

Cambridge Summer Institute

# Applying to Graduate School in the US or UK

David Robinson, August 2018

1. Be clear on your goals – think about where you want to end up *and* have a “Plan B”
  - a. Get ahead professionally
  - b. Remediate a weak first degree
  - c. Emigrate
    - i. US “F-1” *student visa* comes with 12 months “OPT” (optional practical training) automatic permission, up to 36 months for “STEM” (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics); note – “Business” is not STEM
    - ii. Despite rhetoric, F-1 easy to get: You need to be admitted and show you have the funds to pay for the course, that’s all.
  
2. Basics:
  - a. Instructed or “taught” Masters (usually) 1 year (this is what you want, most likely)
  - b. Research or “thesis” Masters = ½ way to PhD
  - c. MBA *only* after 3 to 5 years work experience
  - d. Many entrants to MFE has other graduate degrees including PhD
  
3. It’s expensive:
  - a. Tuition \$52k USD
  - b. Living \$24k USD
  - c. Transportation \$3k USD . . . \$79k USD Total for a year
  - d. → Have a *specific family conversation*; is it a loan or a gift?
  
4. A banquet of choices: 100s of graduate schools; about 500,000 new students /year
  - a. Rankings – don’t fixate on “top-10”; many other good schools
    - i. US News & World Report (a magazine) is the preferred website
      1. Has rankings for many specialties
  - b. Geography
    - i. East Coast, West Coast, other (e.g. Texas)
    - ii. Urban/suburban/rural
  - c. Specialty – specific degree e.g. “Marketing” “International Business” “Accounting”
    - i. Watch out for vague programs (“Management”)
    - ii. Avoid programs with >50 percent non-US enrollment
    - iii. Read their websites and avoid “full-time employed,” “evening,” “part-time,” and online degrees
  - d. Most important: Who hires from that school (3 year rolling listings are typical)?

5. Evaluate your chances based on
  - a. Quality of your undergrad school X your class ranking; **be realistic**
  - b. TOEFL [or ELTS] score – what you have, what you can stretch to gain
    - i. TOEFL is *trainable*
    - ii. Diagnose your weak points and fix
  - c. GMAT (tougher) or GRE
    - i. Limit the number of times you take, retake
    - ii. A “prep” course is a good investment
  - d. Schools will publish the 20 – 80 percentile range; again, **be realistic**
  
6. Apply broadly – you may feel differently when the offers come in
  - a. On the average, about 3 applicants /place overall
  - b. Apply to 6 to 8 schools
    - i. One or two “reach”
      1. Don’t apply *only* to “top-10” schools
    - ii. Two to four “likely to get in”
    - iii. Two good “safety” schools
      1. Don’t apply to places you’d never attend
  - c. Application fees are \$80 to \$200 /school, so budget for this, and TOEFL, GRE, etc
  
7. → You do not need an “agent”
  - a. If you’re too lazy to read websites and fill in visa forms, you shouldn’t be applying
    - i. Visa forms take time, but have simple questions that you can answer yourself
  - b. Agents direct students to obscure, low-level schools that may not match your personal preferences for geography
  - c. Admissions essays that are “edited” (or worse, copied) by agents are easily spotted by admissions officers as not authentically from the applicant.
  
8. Myths:
  - a. “How to raise a girl to get into Harvard” – you are not that girl!
  - b. Private schools give big scholarships (very unlikely to international students)
  - c. Automatic hiring in the US (employment visas are hard to get)
    - i. Some firms ignore F-1 completely
    - ii. “Specialty worker” is H-1b – even if the firm wants you, about a 50 percent chance of getting the visa
      1. Have a “Plan B” e.g. work in Singapore or HK if not US work permit

