

Going to Graduate School in Ecology!

Going to graduate school in ecology is pretty different than applying for undergraduate degree programs. In general, you will apply to work with a specific faculty advisor. That means you need to reach out to potential faculty advisors well ahead of any graduate school application deadlines.

Start doing research on faculty you might want to work with. Read some of their recent papers. Read the page on their website for "potential students." Talk with people you know who have worked with them, and ask other faculty for ideas about who to apply with. Browse recent abstracts from conferences like ESA (Ecological Society of America), SFS (Society for Freshwater Science), etc.

Once you have a good list of faculty to contact (maybe keep a spreadsheet going), then draft a brief paragraph about yourself, your research experiences, and your research interests. Add that paragraph to one specific to each faculty member that outlines what about their research program interests you - use specific details so they can tell that you have done your research on them as potential mentors. Keep track of the dates you send emails and when they respond to you. Reply promptly to their questions, make a note of their response to you:

- A. They might not reply. In this case, wait 4 weeks and email them again. If they still do not reply, scratch them off your list - if they can't email you back now, they won't be a good communicator as a graduate advisor!
- B. They might reply that they are out of the country, on sabbatical, or at a conference. If so, give them ample time after the date they return to respond, and if you don't hear back from them, follow the advice in #A.
- C. They might reply saying that they have no funding, or are not accepting students at this time. Respond politely thanking them for their time and wishing them well with their research.
- D. They might reply saying that they are accepting students, but that they don't have any funding for Research Assistantships. In this case, keep a dialog going. This might end up being a good situation for you. You may need to be a Teaching Assistant, but if the fit is good, it might work out.
- E. They might reply saying that they are accepting new students and that they have grant funding for a specific project. Gold mine! This is what you've been hoping for! Reply promptly asking some specific questions about the research project. Now might be a good time to send your CV and GRE scores to the faculty member directly. They will hopefully encourage you to apply to the program, and then you are, for all intents and purposes, IN!

- F. Applying to the graduate school is usually a formality. Once a faculty member has committed to you, they will fight for your application. They might encourage you to come out and visit (or even fly you out!).
- G. Remember, a faculty member is investing over \$100,000 in you and your graduate education. They want this to work out just as much as you do!

Always be professional, courteous, respectful, and academic in your emails to potential faculty members. Do not use any texting shorthands; always address them as Dr. So-and-so; and try to use a professional email account (not "kittycupcake24").

Work on your Curriculum Vitae (CV). Use online guides or ask your Evergreen faculty for advice.

Take the GRE, but study, study, study beforehand! Evergreen students often do not do well on the GRE because we haven't been teaching you to take tests for 4 years. Buy a GRE book or take a GRE class and prepare beforehand.

Ask for letters of recommendation WELL in advance of any deadlines. Be sure to give your letter writers at least 4 weeks to write your letter. Ask politely if they would be willing to write you a letter, then provide them with: 1) an updated CV, 2) specific details about the program you are applying to, 3) deadlines, and 4) addresses.

Let your letter writers know what happens! We all care about where you end up, so send updates and ask questions if you have them.

Finding Graduate Positions: Some graduate positions are advertised. Here are some good places to start your searches.

1. A place to look for MS, PhD positions, and staff/faculty jobs: ECO-LOG

<https://listserv.umd.edu/archives/ecolog-l.html>

- Eco-Log is a list serve where most things are posted. It is the most extensive database, but kind of hard to search – but worth it!

2. You can find jobs regardless of your stage (undergrad, graduate, faculty member) on this site. I will provide links to the undergraduate and technician pages here:

<http://esa-ecophys.org/undergrad.html>

<http://esa-ecophys.org/temp.html>