

Section 3: Planning Your Application to Graduate School*

Normally you should apply in the fall for admission the subsequent fall. Start planning your application early. In fact, it's never too early to start working on your application. For one thing, if you manage to plan way ahead, you may be in a better position to get strong letters of recommendation (see *Section 4: Application Materials*). You also need to think ahead to what your writing sample will be since as part of your application you will be required to submit a sample of your very best written work (see *Section 4: Application Materials*). It is best to start months and months in advance of the deadline dates for applications, which tend to range from 1st December to 15th January (see *Section 5: Graduate School Application Timeline*). Take the process very, very seriously, or it's a waste of your time and money.

Start by identifying the programs to which you want to apply. Your decisions about where to apply are very important. A useful resource is Brian Leiter's *Philosophical Gourmet Report* (PGR). The report can be found at <http://www.philosophicalgourmet.com>. The PGR provides rankings of programs and subspecialties and lots of information and advice about graduate study in philosophy. Think about the general strengths of the program and also the subspecialties of the program. It's important to study in a reasonably well-rounded program, both for those who don't yet know what subfields interest them most (you need to be exposed to different areas of philosophy at the graduate level to make an informed decision about where to specialize) and for those who do (specialists in any field need a decent background in other areas of philosophy). Pay special attention to programs that are strong in your specialty area (if you have one).

Be realistic about where you apply. Discuss what is realistic with your professors. Try to have a realistic assessment of the strength of your application and submit most of your applications to places where you have a realistic prospect of admission. There is no simple answer as to the question of how many applications you should make but do try to spread your applications over a range of schools. Apply to some places likely to accept you. On the other hand, do consider applying to one or a couple of places of exceptional interest to you even if you think your odds are not great. The number of applications is likely to be limited by your financial resources, since applications can cost quite a bit of money once all the fees and postage are added up.

You should visit each department's website to get a sense of the program and request or download their application materials for graduate school. You will be applying to a specific department and individual philosophy departments will have their own forms, requirements and deadlines. Make special note of faculty members in each department who conduct research and teach courses in the particular area of philosophy you are most interested. Here are some other things you may want to know about schools that seem interesting:

- What are their completion rates?
- What are average completion times for the degree?
- What is the placement record of the school like; do their graduates get good jobs?
- What kind of funding does the school offer? What proportion of students are funded, and to what level? Is the funding through scholarships or TA-ships? How many years of support do they guarantee?

- What is the quality of life like: what are housing costs like? What's the town or city like?
- Are there a number of people there you'd like to work with?

* This section is indebted to David Brink's "Graduate Study in Philosophy" @ <http://philosophy.ucsd.edu/faculty/dbrink/GraduateStudy.pdf>; "Philosophy Graduate School" @ <http://www.unl.edu/philosop/undergrad/undgrad.shtml> in addition to <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/philosophy/nav03.cfm?nav03=12383&nav02=12463&nav01=12320>.