

Graduate School?



Kathleen S. Matthews
Dean, Wiess School of Natural Sciences
Rice University

Why Graduate School?

- **Expands career opportunities**
- **Provides potential to pursue independent research and have independence in job setting**
- **Provides opportunity to contribute to larger community**



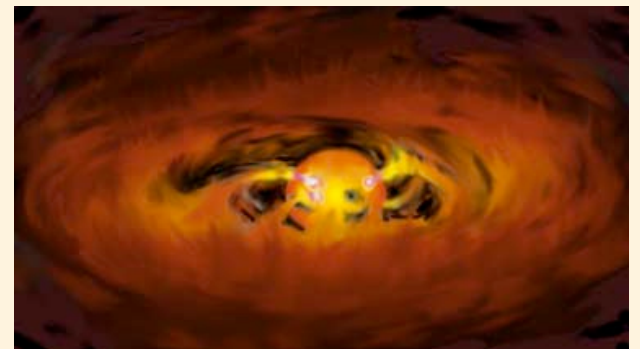
Why Graduate School?

- **Expands career opportunities**
 - ✓ **Industry leadership positions in research or in management**
 - ✓ **Academic research and teaching**
 - ✓ **Leadership in government and non-profit agencies**
 - ✓ **Technology transfer**



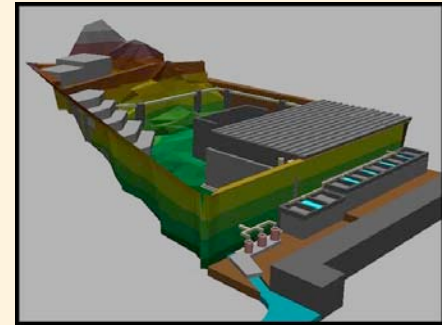
Why Graduate School?

- **Provides potential to pursue independent research and have independence in job setting**
 - ✓ **Ability to make choices about personal directions**
 - ✓ **Potential to influence organization**



Why Graduate School?

- **Provides opportunity to contribute to larger community**
 - ✓ **Role models for K12 students**
 - ✓ **Information that is important to decision-making**
 - ✓ **Leadership for key societal issues**



Myths/Realities

- **Myth: “I’ll have to pay tuition and living expenses, and I can’t afford it.”**
- **Reality: Almost all programs for Ph.D. study provide tuition waiver and living stipend. (That is, they pay you to go to graduate school!)**



Myths/Realities

- **Myth: All programs are alike.**
- **Reality: Graduate programs differ substantially among institutions, and the only way to know about a given program is to visit and ask lots of questions of the students and faculty. Most schools will pay for these visits!**



Myths/Realities

- **Myth: “I’ll just be in more classes.”**
- **Reality: Some classes are required, generally in the first two years, but most of the emphasis is on independent work/research with a single faculty mentor.**



What field? What School?

- **Assess your interests**
 - ✓ **Match them with institutions in which you are interested**
 - ✓ **Ask your professors, other students, anyone with information**



Where?

- Think about *where* you want to be as well as *what* you want to be doing
 - ✓ What kind of climate do you like? Do you love snow? Heat?
 - ✓ Do you prefer a city? A smaller town?
 - ✓ What aspects of your surroundings really matter to you?



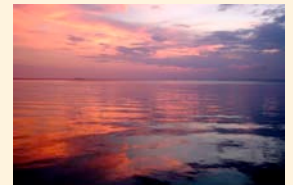
Why?

- **Be sure that you really want to undertake the course of study**
 - ✓ **Why do you want to get a graduate degree?**
 - ✓ **What is the cost relative to other options?**
 - ✓ **How will you dedicate yourself to success?**



What about the “two-body” problem?

- If your significant other wants to pursue graduate studies
 - ✓ Work together on the selection process for where to apply
 - ✓ Be willing to compromise on some criteria
 - ✓ Think about the dual demands and be sure you are ready to share this process
- Be aware that many institutions are sensitive to two-body issues — ask when you visit



What about the “two-body” problem?

