Recruiting Graduate Students

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The Challenge

- The most desirable graduate students are
  - Smart
  - Efficient
  - Self-starting
  - Creative
  - Adaptable
  - Literate
  - Independent

- Graduate admissions normally selects for
  - High GPA
  - GRE Scores
  - Glowing letters of recommendation

- The two lists are not mutually inclusive!
Traditional Measures

- **GPA**
  - All schools are different, need to put grades in context
  - Quantitative reasoning (calculus, physics, statistics etc.)

- **GRE scores**
  - No correlation between GRE scores and success as a graduate student
  - Useful only as a rudimentary filter for marginal students

- **Letters**
  - Especially valuable when written by a former research mentor
  - Letters need to be substantive, with specific references to achievements or abilities beyond the classroom.
  - Letters written by experienced researchers are often more valuable, since they have dealt with more students
Other Useful Tools

Personal Statement
- Can reveal details about the student’s motivation and maturity
  - An important first glimpse at writing ability

Phone calls
- A follow-up phone call to letter-writers can provide candid feedback

Prior research experience
- REU students can be like stumbling upon “lightning in a bottle”
- Senior thesis

On-campus visit (where possible)
- Enthusiasm
- Personality and “people skills”
- Knowledge of the field
What students are for you?

- **Ph.D.**
  - Usually technically well-prepared
  - Generally more motivated and keyed into research
  - But they can be slow in completing

- **M.S.**
  - Can be focused on more targeted projects
  - Faster completion times
  - Rarely publish their results
What students are for you?

- B.S.
  - Can be selective in taking on an undergraduate research student
  - Often know them well beforehand
  - Have a graduation deadline for completion
  - Most undergraduates have little capacity for good research.
People to Consider

- Returning students
  - Often more mature
  - Motivation better
- Non-traditional background
  - Can bring useful skill sets
- Your own undergraduates
  - Known quantity
  - Cultivate working relationship
Realistic Expectations: What students are not!

- Fully developed colleagues
  - Don’t expect them to know all the answers, or where to find them
- Vehicles to advance you career
  - They will not write your papers
- Slaves or servants
  - Think of them as apprentices who can help
- Totally independent
  - They will always need guidance, feedback and nurturing to be successful