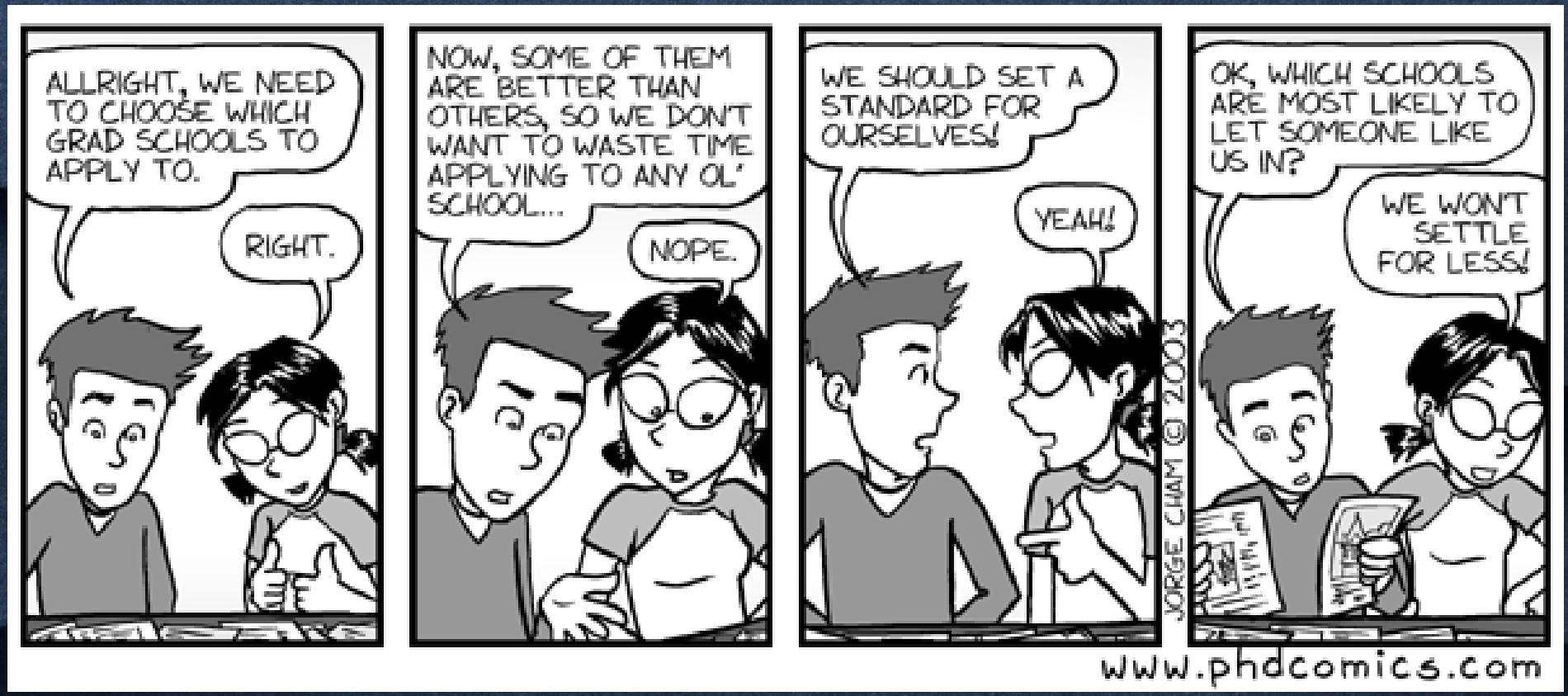
About Grad School Applications...



McGill Physics

Sept 19, 2024

Today:

- Considering where to apply
- Application process
- FAQ panel with profs

- A more thorough FAQ doc is already on our website (in the undergrad section).
- The slides from today and an updated FAQ will be posted next week.

Where to apply - professional considerations

Potential advisors/projects

- Are there several interesting profs in the department?
- Have you connected with at least one prof there?

Funding

- Is it tied to a specific advisor or project? How free are you to work on your ideas?
- Funding amount? Internal scholarships?
- Teaching requirements/opportunities for extra income?

Department culture

- EDI, outreach, social events?
- How social are people in the department with each other?

Degree structure

- Course requirements, qualifier exams, MSc and PhD.

