

Be Prepared For A Marathon

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March 4, 2012

“It is a marathon, not a sprint.”

This was what professor Shachat told me when I started seeking my doctorate in IUB, but I think it can be applied to your application things as well. Applying to study abroad takes you years to work on, and it is never easy. So, be prepared for this long run, you will definitely be exhausted sometimes, but as long as you keep running, you will reach your destination. What you will get are the unforgettable views along the way, and all the applause and hugs in the end.

Well, let me be concise and bullet my thoughts here, so that you can grasp my points easily.

- **Attitude always comes first.** When you have decided to do it, let it be your steadfast belief that can never left you for one moment. If you believe you can make it, then you will. You can adjust your plan of course, but all the adjustments should not digress to much from your main road.
- **Balance everything and plan it well.** You should be aware of the fact you need try to perfect yourself in every aspect. You must maintain good GPA on all courses; you'd better have a minor in support of your major or even double majors; you should do some extra-curriculum activities and you are supposed to practice more of your English as well. In this sense, you need to lay a solid foundation of basic knowledge when you are in the first two years, especially in Math and English. These two categories are extremely important, not only as prerequisites of admission, but also as essential tools in your further education. Try to get satisfactory scores of GRE (>1300) and IBT (>100) before you go into the fourth year. Then, be focused on preparing your application materials at your last fall semester.
- **Recommendation is decisive.** If you let me array by the weights of all the application materials, recommendation letter is on the top without doubt. I was a lucky girl I think, for I got five good recommendation letters which can fully show me to the admission committees and two of them were from world-known professors who were quite influential in academia.

⁰I got my bachelor's degree from the department of statistics in 2011, and I'm currently studying in the economic PhD program of Indiana University-Bloomington.

I write this essay to share with you my reflections on studying abroad. I do appreciate this opportunity, because by taking retrospect of my undergraduate life in XMU, I could contemplate on those decisions I made and encourage myself to keep on fighting for my dreams. More importantly, it somehow can be of a little help to you on your applications, and this is the only thing I can do now to express my gratefulness to the department of statistics, to SOE, and to everyone who ever helped me realize my dream.

Hope you can benefit from my experience and realize your own dreams afterward.

However, it is never a simple thing to get good recommendation letters. Famous professors are always your first choice, if you have chance to exchange to a top university abroad, make use of all the resources there; if you can join a summer school somewhere, look for opportunities that can make you acquaint with a well known professor; if there is any international workshops or conferences hosted in XMU or anywhere you can go, sit yourself in and try to talk with those scholars. Secondly, most of the professors in WISE got their doctorates in good foreign universities, try to know them, and it can't be better if you can attend their classes or even do some researches for them. Then, try to interact more with the professors in your department, go to their office hours, let them know you. In most cases, it won't be too hard to get recommendation letters from professors in your department, especially those who have taught you before. What's more, If you are applying a master's program, perhaps a recommendation letter from your internship is also helpful. I don't think this will be that difficult if you truly performed well as an intern there.

- **Don't be shy, just try.** Do you remember this famous saying of Crazy English? It is true in learning English as well as in your application. Be thick skinned and never be afraid of losing faces. You need to give everything a try, because there is nothing to be afraid of and you have nothing to lose. Sometimes, since you are more "brazen" than others as well as more prepared for every might-be opportunity, it will be you instead of others that will get the so called fortune in the end.
- **Work with your friends and help each other.** Remember that you are competing with those talented and ambitious students outside of this campus, not your classmates. You should share information among all your cohorts, prepare for the English tests together and encourage each other along the way. Please always remember that you can walk faster if you walk alone, but you will walk farther if you have companies. Furthermore, perhaps it will be helpful if you can be friend with graduate students in your department, in WISE, etc. They have more experience than you, and they can provide you inside news sometimes as well.
- **Have gratefulness in mind.** Please respect everyone you meet, especially your professors and your friends. Be polite and good mannered when interacting with them. It doesn't contradict with the above "brazen" thing I mentioned. What I mean is actually to be courageous and also well behaved. Never be hesitated to express you heartfelt thankfulness towards all the people who ever helped you. Keep in touch with them and do something for them as a return if you can. They will be glad to see your progress and provide you with more wisdom they have.
- **Distinguish yourself from others.** You should be different so that there is some probability that you can stand out among all the applicants. Never think about replicating other's experience. You can take advice from others, but you should have your unique way that can make you sparkle.
- **Don't put all the eggs in a same basket.** When you make the plans, be fully aware of all kinds of results that may happen, prepare for the worst and make some back-up plans. When looking back at the school list I made then, it was too risky. I only applied the economic PhD programs in the US. I never expected it would be that competitive at that time. If I had applied some master's program, I wouldn't have been so distressful when I kept receiving rejections.

