The Paperwork You Can’t Escape

How to apply to grad school and not go crazy
Decisions!

- Is Grad School right for you?
- Masters or PhD?
- Taking Time Off
- What do you want?
GRE

- When to take it
- Should you retake it?
- Cost
- Studying
- Subject Test

To Register:
http://www.ets.org/gre
Looking for Programs

- Where to Start
  - Google…
  - Rankings?
  - Schools/Programs you know
  - Ask your professors/mentors
  - Publications
  - List Servs & Job Boards

- Don’t know what you want to do?
- Deciding where to apply
Letters of Recommendation

- Who to ask
- Ask early
- Make it easy
  - Provide CV/statement if necessary
  - Application info in one place
- Thank them!
Contacting Professors (Cover Letters)

- It’s awkward.
- Very important in ecology
- What do they ask for?
- Promote your qualities!
- Attach a CV
- Follow up
- Examples

Dear Professor Langkilde,

Um. Hi.
You’re awesome. I’m pretty awesome. Let’s be awesome together!

Love,
Gail
Applications

- Be organized
  - CV
  - Transcript
  - Statements
  - Recommender info
- What do they want?
- Examples

U don't need dis.
Now iz my turn fer grad skool.
Interviews

- Phone, Skype
- Visits & Recruitment Weekends
  - Lab Meeting
  - Who’s paying?
- Be Prepared
  - What are you interested in?
  - What is your research experience?
  - Why do you want to attend grad school?
- Ask questions: what do you need to know?
VISITING THE DEPARTMENT, INTERVIEWS, GOOD QUESTIONS TO ASK

A visit to the department is often an extremely valuable and informative part of the admissions process—both for prospective students and for the faculty. Some faculty members will invite students for a visit and some students will take the initiative and visit if they have the opportunity. In either case, coordinate the visit with a professor so that arrangements can be made for you to talk with various graduate students and faculty.

Interviewing with Faculty
If you visit, keep in mind that you are evaluating the school, department, and laboratory as much as the faculty members are evaluating you. So prepare to ask some questions in addition to answering them.

Sample questions you might receive from a faculty member:
- What is your previous research experience? (It is often OK not to have much.)
- Why are you interested in graduate school?
- Why are you interested in studying ‘X’?
- Would you be interested in studying ‘Y’ instead?
- I don’t have research money to support you, so you will probably be a teaching assistant throughout your graduate career. How would you prioritize classes, teaching and research?

Things you might want to ask a prospective advisor:
- How many graduate students do you have and how similar/diverse are the projects that they work on?
- What is the difference between the M.S. and Ph.D. projects?
- Who generally decides what the research topic will be?
- How could I expect to be funded if I came to work in your lab?
- How long do students in your lab typically take to finish?
- I have some experience studying ‘X’. Is continuing along this line of research compatible with your lab?
- What sort of jobs have your past graduate students gotten after they’ve graduated?

Interviewing with Graduate Students

Things you might want to ask current graduate students:
- What’s the best/worst thing about: being a graduate student, your advisor, the department, the university, the city, etc?
- How long have you been in graduate school and when do you expect to finish?
- What is the teaching load like for a TA in the department?
- Do you recommend ‘Professor X’ as an advisor?
- What is the most difficult part of the graduate student process? What is the most important part?
- What is the cost of housing? Is it easy to find a place to live?
- How’s life in [the location/city]?

Be aware that graduate students might be willing to give more open answers in person than in writing. After all, you are asking them to chat about their supervisor.

Modified from University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Zoology
http://www.zoology.wisc.edu/grad/Prospective.html
Deciding

- Potential advisor and current grad students great resource
- Factors to Consider:
  - Advisor Style, Availability
  - Potential Research
  - Potential Research Sites, Organisms
  - Funding, Cost of Living, Health Insurance
  - Geographic location
  - Department size
  - Where are previous grad students now?
  - Available Tools
  - Diversity
  - Teaching Requirements
  - Lab Requirements
  - Outreach Opportunities
  - Others?
Contacting Professors
Cover Letters
Personal Statements

- Look at examples
- Ask for advice
- What do they ask for?
  - General research interests
  - Career goals
  - Relevant research experience
  - Educational background
  - Why program/school/advisor good fit for you
  - Strengths you bring to the program
  - How you think critically
  - Demonstrate leadership potential
  - Faculty members you would like to work with
  - Why you want a degree
  - Career (life?!?) goals
Tips

- Sell yourself. Don’t be modest, but don’t be arrogant
- Be concise
- Avoid clichés
- What drives you?
- Why is this program/school/advisor good for you?

