



EducationUSA Weekly Update

Special edition - "Students First", March 18th, 2009

Students First...

A special edition of the EducationUSA Weekly Update with Dr. Martin, author of *Road Map for Graduate Study: A Guide for Prospective Graduate Students*

I. Responding to the notification decision, whether waitlisted, denied or admitted

You will most likely receive one of three decisions from the admissions committee:

- 1) Being placed on a waiting list;
- 2) Denial;
- 3) Admission.

What follows are some of the tips for responding to each of these decisions. A complete list of tips can be found in my book, *Road Map for Graduate Study* - for more information, please see comments at the end of this article.

1. Waitlisted - In some ways, this is the hardest initial decision - you still don't know anything one way or the other. But don't despair. Accept this decision, and consider doing the following:

1. **Don't take it personally.** This is so much easier to say than to do. No one likes to be told they have been put on a waiting list. Most likely, this means that while you have some very strong credentials, you were not considered to be as competitive as those being offered admission. However, the good news is that you were not denied. There is still a chance, and from my experience, in most cases, a very good chance you will be admitted.
2. **Don't assume you are going to be denied.** As I just mentioned, most likely the opposite is true. If you stay calm, confident and patient, you will most likely get more encouraging news down the road.
3. **Make sure you follow instructions.** Once again, be professional and do what is suggested or asked of you. If you do not receive any information about what to do next, ask. Don't demand, complain or argue. Just ask if there is anything you can do. If you are told no, accept that and do not do anything. It may tell you something about this institution if they do not provide you an opportunity to further address your interest in their program. If you are given specific instructions on what you can do, follow every one of them.

2. Denied - This is never easy. After all of the time and work you have put in to your application, it can feel like a real slap in the face. If you are extremely upset, do not react by phone or in writing right away. Give it a few days. As you reflect, consider the following:

1. **Accept the decision.** At this point you cannot change it.
2. **Don't take it personally.** Remember, under most circumstances the admissions committee is faced with a very difficult task: choosing a limited enrollment number from among a very large applicant pool. These individuals are good people, who are doing their best in a very difficult situation. Believe me, they are not personally against you in any way.
3. **Write a thank you note to the person who signed your notification letter.** If you believe you can honestly do so, send a letter thanking the admissions director for taking the time to review your application. Perhaps that is all you will decide to do.
4. **If you believe something was missed or overlooked, ask about it.** Kindly ask if your most recent test score was received or if a recent transcript is in your file. You may want to verify that all of your recommendation letters were received. If you sent a cover letter and it contained some very important information, check to be sure it was included when your application was read. On occasion

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something may have been overlooked. If so, most admissions committees will provide another complete evaluation. If they are unwilling to do so, or worse yet, not even willing to take another look at that part of your application, perhaps you are getting additional information about whether this is really the place for you.

5. **This is a practice opportunity for patience and professionalism.** If you decide to respond in some way to being denied, please remember this: If you want to send a positive message to the admissions committee, it is now. A mature, thoughtful attitude makes a huge and positive impression, believe me!

****I completely empathize with those who are denied admission.** My first application to the doctoral program on the top of my list was denied. I was extremely disappointed and somewhat angry. So I waited a few days and then called the admissions office. I learned that my most recent standardized test score was not in my file. Also, I was told that an assessment of my academic skills did not come through in my letters of recommendation. I asked if I could send the updated test score and provide another recommendation letter. They said yes. I did so and one month later was accepted. I was even awarded one full year of coursework. I realize this may not be the outcome every time, but you never know.

3. Admitted - WAY TO GO!! You did it! Your hard work has paid off. You still have lots of decisions ahead, but for now, take some time off - go and celebrate!!! Once you have “recuperated” from the euphoria, here are some next steps to consider:

1. **Thank those who helped you (family, friends, recommenders, interviewer, etc.).** While you did the lion’s share of the work, there are others who helped with your application and/or gave you lots of encouragement and support along the way. This may be especially true if you were initially waitlisted. Be sure to thank these individuals.
2. **Send a thank you note to the person who signed your notification letter.** This goes a long way. The admissions committee works very hard too, and it is always nice to remember to say thanks to them.
3. **Read the materials you start receiving.** They will contain important information about your enrollment deposit, financial aid, housing, admitted student visit programs, course scheduling, new student orientation, student life and much more. Hold on to this information and read it carefully.
4. **Start/continue talking with other admits, current students and alumni.** By now you may have established contact with current or former students. You may even know others who, like yourself, have just been admitted. Reach out to these individuals. You can learn a lot from current and/or former students. You can learn a lot from future classmates as well. Knowing some of your student colleagues before you enroll is always helpful. Compare notes with them. Get their impressions of the application process you have just been through, and also of the admitted student follow-up you have been receiving so far.

TIP: *Take the initiative to meet classmates through Facebook and pre-orientation programs or other social networks before classes start.*

5. **Try to schedule a campus visit if your visa status or travel schedule allows it.** Here is a good tip: If you really want to get an idea of what the institution is like, make an unannounced visit. One advantage is no one knows you are coming, and you will experience things as they really are. One disadvantage is that you will not be able to schedule appointments you might want ahead of time.
6. **Evaluate how you are treated post admission/deposit.** As a prospective student you were in the driver’s seat when deciding where you would apply. Once you submitted your application(s), you gave the wheel to the institution/admissions committee. Now that you have been admitted, you are once again in the driver’s seat. You get to decide whether to accept the offer. This is a very good time to evaluate how you are treated. **Does the admitted student follow-up process make you feel wanted, included and well informed?** If so, great. If not, perhaps you need to think more seriously about enrollment in the program.
7. **Do some comparison shopping.** Remember the spreadsheet you started when initially investigating various graduate school options? Now is a good time to expand it or create a new spreadsheet. You might use the following as some of your evaluation questions:
 - 1) How soon after I was admitted did I receive another contact from the institution?
 - 2) Did a student or alumnus call me to offer congratulations and to offer help?
 - 3) How often am I being contacted? It is too much? Too little?
 - 4) How long did it take me to get an estimated annual budget?
 - 5) Will I receive financial aid? If so, what type? Scholarships? Fellowships? Loans? Work Study? Graduate Assistantship? Stipend?
 - 6) How much information am I receiving about courses/program of study?
 - 7) What did I think of my campus visit post admission?

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- 8) How friendly/helpful have the faculty, staff and students been since I was admitted?
- 9) Is the information I am receiving really helpful to me?
- 10) If I am coming with a spouse or partner, or with a family, how accommodating/inclusive is the institution?

As you did before, put the names of the institutions to which you have been admitted on the left hand column of your spreadsheet and your various evaluation questions across the top. Give each institution a grade. You will start seeing some themes emerge as you do this.

**Please read the material sent to you or referred to on the web. It is extremely frustrating to prepare information for incoming students, only to have them disregard it, asking questions they could easily have answered for themselves. If you have suggestions about the way in which information is prepared or provided, definitely share those. Be careful not to create negative impressions of yourself by appearing inept at getting readily available information that has already been communicated.

For additional tips in responding to each decision, suggestions on how to make the decision on where to enroll, succeeding as a graduate student and much more, go to Dr. Martin's website and order his book *Road Map for Graduate Study: A Guide for Prospective Graduate Students*. The website address is www.gradschoolrodmap.com

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