

# **Applying to Graduate School: Answers to FAQs**

**Marine and Natural Sciences**

**February 2, 2022**

# Background and Opening Remarks

- Taylor professional training background:
  - B.A. Biology (Bucknell University, PA)
  - M.S. Marine Science (North Carolina State University, NC)
  - Ph.D. Oceanography (University of Rhode Island, RI)
  - Postdoc. Marine Ecology (Rutgers University, NJ)
- Mattaini professional training background:
  - B.S. Chemistry (Providence College, RI)
  - Postbac. Fellowship (National Cancer Institute, MD)
  - Ph.D. Biology (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MA)
  - Postdoc. Bio Research & Teaching (Tufts University, MA)

# Background and Opening Remarks

- Miscellaneous points:
  - Origin of presentation
  - Not all grad programs are structured the same
  - “Fact” vs. “Opinion”
  - Seek input from other faculty and people in positions of interest
  - Request presentation by emailing [dtaylor@rwu.edu](mailto:dtaylor@rwu.edu), or access via the MNS Seminar Series website:

<https://www.rwu.edu/academics/schools-and-colleges/fssns/mns-seminar-series>

# Should I go to grad school?

- But, consider the following:
- What are your short- and long-term career goals?

# Should I take time off before going to grad school?

- No right answer. It's a personal decision.
- Advantages of taking time off before grad school:
  - Recharge batteries
  - Better define areas of interest
  - More experience to improve application
  - Devote more time and focus to applications
  - Earn a more substantial income and pay off student loans?
- Advantages of starting grad school right away:
  - Maintain “academic momentum”
  - The quicker you start, the quicker you'll finish – maybe?



# Should I pursue a Masters (MS) or Doctorate (Ph.D.)?

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	Time	Credits	Expectations
MS	2-3 yr	42 credits (12 research)	1 manuscript
PhD	4-7 yr	72-75 credits (30 research)	>1 manuscript

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## Job prospects

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MS	Improves research, analytical, and computational skills In <u>some</u> fields: Expands job opportunities (industry, education, government); Prepare for a PhD
PhD	Preparation for academia; High level positions in industry and government

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# What is the structure of grad programs in my field?

- Option 1: Enter grad school with advisor identified:
  - Often includes programs in:
    - Ecology & evolution
    - Organismal biology
    - Some chemistry programs
- Option 2: Enter program first & identify advisor later
  - Often includes programs in:
    - Cell & molecular biology
    - Some chemistry programs
    - Math
- Check far ahead for any programs that interest you



# What's important when identifying grad schools?

- Quality of school/department
- Research advisor:
  - Type of research conducted in lab
  - Productivity of lab (grants, publications, presentations)
  - Success of grad students (see above, job market)
  - Average length of MS/PhD
  - Advisor and lab personality
- Funding opportunities
- Geography

# OPTION 1: Should I contact potential grad advisor(s)

- Why?
  - Learn more about program and advisor's research interests
  - Identify advisor's interest and willingness to accept new students
  - Have an important advocate for your grad application
- What?
  - Initial communication:
    - Identify your interests and how they complement advisor's lab
    - Ask if they are accepting students the following year
  - Later communications:
    - Funding availability
    - Possible projects

# OPTION 1: Should I contact potential grad advisor(s)

- How?

- Brief email (attach CV)
  - Phone call
  - Campus visit
    - Meet advisor, other faculty, and students
    - Gives valuable insight into people and place
    - Note: Some programs/schools cover visitation expense
- Be prepared for no response



- When?

- Start in summer and early fall of senior year
- Too early = advisor doesn't know if they are accepting students
- Too late = advisor has made a commitment to another student

# What's considered in a grad school application?

- GPA

> 3.0 (> 3.5 preferred)



- Research experience

- Courses taken

- GRE

Almost always “General”

Sometimes “Subject”

- Personal statement

- Letters of recommendation:

Typically 3 are required

- Connections:

*“It's not what you know, but who you know that's important.”*

- RESEARCH ADVISOR (OPTION 1)

Need a research advisor to accept you into a lab

# FAQ about the GRE

- What is it?
  - Graduate Record Examination = computer-based, standardized exam (offered monthly at designated testing centers)
  - Admissions requirement for many schools
- Do all grad schools require the GRE?
  - Majority require “General” GRE, but trend toward “optional” testing
  - Some others also require “Subject” GRE (e.g. *Biology* )
- How important is the GRE?
  - Varies greatly across schools and programs, ranging from: (i) not required, (ii) mere formality, or (iii) important selection factor

## FAQ about the GRE, continued

- What's tested on the GRE?
  - Verbal Reasoning (2 sections, 20 ques each, 30 min per section)
  - Quantitative Reasoning (2 sections, 20 ques each, 35 min per section)
  - Analytical Writing (2 essays, 1 hour total, external review)
  - Experimental (1 section)
- Can you study for the GRE?
  - Yes – review of math and vocabulary?
  - Yes – develop comfort level with test!
  - Test prep courses are not necessary. Borrow test prep books from a library for free!

## FAQ about the GRE, continued

- How much does the GRE cost?
  - Usual fee is \$205
  - Those who meet criteria of demonstrated financial need can apply for a 50% Fee Reduction Voucher:  
<https://www.ets.org/gre/subject/register/fees/reduction/>
  - On test day, you can select 4 programs to receive your scores. Each additional score report (ordered later) is \$27
- Note:
  - Many grad programs may also have an application fee waiver for those with demonstrated financial need!

