

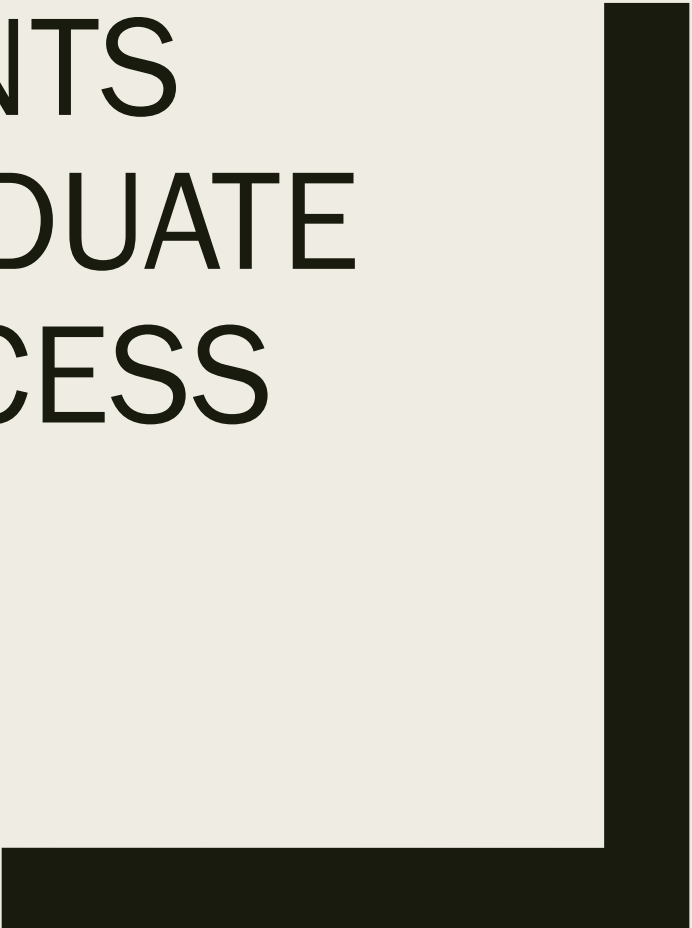


# GUIDING STUDENTS THROUGH THE GRADUATE APPLICATION PROCESS

Jennifer Chamberlin Payne, PhD  
Sr Student Program Advisor, McNair & ROP

Ricardo Romero, MA  
Program Director, McNair & ROP

[mcnair.unm.edu](http://mcnair.unm.edu)  
[mcnair@unm.edu](mailto:mcnair@unm.edu)



# Topics



- Differences between Masters and PhD programs
- Gaining research experience as an undergraduate
- How to secure GOOD letters of recommendation
- How to choose the RIGHT graduate program
- GRE
- Tackling admissions essays

# Masters vs PhD programs

## ■ Advantages of a Masters program

- *Shorter time to finish*
- *Sometimes lower admissions standards*
- *Sufficient to practice as a professional in certain fields (e.g., Business, Engineering, Architecture, Counseling, Speech Language Pathology)*

## ■ Advantages of a PhD program

- *Funding!!!*
- *Potential for more career options*
- *More autonomy to pursue your particular research interest*
- *Sometimes less competition to gain admission*
- *Can leave program with a Masters*



# Gaining research experience

- Introduction to what they will be doing in graduate school
- Ideally done with a tenure-track professor
- Impressive on a grad application for most majors, necessary for other majors (e.g., Psychology, Biology, Physics)
- Encourage to look beyond your campus to...



# REUs (Research Experience for Undergraduates) and SROPs (Summer Research Opportunity Programs)

- Approximately 8-10 weeks during a summer
  - *Paid travel*
  - *Room & board included*
  - *Stipend*
- Often underrepresented groups are prioritized
- Applications due early Spring semester and typically require
  - *Transcripts*
  - *Letters of recommendation*
  - *Essays*
  - *At least one semester left in undergrad*

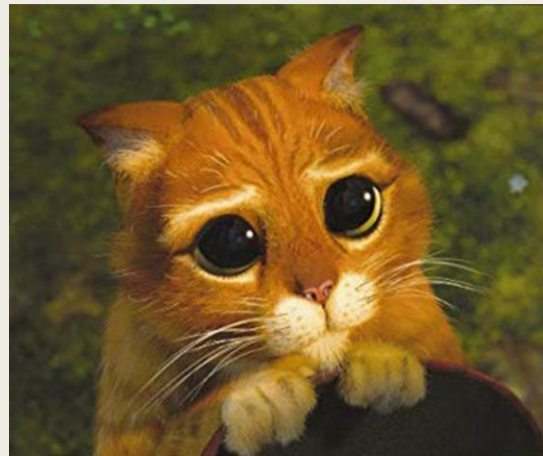


# REUs (Research Experience for Undergraduates) and SROPs (Summer Research Opportunity Programs)

- Many opportunities nationwide for high-achieving, motivated students
- NSF: [https://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/reu/reu\\_search.jsp](https://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/reu/reu_search.jsp)
- Pathways to Science:  
[http://www.pathwaystoscience.org/programs.aspx?descriptorhub=SummerResearch\\_Summer%20Research%20ppportunity](http://www.pathwaystoscience.org/programs.aspx?descriptorhub=SummerResearch_Summer%20Research%20ppportunity)
- Big Ten Academic Alliance: <https://www.btaa.org/students/srop/introduction>
- Summer Research Academy at UCF: <https://our.ucf.edu/prospective/sra/>

