

Books, advice ease grad school search

U-WIRE

RALEIGH, N.C. - In case you've lived in a cave for the past decade, the job market has become more competitive and a bachelor's of science or arts degree is going to get you about as far as a high school degree did 30 years ago.

If this fact isn't disheartening enough, the graduate school application process is more complex than undergraduate.

"The Ultimate Grad School Survival Guide" by Lesli Mitchell suggests a nine-month time frame for the application process. However, if the process is just now beginning, it's not too late.

David Zonderman, professor of history and head of graduate school programming at North Carolina State University, says that when a student is considering graduate school, the first step is to make sure graduate school is for that student.

Most schools are highly selective, and certain programs suggest that if a student's G.P.A. is lower than a 2.9, that person should enter the job market instead.

"A' work for a student in undergraduate could be 'B' work in graduate school," Zonderman warns.

Zonderman also suggests that the best resource to start with is talking with a professor, especially if the professor has known the student for more than one semester.

He or she can give direction for focus of interests and determine chances of acceptance. Prospective students should narrow their choices down to five schools based on the program, faculty and location.

Choosing a program can be difficult, especially in the sciences. Thomas Wentworth, professor of botany at NCSU, says a student must really specialize in the sciences. Considering ecology, plant or animal ecology can be areas of focus. There is the molecular level, or one can specialize in population biology or ecosystem levels.

Finding a faculty person to serve as a mentor is another step in the application process. Most graduate schools do not accept students until a faculty member at that school has chosen the student to do research under him or her.

Wentworth said choosing a grad program is nothing like choosing an undergrad program.

The GRE is the next rather tedious step. Zonderman suggests taking the test early in the fall in

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order to get scores in on time. There is a multitude of books and software to prepare for the general and subject tests.

For general information, go to the Web site www.gre.org or call 1-800-GRE-CALL.

A Web site for test preparation, www.800score.com/gre1234.html, which provides free software for downloading with tests and advice on how to take the test.

Acquiring letters of recommendation is one of the most important components of the application process. Developing good relationships with faculty as an undergraduate is important.

This can be done by volunteering or working for a professor, interning, participating in academic clubs as an officer and writing a thesis while in an honors program. Usually, letters from two faculty and one employer are recommended.

There are "How To" books galore on graduate schools. Peterson's "Graduate Schools in the U.S." (\$19.96) serves the usual purpose for a "How To" book. It covers the admission process, GRE requirements for each school, and deadlines. More intrinsic books are available as well.

For those who have accepted the cyber space lifestyle, check out "The Best Distance Learning Grad Schools: Earning Your Degree Without Leaving Your Home" (\$18). This book lists all of the graduate schools that have entire programs taught on the Web.

For a general review of all resources, check out "Graduate School: The Best Resources to Help You Choose, Get In, and Pay" (\$24.95). This book serves as a review on all books and Web sites on graduate schools.

U.S. News & World Report: Best Graduate Schools (\$7.95) breaks down schools by ranking.

Also, "Newsweek: How to Use the Internet to Choose or Change Careers" (\$6.95) gives information on finding resources for graduate school success and getting financing for fellowships.

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