Following Your Yellow Brick Road to Becoming a Master

Graduate degrees and continued education, are topics that are more frequently being discussed as society changes and becomes faster paced and more information hungry. Those who choose to continue their education after obtaining their undergraduate degree are more likely to experience: “personal growth, greater employment opportunities, greater career advancement, financial reward, a sense of accomplishment, and greater recognition and credibility”, (Martin, 2012). There are many paths that a student may follow on their journey toward higher education. Some choose to finish their undergraduate degree and right after are once again thrust back into school, while others graduate and work to gain experience and knowledge, after which they return to school to attain a higher degree. No matter what path a student chooses one thing is for certain, the university chooses whom they want, and with each year that passes they are presented with more and more applicants to choose from. As someone who plans on embarking on this journey, I’ve done some outside research and sought out advisement on the subject. From what I can gather this road to graduate school is one that begins early, and requires intelligence, a lot of passion, and courage to step out of your box stand out.

Intelligence is the easiest to begin with, it is something that a majority of students are aware that they will need before they even think about applying to graduate school, and therefore something they can start planning for early on. Having a good GPA is fundamental, and is something that every student considering applying to graduate school is required to have. How high their GPA has to be will depend on the institution and their own criteria.

[“You can never have too many A’s”]

It is safe to assume, however, that having at least between a 3.0-3.5 GPA would give any student a solid shot at being considered for most programs. Although it’s not everything, a student’s GPA is one of the best indicators an institution has to determine whether or not a student will be successful in their program. As my advisor Dr. Riggio put it, “you can never have too many A’s”. Another indicator that many graduate schools utilize to determine future success and other outcomes are GRE (Graduate Record Examination) scores (Symons, 1999). The GRE can be looked at as a more sophisticated version of the SAT, and should be prepared for in much the same way. This can all be overwhelming for some students, so it is important work on this as early on as possible to have the best chance for success. Grades and test scores are just one aspect of the decision making process for recruiters when selecting between applicants, another method by which selections are made is through the reading of letters of recommendation.

When applying to graduate programs students will be required to present at least three letters of recommendation, and it is safe to expect that two of them will need to come from professors or other faculty members from school. This is where having passion comes into play on the road to becoming a master. It is important to use that passion for knowledge, or your area of study, to form professional relationships with your professors. Having these types of relationships will make asking for a letter of recommendation, or guidance, easier. Students who do not receive proper advisement in their undergraduate program are much more likely to make crucial mistakes that could hinder them from understanding graduate school requirements, the different aspects of the application process, and graduate school culture (Appleby, D., & Appleby, K., 2006). Having passion, and professional relationships will also make it easier for people to want to mentor and help you. For the most part, professors can sense when students are giving their whole heart to a subject and are enjoying it, and it is those very students that they are always willing to provide guidance and aid to.
Now that we have our intelligence and passion for the journey on this long road, all that is left is courage. Applying to graduate school can cause high anxiety, stress, and loads of other psychological and physiological issues (Parker-Hope, 2008). Students applying to graduate school need to have the courage to face possible rejection, explore their academic possibilities, assume larger responsibilities regarding their academic career, and be prepared to deal with other issues such as tuition costs that are always on the rise, and an economic climate that is not helping with the advancement of academic careers (Amir-Aslani, Rennard, & Theodosiou, 2012). Courage also comes into play when looking for activities outside of school, such as internships, job shadowing opportunities, and lab research opportunities, which show potential recruiters that you as a student are very serious about your future career. This outside of class involvement can also aid students in developing areas of interests within a major, and allow for them to present research, and give them opportunities to publish papers or other works. As part of the application process, students are required to submit a plan of what they would like to research should they be accepted into the program, this is known as the personal statement. Many students misinterpret this aspect of the application process and submit a letter about their personal lives and any difficulties they have had to overcome, or the influence of certain experiences, on their road through their academic career.

[It is probably the most difficult tool to acquire, but one of the most useful for getting the ball rolling and becoming a master in your field of interest]


http://dx.doi.org.mimas.calstatela.edu/10.1037/h0086827