- Evaluate experiences; don’t just describe them (it’s not a resume)
- Don’t whine, don’t preach
- Proofread!
- Use a template? Make sure all school/professor names are right
Hello Professor X,
My name is Nick Dobric and I am contacting you regarding the Master of Science in Applied Ecology program. I hope to attend Michigan Tech starting in Fall 2010 and am looking for a faculty advisor. I am reviewed your webpage and am interested in the work you do on wildlife ecology.
I received a B.S. in Environmental Studies from Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin in 2005 with a 3.9 GPA. My GRE scores are 490 Verbal, 640 Quantitative, and 4.0 Analytical. At Northland I took basic science courses plus Ecology, Forestry, GIS and Botany. My college transcript and my resume are attached.

My research interests are extensive since most aspects of the natural world excite me. Western US ecology including terrestrial, avian, and freshwater is my basic parameters. I hope to find a research project that can utilize various academic fields to address a systemic ecosystem problem.

My specific interests include: Interconnectedness/trophic cascades of carnivore, herbivore, plant, bird and fish communities Comparative analysis of ecosystem health or a specific species in protected lands versus anthropogenic disturbed ecosystems Habitat and/or species restoration, species migration corridors and habitat fragmentation Implementation of scientific results into policy and management changes

My most recent work was with a non-profit conservation group, the Nevada Wilderness Project. It required communicating the biological benefits of protecting habitat to the public and decision makers and required collaboration with numerous parties. I also assisted with fundraising and have successfully obtained significant grant rewards. My deep passion for the outdoors, pragmatic and thoughtful approach, mixed with zeal, has led me to become an effective leader in the conservation field.

Despite my success in the conservation field, I continue to seek to understand ecosystems at a deeper scientific level. Upon completion of the M.S. degree, I hope to continue with research and possibly pursue a doctorate. Eventually I plan to return to the conservation field with an established organization that utilizes scientific research to implement policy changes. Now that you have my general background that leads me to ask if you are taking on any new graduate students for this coming fall semester? If yes, can you please send me some basic information on the research that you have an opening taking on any new students, or do not believe that I would be a project, can you please recommend another faculty member? Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.
Sincerely,
xxx
Dear Dr. X,
I am a senior at University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, and I will be finishing my bachelor's degree in biology this May 2010. I am very interested in the master's level forest ecology and management program Michigan Tech has to offer, and particularly your personal work in predator/prey interaction at Isle Royale with wolves and moose. My undergraduate research has involved northern pike from Isle Royale - so I have some familiarity with the unique habitat of this area. I have very strong interests in future studies of wildlife population ecology and conservation - and hope to ultimately work towards a Ph.D. after my master's degree involving it. I am interested to find out if you will be accepting any graduate students as of fall 2010 involving this project or other related topics? I would be very appreciative of any information you can share!
Thank you very much for your time and consideration,
Xxx

Applying to an announcement example:
Dear Dr. X,
I am pleased to submit to you an expression of interest in the Ph.D. assistantship to study the effects of large herbivores on freshwater ecosystems. Attached please find my application materials. Please feel free to contact me with any questions that you may have, and best regards,
xxx
April 21st, 2008

Dear Professor Mustah,

I was excited to see that you are seeking a postdoctoral candidate to work on mechanistic home range models. My strong background in spatial analysis, carnivore and ungulate ecology, and experience working in Yellowstone and with the United States Fish & Wildlife Service fit the position well.

I will complete my doctorate in Forest Science at Michigan Technological University in May 2008 (I have already successfully defended my dissertation). My success formulating innovative ideas and getting them funded through NSF, EPA, and NASA fellowships, my modeling and field experience, and the independence with which I have operated as a student have provided the professional development needed to meet the qualifications you seek in a successful candidate.

