

## **Richard Stockton LITT Program suggestions for Preparing Graduate School Applications in English, Comparative Literature, and Creative Writing**

Before you begin the hard work of applying for graduate school, take a moment to think about why you want to go to graduate school and whether it is the right choice for you.

- Are you a deeply committed, very hard working, and inquisitive student?
- Are your grades generally excellent?
- Are you willing to postpone earning money now, for the possibility of a career in a highly competitive and not always so high paying environment?
- Are you willing to pursue a career where currently only 30% of Ph.D.s in English find a tenure-track job?
- Are you willing to be geographically flexible for graduate school and a career in academia (generally nationwide and sometimes internationally)?

Graduate school is very different from your undergraduate studies. You might consider asking professors or other graduates whom you trust for their candid opinion on how you would do in a graduate program (though don't take that as a final word: many succeed beyond people's expectations of them!). Once committed, consider these guidelines:

1. Set aside enough money to take the GREs and pay application fees and set aside enough time to take the test, send results, and fill out the applications. Begin drafting ideas for your application essays and prepare a sample of critical or creative writing.
2. Schedule and take the GREs. Apply for federal financial aid and look for appropriate scholarships in your community, associations, and state, as well as ones that might apply to your particular field of study and/or background (gender, race, income, region, etc.).
3. Decide on the kind of degree you want, the concentration you want to specialize in. Are you interested in an MA, MFA, or Ph.D. program? What kind of field within English most interests you (for example, Renaissance studies, modernism, gender and literature in Literature; or poetry, fiction, new media, etc.)? Have you thought about related degrees in English as a Second Language, Library Science, Teaching certification combined programs, etc.? If you are bilingual and begin working on a third language, you qualify for most MA and PhD programs in Comparative Literature. Although generally more selective, this can be an ideal program for Literature students who wish to study world and global literatures, inter-American studies, or literary theory.
4. Find three qualified professors who remember and like you to write evaluations and ask them if they will be willing. (It's ok to ask "Will you be willing to write me a good evaluation?" so that you are not surprised later by a bad one!). Contact them a month in advance, giving them at the very least 2 weeks to write the things--and check in on them to make sure they have remembered.
5. Research and select institutions:

**A.** Make a list of 'must have' criteria for your graduate program and narrow the scope, then be as open as you can to programs. Consider the following:

**Faculty**(check website to see how frequently key faculty members teach grad students), **location, size of school, cost, fellowship opportunities, kind of degree, reputation of the school, flexibility of the program, opportunities to teach in the program, requirements** (such as language requirements or other tests), etc. Be certain of criteria: If you don't want to live in TX, don't bother looking there--but be sure not to rule out interesting towns like, say, Austin.

**B.** You can look for specialties and rankings of universities at places such as *U.S. News and World Report, Peterson's Guides*, etc. (UCSB has a chart of rankings on line at <http://www.english.ucsb.edu/undergrad/aftermajor/gradrankings.asp>).

You might then try to find recent graduates of the programs you are interested in—or, for your select few, email the coordinator and ask for email addresses of current students, so you can ask them questions directly.

**C.** Make a list of serious potentials (say, twice as many as you are willing to apply to) and request applications from institutions. Here's a good time to point out that you should have a range of schools, in terms of selectivity—always have a couple “safety schools” (sure bets) in case you don't get into schools you ideally want.

**D.** Read the materials carefully and select your winners. Visit the schools in advance if you can. You should probably pick between 3-10, depending on your needs/criteria and time/money constraints. Better to fill out five applications well than to do twenty poorly. Lastly, read all their application requirements carefully and make sure you have all the materials you need.

6. Write your application essay and share it with at least two other writers of experience—getting feedback from a professor is a good idea.

7. Prepare recommendation materials for your professors (give them the forms, SAS envelopes, and a clear list of the deadlines. You might offer a list of things you would like them to comment on and give them past work to refresh their memory of your skills. It's also good to give them your application essay, so they know what you are emphasizing in your application.

8. Proofread your application materials! Ask for help. Make the deadlines!

9. Then go about your daily routine as though the letters you're waiting on have no impact on your life. If you get in, tell us (especially those who recommended you--we want to know!). If you haven't heard from where you really wanted, or didn't get the funding you ideally wanted, wait as long as you can to see what your other options are, but be respectful of the universities' deadlines for responding. If you get no funding, consider whether you want to take out the loans or apply again next year. If you don't get in, don't be discouraged! (Not all of us got into grad school on the first try.) Keep studying and learning. Then try again, and ask for more help.