Collabs with other research groups and institutes

Where to apply – personal considerations

Proximity to loved ones

- How easy/how expensive is it to travel?
- How often do you want to?

Cost of living vs stipend

- Can you afford to live there with the stipend and other scholarships?

Geography/climate/culture

- Would you enjoy living in that city?

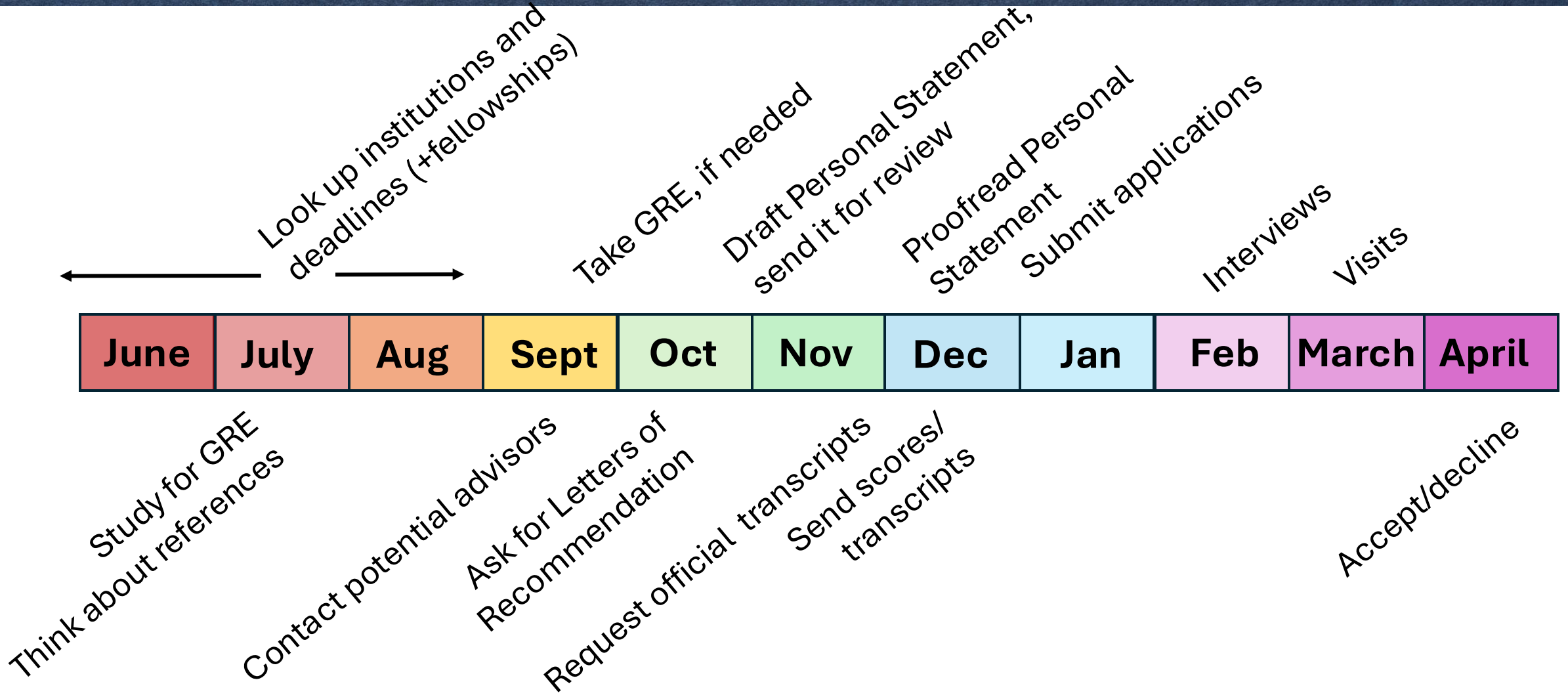
Access to extracurriculars

- City or school sports leagues, clubs, theatres, etc.

Application costs

What other considerations are important?

Application timeline



GRE

- There is a general test and subject tests.
- Not all schools require both or either of these.
- Prepare!
  - Success relates to test-taking ability and subject knowledge.
  - Tests can be expensive, so aim to do them once!