# Securing letters of recommendation

- Preferably from tenure-track faculty, but default to people who will write strong letters
- Start forming the relationships early with faculty
- Guides for requesting letters
  - <https://mcnairsite.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/requesting-a-letter-of-reference-guide.pdf>
- No groveling



# Choosing the School



- US News and World Report provides rankings
  - *Useful as an organizational tool, but rankings are inaccurate and biased*
- Research and career match are most critical
- Consulting professors
- Backtrack the articles and books they enjoyed
- DON'T choose school for the wrong reasons (prestige, location, etc.)
- Create a "Grad Application Matrix"



# Graduate Record Examination (GRE)

- Scores are important, but not life or death; applications are reviewed holistically in most programs
- Important to practice taking the test in computer format
- Inexpensive study prep
  - *Magoosh (fully online course modules)*
  - *Kaplan, Princeton Review (books/online, not programs)*
- Some REUs and SROPs have GRE prep

# Financial Aid

- FAFSA not required for all programs but should be filled out
- No Pell or other federal assistance in grad school
- Fellowships and Assistantships pay most costs
- Should NOT take out loans if at all possible

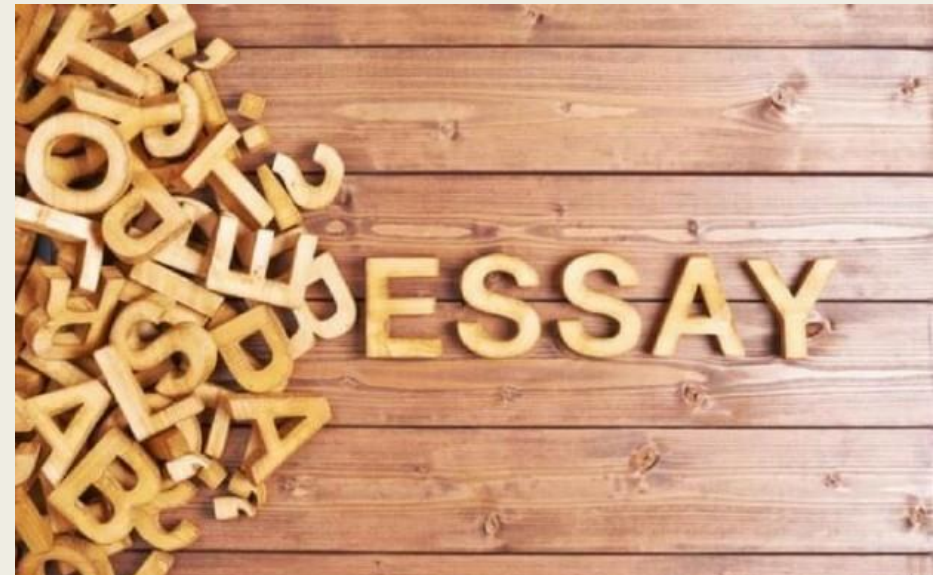


# Admissions Essays

- Many names, common purpose: Personal Statement, Statement of Purpose, Letter of Intent, Research Statement, Diversity Statement
- Expect to write many drafts, up to 20!
- Less is more (1pg. single spaced)
- Should be reviewed by no more than 3-4 people.
  - *Consider using the following order*
    - First reviewer to check for grammar and writing mechanics
    - Second reviewer to edit for content and clarity
    - Third reviewer (professor or grad student) to help with finishing touches

# Admissions Essays (cont.)

- FOLLOW PROMPTS AND WORD LIMITS!
- But if there are no prompts or word limits, use the following guide
- 3 main components of admissions essays:
  - *Background*
  - *Qualifications*
  - *Fit to program*



# Background

- Describe what specific events and experiences in your life have motivated you to pursue graduate study in your chosen field
  - *Avoid clichés*
  - *Avoid sob stories unless relevant to your future studies*
  - *Can discuss your personal background, if relevant*
  - *Who inspired you? (teachers, professors, family)*
  - *Clearly state the program to which you are applying*

# Qualifications

- Why are you qualified for advanced scholarship?
  - *Research experience*
    - Research publications and presentations
  - *Advanced coursework*
  - *Relevant job or volunteer experience*
  - *Certifications, languages, special skills or competencies*
  - *Omit irrelevant info*

# Fit to Program

- Don't underestimate the importance of fit to program!
  - *No matter how smart and prepared the applicant, one must be a good fit for that particular program or no admission*
- Match applicant's interests to faculty research topics
- Demonstrate knowledge of the program, university, resources, etc.
- Make clear why applicant fits in that program

# McNair Scholars Program & Research Opportunity Program

- Ricardo Romero, Program Director, [loborr@unm.edu](mailto:loborr@unm.edu), 277-5491
- Jennifer Chamberlin Payne, Sr Student Program Advisor, [jcham@unm.edu](mailto:jcham@unm.edu), 277-3098



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