How (not) to Apply to Grad School and Survive your First Year

“Why, no. Graduate school is not stressful!”
– Harold, 23
About me

• 1st year M.Sc. student
• Research area: Software engineering
• Hobbies:
  • Long walks on the beach
  • Warm sunlight on my face brings me to tears
  • Daydreaming about dropping out of grad school
Why Grad School?
Unparalleled work-life balance
adding test runs

adding instructions for script

Hey have time to hop on a call?

Dude it's 2am

Did I stutter?
Adding test runs

Adding instructions for script

Hey have time to hop on a call?
Dude it's 2am
Did I stutter?
Frequent travel to exotic locales (conferences!)
haha gotem!

The PLDI 2021 submission deadline is Nov 20! The conference will be virtual.

As a result of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, ICFP will be held in an all-virtual format this year. We're sad that we won't be there with all of you in person, but the ICFP community will still be together and we'll still learn and share the latest in functional programming.
Plentiful free food
As this document technically concludes the 24 years I have spent on the pupil side of the educational equation, I will be reluctant to give up using ‘but I’m just a student’ as an excuse for anything I don’t want to do, or pay for; however, I will steadfastly refuse any effort to get me to wear pants of appropriate length, stop evaluating the value of any foodstuff in terms of calories per dollar, replace the one bike shirt I have worn daily for the past 8 years, or make me feel self-conscious while stuffing free food into my pockets at every opportunity.

Reid Holmes

– Reid Holmes, Pragmatic Software Reuse
Still interested?

Unparalleled work-life balance
Frequent travel to exotic locales
Plentiful free food
Get some help.
The Application Process
Choosing a school
Self-doubt
Asking for reference letters
Choosing a school
Self-doubt
Asking for reference letters
Oh God am I actually doing this?
Choosing a school
Self-doubt
Asking for reference letters
Oh God am I actually doing this?
Contacting faculty
Choosing a school
Self-doubt
Asking for reference letters
Oh God am I actually doing this?
Contacting faculty
Submit Applications

Fall
Winter
Choosing a school
Self-doubt
Asking for reference letters
Oh God am I actually doing this?
Contacting faculty
Submit Applications
Damn, this shit is expensive

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Oh God am I actually doing this?
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Damn, this shit is expensive
Submit Applications
Maybe I should look for a job

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Winter
Choosing a school

Self-doubt

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Oh God am I actually doing this?

Contacting faculty

Submit Applications

Damn, this shit is expensive

Maybe I should look for a job

Self-doubt

Screaming

Drinking

ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
Choosing a school
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Submit Applications
Damn, this shit is expensive
Maybe I should look for a job
Self-doubt
Screaming
Drinking

ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

Decisions

Fall
Winter
Spring
Choosing a school
Self-doubt
Asking for reference letters
Oh God am I actually doing this?
Contacting faculty
Submit Applications
Damn, this shit is expensive
Maybe I should look for a job
Self-doubt
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Drinking
ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
Choosing a school

Hedge your bets! Just remember:

School > Research lab/cohort > Advisor
Reference letters

• Ask professors you **barely** know
• Ask no earlier than two (2) days before the deadline
• Provide **zero** information, keep them on their toes!

Hi Professor. I took a class with you two years ago and got 69%. BTW can I get a letter by tomorrow?
Contacting faculty (Part 1)

a.k.a. the *copypasta* method

- Remember your SE classes, *generics are good*
- Follow the DRY principle
- Tell a story with your emails
- The longer the better!
Contacting faculty (Part 2)

Gail  9:04 AM
G'morning. Are we meeting now?

James  9:05 AM
oh FUCK
The statement of intent (Part 1)

• Practice your fiction skills!
  • Most papers are fictional these days anyway
  • CONS should not Evaluate its Arguments ???
  • Threesomes, With and Without Blame ??!!!
The statement of intent (Part 1)

• Practice your fiction skills!
  • Most papers are fictional these days anyway
  • CONS should not Evaluate its Arguments ????
  • Threesomes, With and Without Blame ??!!!

• Elucidate your superior comprehension of your intended field by utilizing substantial combinations of characters with pre-designated semantic meaning determined by society
  • “use” → “utilize”
  • “graph with data” → “machine learning”
  • “make easier” → “mechanize”
The statement of intent (Part 2)

• Do *not* state your intent!
  • Trick question!
  • Avoid at all costs!
  • Danger!

Instead... tell your life story
Statement of Intent
James Yoo (M.Sc. in Computer Science Applicant for September 2020)

When I was 6 years old, I had a dream that I was abducted by a computer! Crazy, right? It turns out that’s the entire thing that sparked my interest in software engineering! I had a nice salad this morning. To be fair, you need a very high IQ to understand software engineering. The field is extremely nonsensical, and without a solid grasp of the SOLID principles, most of the the papers will go over a typical student’s head. There’s also Matthias Felleisen’s nihilistic outlook, which is deftly woven into his papers about the HtDP Design Recipe - his personal philosophy draws heavily from, wait. I lost my train of thought...
Flip a coin
Flip a coin
(No, really)
Questions?