



August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## Everyone's experience is different

It can be hard to know the best way to prepare for graduate school, but after making the transition, I realized a lot of experiences from my undergrad were very helpful in showing me what graduate school was like, developing helpful skills for classes, research, and teaching, and preparing me for the application process. Everyone's experience is different, but here's my advice on a few things you can do in undergrad to help prepare yourself!

### *Getting Yourself Ready for Grad School*

- Reinforce knowledge in your area of interest
  - One of the best things that I did in undergrad to prepare for graduate courses and teaching was tutoring organic chemistry. Working at the university's tutoring center was a fairly small time-commitment and provided a structured way for me to review foundational material in my subfield while I was taking classes in other areas. This made my experience as a TA in grad school a lot easier, since I had already learned how to explain many of the concepts, and also gave me a stronger foundation in my graduate courses. Serving as a TA as an undergrad can also be a good experience, but as a tutor I received training in teaching and pedagogy (plus it's a paid position), so if you have to choose, I'd recommend tutoring if possible.
- Do some research full-time over the summer
  - While I would definitely recommend doing research during the school year and getting involved in a lab as early as possible, doing research full-time can be a much different experience than the 5-10 hours a week you're able to commit to during classes. I spent my summers after sophomore and junior year doing full-time research, one at a pharmaceutical company as an intern and one on a fellowship in my undergrad lab. Both were super helpful in preparing me for what it would be like doing research full-time and allowed me to experience what research is like in both an industry and academic setting, which has been really helpful as I think about my career long-term.

### *Building Successful Applications*

- Apply for opportunities you're eligible for throughout undergrad
  - Applying for scholarships and awards is a great way to improve your writing skills, refine your personal statements over time, and build up your resume/CV. I applied to a lot of smaller scholarships as well as national ones (the big one for STEM

undergrads is the Goldwater Scholarship). Throughout undergrad, I worked closely with the scholarship office to refine my personal statements, and they also helped with finding awards and fellowships that I was eligible for. Remember when you're applying to things that no one is working on their application in a vacuum, and you should be using all of the resources available to you to put together the best application you can. Asking people to help review and give feedback on your materials can be nerve wracking, but in most cases they're happy to help and it's one of the best ways to refine your applications.

- Talk to your professors about graduate schools
  - Deciding where to apply for grad school can be really overwhelming, so I found it helpful to talk with a couple of my professors about what types of programs I had a good chance of getting into that would fit well with my research interests. Once I had an idea of where I could get accepted and what programs were strong in my subfield, I chose where to apply based on locations and which professors I was most interested in working with.

While these are the things that I found most helpful, the most important thing is to do anything that you feel you need to do to know if grad school is the right path for you. It's also important to remember that grad school is about learning, and you don't need to show up as an expert. Remember to have fun and enjoy undergrad while you can!

H2P!

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*TFS*