



# University of Pittsburgh

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## **My keys/important decisions that lead me to graduate school**

Reflecting on my time as an undergraduate there are decisions I made regarding research, courses, and volunteering that led me to a job after graduation and to my current position as a graduate school student. The most important and beneficial choice I made was getting involved in research as an undergraduate. I will tell any student whether they are thinking of going to graduate school or not to join a research group at their university as soon as possible. The skills and knowledge you will learn in a research setting will not only benefit you while you are still in undergraduate with courses during your later years but also in graduate school. Working on benchtop skills, developing good lab techniques, running instruments, interpreting data, and reading publications are all great things to work on while an undergraduate. Having research experience doesn't only make you a better candidate to get accepted, it also will give you an idea of what area and what kind of research you will want to pursue in a PhD or master's program.

Another key decision I made while I was an undergraduate was taking advance courses in chemistry. The University of Pittsburgh offered a recommended course list for those interested in subjects of material and nanoscience. They also have recommended courses for other fields in chemistry. While these courses are labeled as advanced, and you will be taking them alongside graduate students you do not need to worry about the difficulty of the course. The subject matter is both interesting and the professors are world class, and those advance courses were not only some of the most beneficial but also the most fun I had in a lecture while I was an undergraduate.

One last piece of advice I would say is to sign up to be an undergraduate teaching assistant (UTA). Being a TA is a right of passage that pretty much every graduate student must do. Getting some experience in a similar setting will help when you will eventually be the person leading the course. Talk to your academic advisor or the professor in charge of a lab course to be involved as a UTA for labs.

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