RECAP: MAHG Colloquium Series: Ph.D. Applications

8 March 2021

How do I find the "right" program?

1. Identify your needs and wants. This applies to much more than the program itself:
   a. Financial
      i. If funding is something that you need and the program does not provide funding, cross it off your list. Pursuing a Ph.D. is a full-time job!
      ii. Funding available depends on size of the program, their endowments—do your research!
   b. Geographical
      i. If the program is in another state/country and you are not willing/able to move
   c. Career goals
      i. What field are you going to is important when choosing a program. Identify where you want to work (i.e. private sector, academia) and find a program that can suit the needs of your career goals.
      ii. Michael Hayse: Ask yourself what you want to get out of a doctoral program and what you want to do with it. The desire to learn is great, but you should pursue it if you want to get into the field and do research. It's a huge commitment. It's worth consulting you're your professors if you are unsure.
      iii. Christina Morus: Know what field you want to pursue. Of all of the MAHG faculty, only Dr. Segal has a specifically Genocide Studies Ph.D. The rest of us have a Ph.D. in a home field and our focus is Genocide Studies.
      iv. The academic world is changing. Have a vision of where you want to go and what you want to do.
   d. Research
      i. Know your research interests and then research your own research: Who is doing similar work? Where are they (US or international)?
   e. Mental health
      i. Pursuing Doctoral studies is a big commitment, so identifying your needs is important. Mental (and physical) health is another major need to consider.
      ii. Consider the above needs and ask yourself if a doctoral program is right for you. What are the barriers for you? Know your limits and consider them when researching programs to apply to.

What should I look for in a program?

1. Always go back to your needs and assess from there:
   a. Go to the program website and find some history on the program

     i. What are they known for?
     ii. What kind of projects are they doing?
     iii. Look at the FAQ page
     iv. Most programs have a page on current students. Reach out to those who are already program.
        1. Christina Morus: Ask them about the culture of the program. What are the prof/student relationships like? What are the peer relationships like? etc. You need to see if you will get appropriate attention from the professors and if the peer culture suits you. In some program's students are very competitive and in others they are more supportive.
     v. Look at the faculty page and get to know the faculty. Reach out to them via e-mail and ask them questions (research related)
  b. Look at length of program vs. length of funding
     i. Do they offer research funding?
     ii. Do they have Teaching Assistantships or Graduate Assistantships to offset costs of tuition?
  c. What other opportunities does the program offer?
     i. If they require a proficiency in another language, do they offer language training or language immersion programs?

Christina Morus: If you are able to, visit the program. You may be able to sit in on a class. Several programs even paid for me to come spend a few days with the students, faculty, etc.

How do I make connections?

1. Make connections through your network
  a. MAHG faculty or faculty from other programs you've gone through
  b. Professional connections you've made through internships, volunteer work, or previous jobs
  c. Academic conferences!
     i. Christina Morus: Conferences and lectures a great place to make connections.
     ii. Now that many conferences are being held virtually (and many for free), attend conference sessions that interest you or align with your research. Make contact with other scholars who are doing similar work.
2. Don't wait to make connections!
  a. If an application deadline is December/January, make sure you are reaching out to program faculty before the end of October.
     i. It will take time for them to respond and you need time to foster a relationship with them.
3. If you don't have a connection with faculty, look at what they are researching and see where your research fits in or how it would advance their research.

      i.   Know their research and ask them questions. It's your job to show how your research will advance or expand their work. Tiara's tip: Ask yourself "if___, then what?"

      ii.   Reach out by e-mail.
1. Introduce yourself.
   a. Write a professional bio—it helps you learn how to talk about yourself and who you are.
2. Express your interest in program and why you want to work with the faculty.
3. Offer a condensed version of your thesis/ research—keep it short!

      iii.   Show that you've done your research—don't ask questions that can be easily found on the website. Create a conversation by asking them questions.

      iv.   Ask to Zoom meet with students and professors

What is the application process like?

1. Every program will have a General online application
   a. There is typically an $50-100 application fee. Sometimes you can get that waived.
      i. Reach out to department secretary to ask about an application waiver—do not ask faculty!
2. Personal statement
   a. Be honest!
   b. Personal statements are typically 1-2 pages.
   c. Admissions is looking to see what your academic goals are and if there is a faculty member in the program who fits your research interests.
   d. Address what you can bring and how you can advance research already being done
3. Writing sample:
   a. Write something based on your research interests
4. Transcripts:
   a. GPA is important but it's not the deciding factor.
   b. Prepare to address areas or semesters where you did not do well. It may be because you struggled with a class or because you were dealing with outside factors (family issues, struggles with mental health, juggling work and school, etc.). Again, be honest!
5. Letters of Recommendation
   a. Letters are probably the most important part of the application. Programs want to hear from people who know you in an academic/professional setting.
   b. Most applications require 2-3 letters, but you should have 4-5 letters lined up.
      i. A recommender may forget or miss a deadline. They may decide they can't write a letter for you—you never know what could happen so it's best to be prepared!
   c. Let your recommenders know in advance.

      i. Pick people that you know well, personally and academically.

      ii. Ask a professor who you have had multiple courses with and build relationships with your professors!!

      iii. Provide them with a personal statement, resume or CV. This makes their job easier. Make sure they know what the letter should include.

6. GRE
   a. Many programs are phasing out GRE.
   b. GRE scores usually expire after 5 years
   c. If you are not a good test taker and a program you are looking at requires the GRE, go back to your needs and reevaluate whether this program is right/compatible.

7. Language requirement:
   a. Some programs are going to require fluency (usually reading proficiency), but not all.
      i. Again, be honest with where you are in your language proficiency.
      ii. Christina Morus: More often than not the it's a reading requirement, not a speaking requirement. They want to ensure you will be able to do archival research.
      iii. Raz Segal: Most often the language test asks applicants to read three pages and translate it.
      iv. Michael Hayse: History programs take the language requirement seriously. You have to be able to read the original sources.
   b. Some programs don't require a second language but encourage it. These programs may have other options such as language training or immersion programs.
   c. You may have to do this work on your own prior to applying.
      i. The MAHG program can help you with this. The MAHG program will recognize one advanced language course as a 3-credit elective.
      ii. There are government grants for language immersion, especially for less-common languages or for "heritage speakers."
         1. Could lead to job opportunities or foster connections that will be helpful during the application process!

8. Other requirements:
   a. Carefully go over the program requirements. Every program is different and may require other materials/skills—again, do your research!

** Let as many people read your application materials as possible! It is critically important that all materials are clear, concise, free of grammatical errors, and express your research interests and career goals!

      Christina Morus: Be hungry for and receptive of feedback!

Important things to remember when going through the application process:

1. Take care of yourself: EAT, SLEEP, ETC.,
2. Do your research and take your time.

3. Get organized with application materials/deadlines.
4. Build and maintain relationships with advisors and professors.
5. Do not wait until the last minute to research programs or applying
    a. Tiara: Plan a full year in advance. I spent a few months preparing to do applications and the rest actually completing the application materials.
6. Learn to say "no"—prioritize your time and your needs.
7. Get comfortable talking about yourself, your strengths and weaknesses. Remember that it will sometimes be an uncomfortable process.
8. Listen to your advisors. They've all been through this process and can offer essential advice and guidance
9. Prepare yourself for rejection