Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) at graduate schools of interest. Applications open around winter break.

Senior Year

August/September:

- Take the GRE and send your scores to potential schools (Takes 4-6 weeks to get scores)
- Ask professors, mentors and employers to write letters of recommendation.

October:

- Complete applications, personal essays, and other information requested by graduate programs.
- Request official copies of your transcripts to be sent to graduate programs (takes 10-14 days)

November-January:

- Double check deadlines and submit applications prior to deadline date.
- Confirm that grad school application, recommendations, and test scores have been received.

January-March:

- Complete the Federal Financial Aid form (FAFSA.gov) even if you don't think you'll qualify for aid.

March-May:

- Note application deadlines for school's graduate assistant/research assistant/fellowship positions.
- Visit institutions that accept you, and continue your decision process.

Application Materials – Checklist

☐ Official Transcripts
☐ Official GRE Scores
☐ Letters of Recommendation (3-5)
☐ Writing Sample(s)
☐ Application
☐ Personal Statement/Statement of Purpose
☐ Resume/CV
☐ Research Statement

Competencies for Graduate School Acceptance

ABILITIES
- G.P.A. & GRE Test Scores
- Writing, Speaking & Critical Thinking Skills

INTERESTS
- Exposure to the field
- Leadership & Team Work

VALUES
- Desire for Learning & Ethical Standards
- Curiosity, Maturity & Drive

INTERVIEW/RECCOMENDATIONS
- Interview content
- Recommendation letters

WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

This is your opportunity to sell yourself in the application process; it generally falls into one of two categories:

1. The general, comprehensive personal statement:
   - Allows you maximum freedom in terms of what you write.
   - Type of statement often prepared for standard medical or law school application forms.
2. The response to very specific questions:
   - Business and graduate school applications ask specific questions, and your statement should respond specifically to the question being asked.
   - Some school applications favor multiple essays or a statement of intent.

Questions to Ask Yourself Before you Write

- What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
- When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it (and about yourself)?
- How have you learned about this field—through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences?
- If you have worked a lot during your college years, what have you learned and how has that contributed?
- What are your career goals?
- Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (great grades but mediocre GRE scores, GPA fluctuation)?
- Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships in your life? Financial status, family issues, first-generation college student status, all contributes towards your education?
- What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?
- Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school and the profession or field than other applicants?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested?

General Advice

Answer the Questions That are Asked
You may find questions that are similar. Don't be tempted to use the same statement for all applications.
Tell a Story
Think in terms of showing or demonstrating through concrete experience. One of the worst things you can do is bore the admissions committee.
Be Specific
Your desire to become a scientist should be logical; the result of specific experience can be described in your statement.
Tell What You Know:
Be as specific as you can in relating what you know. Detail your interest and experience in your particular field.
What not to Talk About:
There are certain things best left out of personal statements. For example, references to accomplishments in high school and potentially controversial subjects (religious or political issues) also avoid clichés.
Do Your Research:
Do some research to find out what sets your choice of schools apart from other universities and programs.
Write Well and Correctly:
Be meticulous. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Many admissions officers say that good written skills and command of language are important.

Resources to Use

O*net Online: www.onetonline.org	Search occupations as well as graduate school options
Peterson's Guide Online: www.petersons.com	Search for graduate schools for any program of interest
US News-Education Report: www.usnews.com/education	Search for top programs in any graduate school subject
Grad School Shopper: www.gradschoolshopper.com	Search for programs to see strengths & weaknesses