- **At last, attitude again.** It is attitude instead of aptitude that decides altitude. Therefore, you need to be positive all the time. There is not doubt that you will meet various kinds of difficulties and obstacles. Don't be panic or upset, believe that if you run steadily towards your goal, you will be rewarded in a due day to come. For me, the toughest time was when I had finished all the applications and could do nothing except waiting for the news from schools. You may meet this situation, but as you receive rejections one after another, don't keep whining and sighing all the time, do something to make up, or fight positively for it. Be patient, if you try hard, you will be paid back eventually.

It was indeed a long way to go, I spent four years to run this marathon. There were joys and tears, there were shortcuts and detours, and also, gains and losses. I'm glad I reached the stop of this marathon, and I think I am prepared at least mentally for the new marathon I am on now. Good luck to all of us!

Above are the suggestions I have to your specific application. However, I'd like to give you more information about something that are related.

Q1 "Which one should I choose? PhD or Master?"

You do need to think seriously about it and make a table of pros and cons to help you decide.

PhD	
Pros	Cons
It is easier to get financial supports.	It is much more competitive than master programs.
You can experience more in a longer time.	It is less likely to be admitted to top universities.
It is relatively easier to find a job abroad.	5 years or more will be spent on achieving the degree.
You can have more choices on the job you will do.	Life is really hard and dreary and make you like nerds.
You can either work in academia or industry.	You must be determined and have a strong will.
You will improve tremendously if you can acheive it	Interest, talent and diligence are all required.
Master	
Pros	Cons
It is easier to be admitted, even to top universities.	A huge amount of money will be invested on it.
The programs will be less demanding.	It's relatively harder to find a job abroad
It is job oriented, thus can help you make money	You will have fewer choices on your careers.
Your life abroad might be more interesting	You may not have as much progress as you expect

For me, it is obvious that PhD is superior. If you make your mind to seek a PhD abroad, prepare early. Since you'd better have some research experience when you apply, please spend more time on your study. Furthermore, actively involve yourself in all kinds of conferences; read more papers on the field which interests you; communicate more with professors and graduate students; try to do some reasearches or projects with professors you know. More essentially, you need to form a good habit of learning. Be an independent thinker, be creative and critical; train your memory, implementing ability presenting skills. These are not so evident to you now, but you'll find it out later in your study.

As it is harder to be admitted to a PhD program, make sure you have some kind of insurance. Probably you can get a master's degree either in China or abroad first, and use it as a springboard for your next shot. Usually, the top students in PhD programs are the students who have already got years of graduate study. So, if you are committed to devoting yourself into academics or have an Ivy dream, leave yourself more time to prepare for it.

Q2 "If I can't get any funding from the school at first and my family cannot support me , what should I do?"

If this is the case, don't give it up either. You can check on CSC (China Scholarship Council) website if there is any program that you can apply. The government will sponsor you for your living expenses and even your tuitions if you can be admitted. When I was told that IUB can't offer me scholarship because of limited funding in the department, I applied the CSC program and was chosen with fortune after submitting application materials and a highly selective interview. The requirement from the government is that I need to come back to serve the country for at least 2 years after my graduation in the US. It is not that demanding, I think. However, be aware of that most scholarships provided by CSC are only for students who are seeking a PhD, except for a few specially designed master's programs. All the information can be found on the website, if you need CSC's sponsorship, why not give it a try?

Actually, as far as I know, even though you can't get any funding from your department in the beginning, you definitely should go there as well. If your performance is satisfactory, you can get financial aid later on. Even for some master's, there are chances for you to work as a GA/RA/TA then. Therefore, as long as you can be admitted, go there first. Every problem will have a solution eventually.

Q3 "United States or elsewhere?"

I won't deny that there are many good universities around the world, and there are a great many of choices out there. However, I do believe that US must be the best place in terms of culture, academic atmosphere, acknowledgement, etc. As a big "melting pot", America has a more diversified culture, thus it is easier for you integrate yourself into it. US universities have the most learned professors and abundant resources, so good programs will provide you with rigorous training and hence assist you in many ways for your future career. In addition, US is still the strongest country in the world which leads the trend in many aspects, you need to push yourself into the frontier thus it is more likely for you to make a difference then.

Well, I should stop here, I suppose. As a matter of fact, there are more things that you should consider on your way of application than what I have talked about here. Please remember to take advantage of all the accessible resources around you and explore your own way with courage and resolution. I believe if you try to do your best in every little things, you will harvest what you desired in the end!

Good luck to you on this marathon and I'll be glad to hear all the good news from you!