Personal Statement

- Talk about past research projects.
  - What skills you learned
  - How they'll be useful for grad school in your field
  - What you enjoyed in this work
- Show your contributions.
  - How you solved problems, contributed to projects, overcame obstacles
- Talk about your fit with the department, who you'd like to work with.
- What do you want to do with the degree?

Personal Statement

- Respond to prompts given.
- Draw attention to strengths of your application.
- Address any glaring issues (poor grades, low test scores, etc), but don't draw unnecessary attention to them.
- Be genuine and straightforward, avoid cliches.
- Use active voice, triple check grammar and spelling.

Personal Statement

- **Not** a copy of your CV and transcript.
- Start early, get feedback.
- Show you know what you're getting into.
- What do you want to do with the degree?
- Tailor statement to institution.

Letters of Recommendation

- Usually 2-3
  - Academic proficiency + research experience/potential
  - Responsibility, leadership, etc.

- **When asking for a letter:**
  - Give letter writers lots of time
  - Provide a list of where you are applying, deadlines, and submission methods
  - Remind writers who you are/what you did in their group or class
  - Respect the decision of anyone who declines to write one
  - Keep track of letter requests and submissions
  - Can send reminder emails

- **Do not** request access to view reference letters.

Contacting potential advisors

- Know the program- admission by committee (many places) or through individual professors (McGill)? Do you have to reach out to profs?
  - Not all profs respond to these before application – check websites
- Keep emails short and to the point.
- Introduce yourself, give context for why you are writing.
- If profs don’t answer, it's OK! They probably still saw your email but are super busy.
  - You can send a reminder once you submit your application

Contacting potential advisors

(This is not good. How do we fix it?)

To: Aphysics.professor@mcgill.ca

From: physicschampion@gmail.com

Subject: PhD?

Hi there,

I love what you do and I'm super interested in doing a PhD in astronomy at your institution. Would you be available for a chat?

Best regards,

Harry

Contacting potential advisors

(One way to improve it – what's better about this one? What else could be improved)

To: Aphysics.professor@mcgill.ca

From: harry.potter@mail.mcgill.ca

Subject: PhD opportunity for Fall 2025

Dear Prof. Professor,

My name is Harry Potter and I'm starting my final year of my Physics program at McGill University. I am considering applying for graduate schools next year and I'm reaching out to you to learn more about research opportunities in your group.

Last summer, I completed a four-month research project with Prof. Smith working on testing a component of the nExo project, which motivated me to continue to graduate studies. This project made me realize that I want to focus on astronomy and I am particularly interested in studying what the universe is made of.

I would love to have a chat to discuss possible graduate projects in your group. Please let me know if you are available. My CV and unofficial transcript are attached to this email.

Thank you,

Harry

Funding

- Sources:
  - Supervisor's research grants;
  - TAing/teaching;
  - Fellowships
    - NSERC
    - FRQNT
    - Department awards
    - School awards

https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/funding

https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/PG-CS/index_eng.asp

- Check school's grad program website for funding information.
- Check application deadlines
  - for NSERC, you apply through your current institution, with an earlier deadline than the NSERC.

Interviews, visits

Talk to potential advisors

- If you have to choose between a favourite project or advisor, choose the advisor
- Meeting schedules (frequency, times)
- How would you work together?
- How do they feel about things like wfh, doing outreach, etc?

Consider

- Ease of communication
- Access (group size, etc)
- Mentoring, support in professional endeavors (grant applications, going to/presenting at conferences, etc)
- Not a best friend

Interviews, visits

Talk to grad students. Ask them:

- The same things about the prof
- The culture in the department
- Research freedom, support
- What they like about the department, what could be better
- Insights about the city
- Ask about other profs (get the gossip)
- Teaching and coursework load
- Qualification exams

FAQs

1. Is it better to go to a well-known school, or is it OK to go to a smaller/less well-known school?

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2. Reference letters: what if I've only done one research project? What if I haven't done *any* research projects?

FAQs

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2. Reference letters: what if I've only done one research project? What if I haven't done *any* research projects?

3. Do I need to reach out to professors before I apply? After I submit my application?

FAQs

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7. How important are grades?

FAQs

8. How do I prepare for an interview?

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9. What do I do if I don't get in?

Other questions?