To date, I have published five papers in a diverse set of high quality, peer-reviewed journals, and three additional manuscripts are currently in review. As a student I obtained $221,500 in grants and fellowships. I have presented my research at scientific meetings and my recent work has received national and international press coverage (ScienceDaily, FOXNews, Detroit Free Press, Der Spiegel). My advisors and I spend seven months of each year in the field. Consequently, I am accustomed to working independently, comfortable managing multiple projects with minimal supervision, and have demonstrated the ability to raise funds and direct research successfully.

The position description indicates that you are looking for a scholar with previous experience in home range analysis or the development of models of individual movement behavior. I have experience in home range analysis through coursework and assisting in the analysis of telemetry data from fish and mammals. I also think that my research on predator-heterogeneity-biodiversity links would bring a new perspective to the project that will likely lead to developing novel ideas that expand the current project into other important, fundable research areas. My primary research interests are in the spatiotemporal structure of predator-prey relationships, and the biotic mechanisms and consequences of shifting landscape mosaics.

Working in a lab that strives to bridge theoretical and empirical ecology is an explicit goal in my search for a rewarding postdoctoral position. I value applied research and am comfortable with theoretical concepts, hence I feel my presence would compliment the expertise in your lab. The conservation and management dimension aspects of your project are important and especially motivating.

I am eager to learn more about the project and tell more about my background. Should you decide to pursue my application I would be happy to visit Cambridge at my own expense. Thank you for your consideration and the best of luck to you in your postdoctoral search.

Sincerely,

Joseph Young
CV’s and Resumes

- For What Purpose?
- Look at examples, Ask for Advice
  - Contact Info
  - Objective?
  - Education Info
  - Honors, Awards, Fellowships
  - Research Experience or Publications, Posters & Presentations (both?)
  - Teaching Experience
  - Professional Memberships
  - Skills (Computer, languages, etc)
  - Professional Exp
  - Grant Support
  - Invited Lectures, Prez
  - Foreign Field Exp
  - Consultant For
  - University/National Committees
  - Grad students
  - Others?

For What Purpose?
Look at examples, Ask for Advice

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- Others?
## Common Action Words Used to Describe Job Experience

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<th>Effected</th>
<th>Increased</th>
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<td>Improved</td>
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<td>Edited</td>
<td>Improvised</td>
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Taken from: [www.e-education.psu.edu/styleforstudents](www.e-education.psu.edu/styleforstudents)
Research Interests

- Behavioral ecology
- Causes of growth rate and behavior variation among siblings
- Effects of steroid hormones on growth and behavior

Education

2008 – present  Ph.D. in Biology. Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, USA.

2007 – 2008  Dominion Scholar. Ecology Program, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, USA.

2003 – 2007  B.S. Ecology and Environmental Biology, Summa Cum Laude with University Honors. Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania, Lock Haven, PA, USA.

Research Experience

2008 - present  Graduate Research Assistant – Dr. Tracy Langkilde

2008  Research Assistant - S. undulatus collection, Dr. Tracy Langkilde, Alabama and Arkansas

2008  Field Assistant - Praying Mantis Dispersal Study, Dr. Robert K. Rose, ODU

2007  Field Assistant - Small Mammal Census, Dr. Robert K. Rose, ODU

2007 – 2008  GIS Mapping - independent projects, Dr. Hua Liu, ODU

2006  Independent Student Researcher - Field Ichthyological Techniques, Dr. K. Thompson, LHUP

2006  Independent Student Researcher – Microbial Ecology, Dr. J. Calabrese, LHUP
  - Findings were presented at the Student Research Symposium (LHU) and the Conference of Pennsylvania University Biologists (CPUB).

Teaching Experience

2011  Guest Lecturer – Animal Behavior, PSU
2008 – 2010  **Graduate Teaching Assistant** - *Biology: Basic Concepts and Biodiversity*, PSU

2007 – 2008  **Graduate Teaching Assistant** – *Invertebrate Zoology*, ODU

2004 – 2007  **Peer Tutor** – *Basic Biology, Principles of Biology, Physical Geology*, LHUP

2006 – 2007  **Honors Program Activity Group Leader** – *Music Appreciation, Environmental Issues and Explorations*, LHUP

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**Publications and Presentations** *indicates undergraduate collaborator*


**Rosier, R.L.** and T. Langkilde. Not all lizards have plastic legs: absence of limb length plasticity in *Sceloporus undulatus*. Journal of Herpetology. *(in review)*

