PhD Applications

Reasons to Earn a Doctorate Degree

- To gain a deeper level of understanding and add to the body of knowledge in a particular field of study through in-depth research.
- To secure work in higher-level and specialized positions in industry or academia, including faculty positions at colleges and universities, research-based corporate positions, government labs, or think-tanks.

The Search Process

- Define your career goals and potential areas of specialization.
- Talk with professors in your area of interest regarding program strength and reputation. Ask them about their own educational experiences.
- Search for PhD programs based on specialization, location, cost, enrollment size, learning environment, and length of program using resources such as Peterson's, Princeton Review, and U.S. News and World Report.
- Peruse PhD program websites to identify a few faculty and research groups that align with your research interests. You may need to reference these interests in your Statement of Purpose.
- Speak with alumni from each program to learn about their experiences and careers.
- Network with professors from potential programs to learn about their teaching style, research interests, and long-term goals.
- Create a spreadsheet of schools you are interested in, keeping track of application requirements, deadlines, and other helpful information for each program.

The Application Process

What you will need.
- A typical application includes the application form, an application fee, letters of recommendation, transcripts, essay(s), resume/CV, and a Statement of Purpose. Additional statements may be required such as Diversity Statements or Research Statements.

Start early and pay attention to deadlines.
- Quality applications take time, and PhD programs are highly competitive.
- Most PhD application deadlines are in late fall for August start dates, but it is important to check the application information for each of your individual target schools as deadlines/processes may vary.
  - *For Example*: If you plan to start a PhD in August 2023, you should start working on your applications by April or May 2022 (with a deadline of fall 2022).

Carefully read all application instructions.
- Missing one piece of an application or providing the wrong information can set you back in your timeline or could prevent you from being considered for a program.

Ask for recommendation letters early on.
- Three recommendation letters are usually required from professionals such as professors, previous or current supervisors, advisors, or other professionals who can speak of your relevant experience and skills well. Do not ask a friend or family member!
- Contact faculty members well before they begin their busy fall semesters; summer is an ideal time to reach out to them.
- An effective approach to use in asking a person to write you a recommendation is: "Would you feel comfortable writing me a positive recommendation?"
- Make sure each person writing you a recommendation knows to which type of programs you are applying and even the kinds of things you would like them to emphasize about you. Send them a copy of your resume and any supporting materials from your application.
- Send your recommenders polite reminders about application deadlines and ensure that your materials were submitted.

Request academic transcripts from your school(s) early on.
- Some programs will request electronic transcripts from your school(s), while others will want official printed copies. Transcripts usually take time to be processed and/or delivered, so request them from your school(s) a few months in advance to ensure you meet the application deadlines.
- Contact the admissions department or check the online application system to confirm they have received your official transcript(s) early on.

Write unique essays / Statements of Purpose tailored to each university.
- Each essay you write should specifically address why you have chosen that particular school, program, and research focus area, and why/how you are uniquely qualified.
- Before starting your essay, create an outline of key points based on your knowledge about the program and research you want to do, relevant experience, and career goals.
- Do not write a generalized essay or template.
- Review the [Student Academic Success Center (SASC)](#) and additional resources (below) before starting your applications. Meet with the SASC for a grammatical review of your essays.
- Meet with a CPDC Career Consultant for a content review of your essays.

CMU Resources
[Statement of Purpose / Personal Statement](#)
[Diversity Statement](#)
[Research Statement](#)
[Resume / CV Guide](#) (PhD sample on pages 10-11)