



# IEEE Caltech Chapter

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## Graduate School Application Workshop Minutes May 28, 2009 – 12:00pm

A graduate school application workshop took place in Moore on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

A panel run by Professor Michelle Effros, Professor Babak Hassibi, Professor Alain Martin and student Gabe Cohn was set to discuss the application process and to answer questions from the audience.

A handout written by Gabe Cohn was distributed. The handout describes the application process and highlights important dates.

Sandwiches and drinks were provided.

Below is a summary of the comments made by the panelists.

### Professor Effros

- On letters of recommendation: Get letters of recommendation from people you know really well. Talk to professors outside of class. It is not enough to get high grades. Ask relevant questions in class and outside class. Show curiosity and interest. Think beyond what is required for the class. Show enthusiasm. You can get letters from people outside of your field, but only if these letters are an addition to the letters you get from people in your field, not a replacement. The letters of recommendation are probably the most important part of your application. Ask for the letters early, and send polite reminders. Give your recommenders personal statements, grades, descriptions of the research you are doing, and other useful information they might need in order to write your letter.
- On fellowships: Prepare and apply for fellowships early.
- On personal statements: Demonstrate that you can write, that you have a sense of how graduate school is like, that you know what you want to do (state this clearly). Talk about the skills that are going to be required, the things you will have to learn. Talk about what excites you about what you want to do. Don't be too broad. Talk about your future classes. Say why you are interested in the area.
- On classes: Don't do the bare minimum. Take graduate level classes (might be more important than having a very good GPA).
- On emailing professors: Get information from the professors before emailing them. Don't say that you have read their papers if you have not.

### Professor Hassibi

- On graduate schools: Triple majors are not very helpful. Graduate school is about specialization. Selection of courses is important. Plan to take advanced courses in your area. We care about depth. This is a competition between students. If you only plan to do a Masters' degree, do some research too.
- On letters of recommendation: Get recommenders from your field. Don't be shy when you have to remind professors to write your letter.
- On fellowships: This is a good year to get a fellowship, since the economical situation is hard.
- On personal statements: Give them focus. Articulate why you want to go to graduate school. Accepting students is risky for professors; this is why the personal statement and the letters of recommendation are important.

### **Professor Martin**

- On graduate schools: Keep in mind that classes and research are very different.
- On letters of recommendation: We know the faculty in other schools, so it is important that your letters of recommendation come from people in your field. Usually a letter from a work manager is less valuable than a letter from a professor. If your professors know you, it is a lot easier for them to write the letter.
- On personal statement: Keep them short. This is a match making process. Don't start by telling stories about your childhood. Make sure you give a strong background.

### **Gabe Cohn**

- On letters of recommendation: Some schools, such as MIT, require that your letters come from research advisors. Remind your professors to write your letters.
- On choosing a school: Try to meet the professors that you want to work for.