## FAQ about the GRE, continued

- What's a good score on the GRE?
  - 60<sup>th</sup> percentile = Fair
  - 80<sup>th</sup> percentile = Good
  - 90<sup>th</sup> percentile = Very good
- Should I retake the GRE if I am not satisfied with my score?
  - Yes, but consider the cost
- Should I send my GRE scores to a grad school?
  - GRE scores will need to be submitted to a grad school to complete your application package
  - But, recommendation is to send scores after you know exam outcome (this comes at an additional cost)



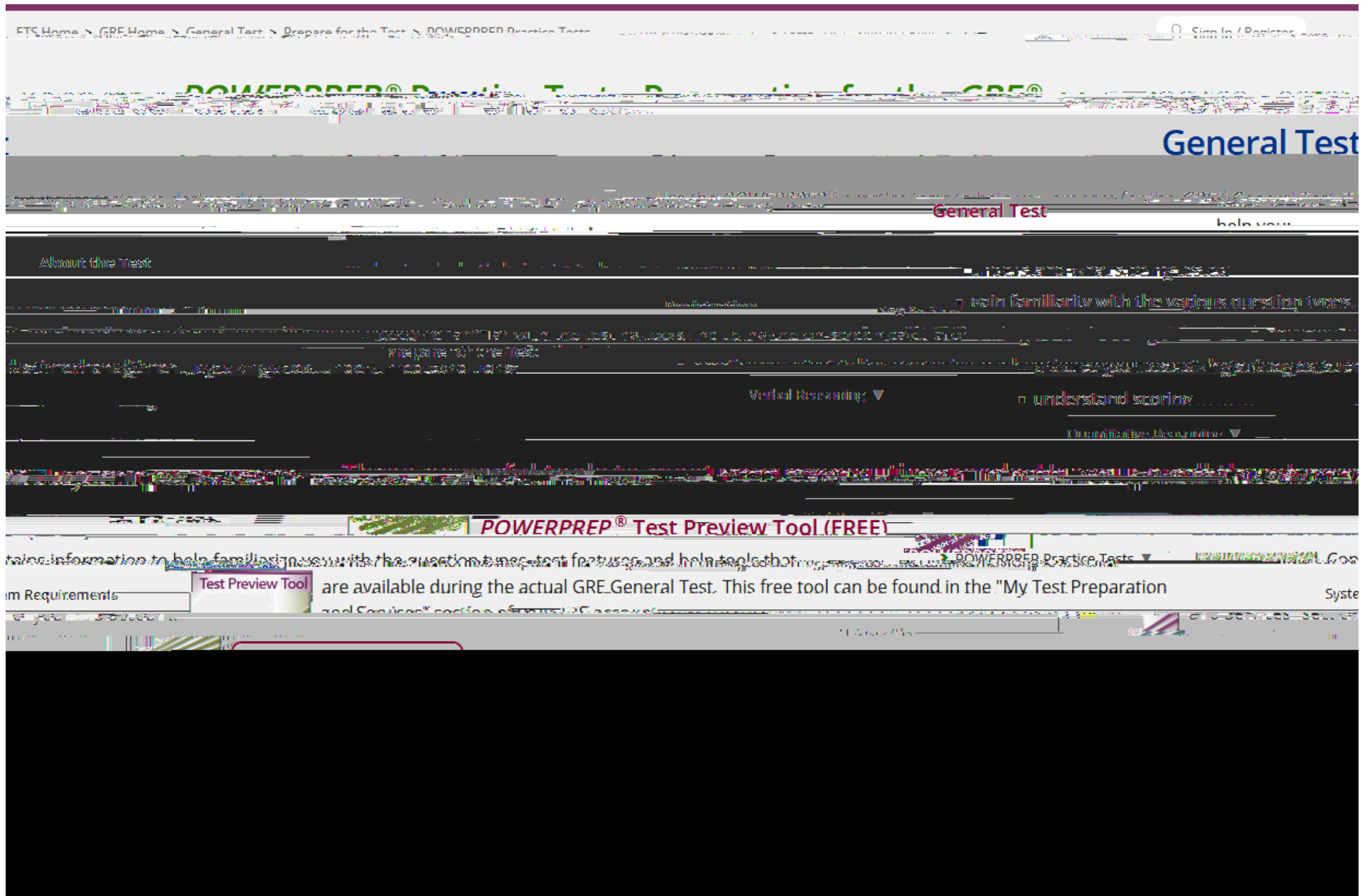
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[http://www.ets.org/gre/revised\\_general/prepare/powerprep2/](http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/powerprep2/)



# General Timeline

Take GRE

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Research schools

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Contact grad advisors (Option 1)

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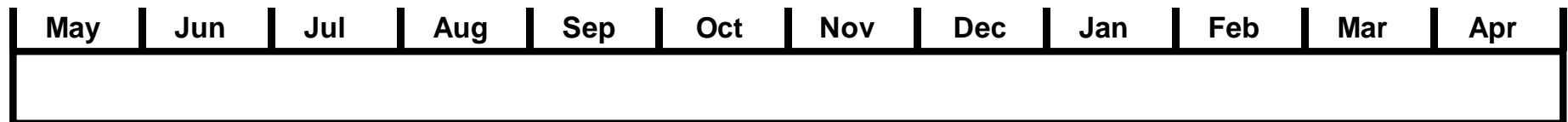
Visit grad schools

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Applications due

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Decision



**Note:** Timelines vary across disciplines and schools.  
Check your programs of interest for exact schedule and deadlines.