- If your significant other does **NOT** want to pursue graduate studies
 - ✓ Work together on the selection process for where to apply — look at the job market for your partner
 - ✓ Think about the dual demands and be sure you are ready to share this process
- Be aware that many institutions are sensitive to issues of couples — ask when you visit about policies/possibilities



Getting Ready

- **Take the Graduate Record Examination well in advance**
 - ✓ **Prepare for the examination — find out what's on the exam, take practice tests**
 - ✓ **Decide early whether you will need to take an advanced test and in what subject.....prepare for that subject test**
 - ✓ **If first scores are not high, retake the exam**



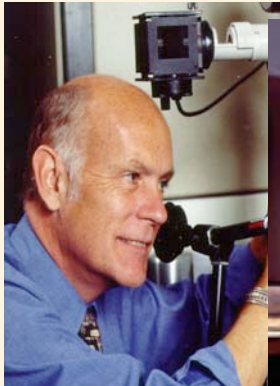
Applying



- ***Completely* fill out applications for institutions of interest**
 - ✓ **Don't wait until last minute to begin the application process**
 - ✓ **Think about the questions asked and try to represent yourself as clearly and effectively as possible**
 - ✓ **If possible, send application in a little early — it may be reviewed more quickly**

Asking for Letters

- **Ask for letters of recommendation**
 - ✓ Think carefully about whom to ask to write letters....
 - ✓ Be sure that they know about *you* as an individual (both strengths and weaknesses!).
 - ✓ Give them information (e.g., *resume*, statement of your interests)
 - ✓ Ask your letter writers *early!*



Personal Statement

- **Think carefully about your personal statement**

- ✓ **Opportunity to make a *personal* impression**
- ✓ **Opportunity to explain unusual aspects of your record (grades, external demands that affected performance, *etc.*)**
- ✓ **Place to highlight achievements/interests**



Interaction with Schools

- **Respond promptly to queries from interested schools**
 - ✓ **Signal your interest clearly and quickly**
 - ✓ **Ask about opportunities to visit (many schools will pay for your visit) and let them know your availability**



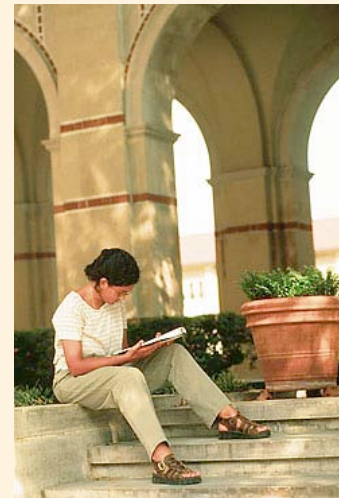
Doing Your Homework

- Investigate the department and its faculty/students before visiting the school for an interview
 - ✓ Look them up on the web and review their policies/procedures
 - ✓ Be prepared to ask as well as respond to questions
 - ✓ Use the visit to gather the information you need for making a decision



Choosing a School

- **With multiple offers, consider:**
 - ✓ **Do your personal goals fit well with the style and interests of the program?**
 - ✓ **How did you *feel* when you visited?**
 - ✓ **What did the current students tell you about their satisfaction?**
 - ✓ **Did you like the faculty?**
 - ✓ **What is your overall “comfort” level?**



What about multiple offers?

- **With multiple offers, consider:**
 - ✓ **Did you meet faculty that you would wish to serve as your mentor?**
 - ✓ **Are there enough options if your interests change before you begin your research program?**
 - ✓ **Are the barriers between disciplines/schools low?**
 - ✓ **Can you change programs?**



Beginning Graduate School

- Arrange a place to live early
- Get to know the community — where are the restaurants, medical care, grocery stores, *etc.*
- Find compatible colleagues and make friends quickly
- Form a study group
- Take time for relaxation



Envision Your Future

