How to Get Into Grad School and What to Expect the 1st Year
“The Path”

UG 4 yr

Grad School
5-6 yr

Postdoc #1
3 yr

Postdoc #2
3 yr

Permanent Job
“The Path”

UG 4 yr
Grad School 5-6 yr
Postdoc #1 3 yr
Postdoc #2 3 yr
Permanent Job

Mission/Observatory Support
Science Writers/Publishing
Outreach
K-12 Education
Financial/Industrial Analyst

Space Industry
Software Development
Science Policy
Technical consulting/management
(Masters?)
Basics

- 100-200 applicants, accept 10-20%
- ~60 institutions that grant PhD in Astronomy, but majority of PhDs come from ~15-20 institutions
- Tuition is paid and given a stipend (~$25,000/yr)
- Being a TA is common, particularly in early years
- Average length is 5-6 years
- Out of PhD 77% accepted a postdoctoral position with a median salary of $54,000
Advice (getting in)

- Talk to grad students, postdocs, faculty
- Where? size, research, location, community, “success” rate
- Physics GRE is flawed but important: study, perhaps take twice
- Personal essay should not be major focus: explain your experiences/skills and why this particular institution is a great match for you
- Letters are important: Give writers 1 month warning
Advice (once there)

- Grad school is significantly different from undergrad
- The 1st year is tough. Periodic feelings of doubt, being an imposter, alone are normal. Try to ride it out.
- Build your cohort
- Seek support from older graduate students and postdocs, the Graduate Office, campus mental health office, campus Title IX or anonymous resources, former mentors, national message boards/blogs/forums
- Trust your instincts and be proactive
- Seek out mentors, ultimately your PhD advisor
Resources

• American Astronomical Society (aas.org) general career advice, list of schools
• Astrobites (astrobites.org) timeline for application process, European PhD, deferring, advice once in grad school
• Astrobetter (astrobetter.com) an excellent repository of resources
• American Institute of Physics (aip.org) statistics; (gradschoolshopper.com) filterable search engine for grad schools
• PhDcomics (phdcomics.com)