



Tips from Current Doctoral Students

The process of identifying a school and doctoral program you'd like to attend; preparing, applying and getting admitted; can seem daunting. But hundreds of PhD Project participants have gone through it successfully, and so can you.

Here, exclusively for PhD Project program participants and those interested in applying, current first-year doctoral students share their best strategies, tips and secrets for success. Following the suggestions that fit your situation can save you months, even years – and help you get admitted to the school of your choice.

IS THIS RIGHT FOR ME?

Get in touch with yourself. Understand what you really want to do; spend the time up front to think it through. Only then should you start to select the right school for you.

KERRI ANN SANDERSON

Florida Atlantic University - Accounting

Former Big 4 firm accountant

Do not look at schools' doctoral programs as you did for an MBA – it's very different. Don't be blinded by a school's reputation. Ask yourself, "Does this school fit who I am?" Some schools are wonderful but they may emphasize areas that you are not interested in. Know yourself. Take a hard look at your inventory of skills. Do you shut down in cold weather? Do you need to be in a big city?

STEPHANI MASON

Rutgers University -Accounting

Former adjunct business faculty

At first, this looks like something only a *magna cum laude* could do. But you realize that your corporate experience counts. The first thing to do is talk to people who have gone through it, to get a sense of what it takes. The more you talk to people, the more you realize that you can do it too.

BEATRIZ GUTIERREZ

University of Massachusetts - Marketing

Former marketing executive

Make sure you have the passion for it.

DALITA SALAZAR

University of Texas El Paso - Marketing
Former full-time student

THE GMAT

Take the GMAT seriously and consider a prep course. I took the GMAT the first time thinking, it's no big deal. But it *is* a big deal. Take a review course if your math skills are not that good.

ANISSA TRUESDALE

University of Southern Florida - Accounting
Former corporate accountant

Take the GMAT when you leave MBA school if you are even considering this as an option. The score is good for five years.

C.J. SIMMONS

University of Alabama – Management

IDENTIFYING AND RESEARCHING THE RIGHT SCHOOL AND PROGRAM

The pre-application process is a research project. Understand the types of students the school you are considering has admitted in the past, and see what schools the graduating doctoral students are going to.

STEPHANI MASON

Understand the culture of the school. You can get the basics about a school from the web site, but you learn the culture by talking. Talk to faculty; contact current doctoral students. I asked them what they were working on, who their mentors were, what was the quality of the mentoring relationship, and what support they were getting.

CHRIS BELL

University of Arkansas – Accounting
Former corporate auditor

Don't be shy about reaching out to the experts in your field for guidance. I used SSRN, the research network, to look up which professors were researching the topics I was interested in. Then I cold-emailed those professors and asked them what schools might be best for me.

PAIGE GEE

Temple University - Accounting
Former self employed accountant/adjunct college instructor

Read the major academic journals. It showed me what research papers looked like, and exposed me to what was currently being researched, and who is researching what. At application time, I looked at schools based on what people there were researching – and I wanted at least three professors who research my topic, because in this business people can leave: You don't want to be where just one professor is researching your topic.

CHRIS SMALL

Harvard Business School - Accounting
Former CPA firm accountant

Don't look at the school. Look at the professor who does research in your area. Read that professor's research, visit him or her, and ask the doctoral students about what it's like to work with that person.

KEVIN THOMAS

University of Texas Austin - Marketing
Former marketing executive

Make sure the research being done by the faculty in which you are interested in is reasonably current. If it is all from many years ago, that's not helpful to you.

ANTHONY HOOD

University of Alabama – Management

Don't try to get into the school you think you ultimately might want to teach at, or that is the place where you want to live one day. It's very likely you won't end up working at the school where you do your doctoral program.

LEE BROWN

Old Dominion University- management
Former sales manager

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Start early. The process is very involved and there is much information to organize.

Organize and track: I applied to nine schools and I set up a spreadsheet for each one: deadlines, attributes of the school, requirements, letters of recommendation. Without my system, I would have been lost. Request your letters of recommendation early. Professors are busy. Give them at least two months to do it for you.

PHOEBE DAVIS-CULLER

Florida Atlantic University - Accounting
Former corporate executive

Craft your personal statement to fit the school and its interests. It's like tailoring your resume. If you are applying to five schools, do five personal statements.

KERRI ANN SANDERSON

Model the winners. I asked the first year doctoral students to send me the essays that got them in so I could learn what worked.

Have an editor. Have a professor or other academic mentor review and advise on your application essay

PAIGE GEE

Don't rush, and have a plan. I created a 12 month plan covering everything from when to take the GMAT to when to start contacting schools and professors – small, manageable bites. That way, I wasn't rushed.

TINA THOMPSON

Florida State University – Management

Former IT consultant

Don't wait until the deadline. Get it in early. They will start reviewing applications before the deadline.

CHRIS SMALL

After I read their research, I asked the professors I wanted to work with for informal pre-interviews, by phone or email, before the formal interviews. The fact that they already knew me when I arrived for the formal interview made a big difference.

OSCAR HOLMES

Virginia Commonwealth University – Management

Former high school teacher and college instructor

THE VISIT AND INTERVIEW

Find and use an academic mentor before you start interviewing. Run your ideas before your mentor before the interview. At one interview I asked about something and I was told, "That is not an accounting question."

ANISSA TRUESDALE

Let them see you. Put a face to your application. I met with the director, the professors and the doctoral students for a full day while I was interviewing. You can find out about *them* from the school web site. This was allowing them to see *me*. I wanted to communicate my goals and show how I would add value to their program.

PAMELA HARPER

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute – Management

You don't have to have all the answers. Going in, I thought I would be expected to know exactly what topics I wanted to research, and everything I wanted to do. But you don't.

Don't be shy about pressing for information that is vital to you. I asked how many people they planned on bringing on, and in what areas. If they are not taking anyone in my area, I need to know that.

PAIGE GEE

At campus interviews, I noticed the doctoral students' attitudes. Were they stressed out, in need of sleep, or did they say it was tough but worth it? Find a place where students are happy with the choice they made.

CHRIS BELL

Get candid input from current students – and mostly in person. I hung out with doctoral students over coffee; I got them away from the school environment and asked them what the faculty were like, how students and faculty treated each other.

SCOTT OWEN

University of Oregon – Marketing

THE DECISION

Don't burn bridges. It is a small world.

CHRIS SMALL

FINANCIAL AND PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research the opportunities for fellowships and awards. Look for areas and topics of research that are being funded, and learn who the funding entities are. My search led me to choose a school that had significant funding, and I am funded for full tuition.

RONI MC CLINTOCK

Claremont University - Information Systems

...AND A FINAL THOUGHT:

Listen to what they tell you do to at The PhD Project conference. Then do it.

EFUA OBENG

University of Pittsburgh – Marketing