



Applying to Biomedical PhD Programs at UNC

from the SOM's Office of Graduate Education

Admissions Committees make decisions regarding interviews and admittance.

Committee members are:

- UNC Faculty who have active research programs and labs and are in need of graduate students! (*Employers seeking employees!*)
- And, Ashalla Freeman, Director of Diversity Affairs
- Application Review Process:
 - » Deadline for submission of application and LOR's: December 1st
 - » **COMPLETED** Applications reviewed *in 1st week of December*
 - » Each Application is assigned to 2 faculty for review and scoring
 - » Applications are ranked based on average score.
 - » **Applications above a certain score are discussed during a cmte mtg to decide interview offers.**

In your application, admissions committees are looking for your...

- Commitment to the degree AND genuine, personal and professional motivation that will sustain you toward degree completion
- Demonstrated experience and understanding of what research is and how to do it (that you know what you're getting into)
- Understanding of the research/work environment at that institution
- Academic foundations to be successful in graduate coursework

A Competitive Application includes the following...

1. Project-based Research Experience
 - Strong Letters of Recommendation
 - Thoughtful and well-written Statement of Purpose
2. GPA
3. GRE scores

What is Project-Based Research?

- Real hypothesis-driven project about which you should be able to communicate...
 - Scientific Question
 - Hypothesis
 - What does your work mean to you, the lab, the field? Know the big picture relevance of your project.
 - General methodology
 - Findings
- Also convey how you took ownership/"drove" the project and include any presentations/publications

How do you get this kind of experience?

- Summer Research programs
- Postbacc Programs
- Project-based research at your home institution
- Research-focused MS programs



Letters Of Recommendation (LORs) should...

- Be at least 1 page
- Focus on the applicant and their accomplishments ... not the project!
- BRIEFLY establish the letter writer's credentials
- Indicate how the applicant compares to other grad students or undergrads that the writer has trained and who have been successful in grad school
- Convey whether the writer would accept this student into his/her lab as a graduate student
- Expound upon the applicant's likelihood for success in grad school and beyond

Example LOR Request...

- Dear *DR.* ____
- Are you willing and available to write me a **strong letter** in **support** of my application to (*program*)?
- This program aims to (*goals*) and I am applying because (*personal goals*).
- Competitive applicants to this program can demonstrate (*qualifications*), and I feel that I have the credentials and experience to succeed in the program.
- Through our interaction as (*relationship*), I believe you can speak to my (*skills*).
- The application deadline is (*date*) and the letter is due (*date*).
- If you can provide a letter, do you have time to meet and discuss specifics about my application and competitiveness for the program?

Statement of Purpose...not a Personal Essay!

- **Read and Follow ALL the Directions! Most PhD programs explicitly state what should be in the SOP – don't ignore their instructions. Include the following, as appropriate:**
 - Discuss your genuine, long-standing interest in science
 - Describe your RESEARCH... what did you do?
 - Relay your realistic expectations of graduate education
 - Convey why you are interested in a PhD. What are your career plans, and why is the PhD necessary for you to get there?
 - Why UNC? (or the school of choice)
- **Be sure to address any "red flags" or anything that might make you less competitive. Convey that you overcame the challenge/difficulty and improvements that resulted. Your LORs should address these things too!**
 - low cumulative or science GPA/grades
 - limited research experience
 - low GRE scores etc.
 - missing letters from research supervisors

GPA demonstrates your long-term academic performance, habits, and intellectual growth/maturity

Cumulative and science GPA are important. C's or lower in science (major) courses are a problem that you need to address.

GRE (isolated performance on a specific day)

Quantitative score is more important in the sciences than the Verbal score... but do your best on the entire exam! (*Quant tests high school math, so be careful!*) For the last 3 admissions seasons, average GRE scores for UR students offered an interviewed were in the mid-upper 60th percentile.