**Rosier, R. L., T. Langkilde and S. Howarth*. Secondary sexual characteristics and reproductive allocation in *S. undulatus* *(in prep).*

**Rosier, R. L.** and T. Langkilde. Larger lizards are more active in open field trials *(in prep)*


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**Academic Honors and Activities**

2009 – 2011  Judge for Undergraduate Exhibition (PSU)

2009  Judge for Pennsylvania Junior Academy of the Sciences

2008 – 2010  Braddock Award (PSU) - $8,000

2003 – 2007  Dean’s List, LHUP (8 consecutive semesters)

2003 – 2007  Recipient, LHUP Presidential Scholarship - $12,000
2005  Presenter at Regional Honors Conference  
Recipient, Jack and Mary Franz Scholarship (LHUP) - $500  
Recipient, CRODA Scholarship (LHUP) - $2000

### Outreach and Volunteering

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<td>2011</td>
<td>PSU Exploration Day, Biology Department Graduate Student Assoc.</td>
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<td>2008- 2010</td>
<td>Girl Scout Badge Workshops, Graduate Women in Science</td>
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<td>2006– 2007</td>
<td>Americorps, Second Mile Program</td>
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<td>2005 – 2007</td>
<td>Lock Haven University Earth Day</td>
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<td>2004 – 2007</td>
<td>Lock Haven University Children’s Festival</td>
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### Society Memberships and Leadership Roles

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Membership/Role</th>
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<tr>
<td>2010 – present</td>
<td>Ecological Society of America (ESA)</td>
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<td>2009 – present</td>
<td>American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAS), sponsored membership</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 2008 – present | Biology Department Graduate Student Association  
  * Coffee hour chair, recruitment weekend committee,  
    Graduate Affairs Representative (2 years), graduate representative to the Biology Department climate committee |
| 2008 – present | PSU Graduate Student Association                                                |
| 2008 – 2010 | Graduate Women in Science, Nu Chapter  
  * Women in STEM Week co-chair (2009 and 2010)                              |
| 2006 – present | The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi                                              |

### Etc.

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| 2008 – present | **Nittany Highland Pipe Band**  
  Bagpiper, Treasurer (2011 – 2012)                                           |
| 2004 – present | **Tau Beta Sigma**, National Honorary Band Sorority  
  President (2006 – 2007), Alumni/Corresponding Secretary                      |
| 2003 – 2008 | **Instructor**  
  flute and marching, Cambridge Springs Jr/Sr High School Marching Band        |
GAIL L. MCCORMICK

PhD Candidate

208 Mueller Laboratory, University Park, PA 16802
The Pennsylvania State University, Eberly College of Science
Phone: 814.865.7540 / 814.867.2252

gail.mccormick.10@gmail.com

EDUCATION


HONORS, AWARDS & FELLOWSHIPS

2010 – 2011  University Graduate Fellowship. The Pennsylvania State University
2010  B.S. with High Distinction. The University of Michigan
2010  B.T.A with Highest Honors. The University of Michigan
2010  James B. Angell Scholar. The University of Michigan
2007 – 2010  University Honors. (x8) The University of Michigan

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE


2009  Field Assistant. Department of Energy Global Change Education Project (GCEP) Summer Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) Program. Assisted with project adaptation, data collection, analysis, and graphical representation (SPSS, Excel) with regard to dominance, discovery and thermal trade-offs of foraging woodland ants in Duke Forest, NC.


PUBLICATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

In Prep:

Posters:


TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

2010  Teaching Assistant. University of Michigan Biological Station. Pellston, MI.
      • Field Mammalogy

      • Inside the Dramatic Process: Image of the American Family (First Year Writing Seminar). – (Delivered two lectures.)

2000 – 2010  Production Manager, Stage Manager, Director, Actor, etc. ~50 Theatrical Productions. Individually responsible (production manager, stage manager, director) for large portion of artistic/logistical aspects of a show, and orchestrating from 10 to 50 people while under physical, emotional, and temporal demands.


OTHER SKILLS

Computer  Advanced: Microsoft Office, Mac & PC.
          Proficient: ArcGIS, FileMakerPro, SPSS, R, Photoshop, Quickbooks.
          Ability to self-train and learn new software tools quickly

Languages  Spanish