



Applying for Masters Degrees

By Stephan Schmitt

Masters degree applications are roughly similar across institutions, and generally allow for more self-expression than many job applications. But how should all this space on graduate application forms be filled to maximise your chances of success?

One big criterion that you should expect is that universities will concerned themselves with for your previous academic results. Most companies want to see a 2.1 and some good A-Level results, whereas University admissions tutors will be interested in how else you have engaged with academic life. Thence, it would be a good idea to state your achievements at University, which might include bursaries or scholarships that you might have won, or if you won any academic competitions such as the student essay competition that the UEA runs annually. Even if you haven't won an academic competition, you can still mention that you competed (if you did compete!) as this will You might also want to discuss any other economics events that you may have attended, such as the Contemporary Economic Issues lecture series or events organised by the Royal Economic Society, to

name a few. Even if you haven't done any of these before, it's not too late to start!

Admissions tutors are keen to know why you want to study a masters degree. Make sure that you don't give the impression that post-graduate study is a second choice to a corporate or industrial graduate scheme. Very few jobs in the UK actually demand that you have a masters degree, although they do help if you want to practice as a professional economist. Moreover, often higher degrees are common amongst senior executives in large companies, and they may help if you want to move into professional education later in your career. Another good reason for wanting to pursue a masters degree is if you are considering a research degree such as a PhD. Although you would not be expected to know exactly what area of research you would be interested in pursuing, it might be wise to stipulate a few areas that

you are genuinely interested in – especially if they coincide with the strategic research interests of the department that you are applying to.

More generally, linking your academic and social interests to the university that you are applying to will add weight to your application. By taking time to research what each institution specialises in will allow you to select the best universities that fit your interests, and also provide you with a good opportunity to tailor your personal statements to each course. Don't simply send the same text to lots of Universities – it's obvious when candidates do this and shows a total lack of consideration for the course content. For example, the UEA has a leading reputation in experimental economics, as well as being a strong base for behavioural economists and competition policy, and has a growing team of finance academics. This is reflected in the courses offered. You might also want to consider your hobbies; after all, university isn't just about work – even as a

“...demonstrate your keen involvement with the department and academic engagement”

postgraduate student! The Norfolk area is great for water sports and hiking, but perhaps not fantastic if you enjoy mountaineering! Don't be afraid to mention your hobbies, after all, admissions tutors are keen to know more about you than what your academic transcript says. They want to know what you are going to bring to the University other than a suitcase full of books and a pocket calculator.

Going further outside the protective shell of academia, you should describe any relevant work experience that you have had. You may have worked before returning to study, or perhaps you took an internship or a sandwich year. Even if the job wasn't directly relevant to economics it will show that you have had some industrial experience, which will always count in your favour. Indeed, you might even want to mention any part-time jobs that you have had whilst studying – they prove that you have a good command of time management and commitment to your studies, as well as a sensible realisation of your finances. If you know how to use or programme any relevant statistics, mathematics or data analysis software such as STATA, Eviews, Excel, S-Plus or SSPS to name a few, this would count in your favour. Masters degrees often focus on using data, and being able to manipulate data might be useful for your dissertation which counts for a large portion of most masters degrees.

The majority of Universities will ask for a current CV. Make sure that this is fully updated with predicted grades and any recent employment. Most institutions will also require some references. It is

recommended that at least one of your referees should be a lecturer or professor who can vouch for your academic prowess and ability. Also including referees from work experiences might be considered a plus as it demonstrates your adaptability to different environments. Some Universities might ask you how you intend on funding your studies. Don't be afraid of asking to be considered for a scholarship in this section; after all, there is no harm in asking. Nonetheless, competition for scholarships is notoriously tough so don't be disappointed if your application for funding is unsuccessful. Moreover, you should have an alternative plan on how you intend on funding your studies, which might include a career development loan. Career development loans are currently available from Barclays and the Co-operative Bank, and have the advantage that the government will pay the interest of the loan whilst you are studying.

It is advisable to apply early for masters degrees as competition can be intensive, especially given the current economic and graduate job market. Places are often filled by March and in some cases even earlier. In particular deadlines for MA degrees can be early, since many Universities have lower academic requirements for their applied training programmes. Moreover, if you are considering competing for a scholarship, deadlines can be very early. Don't wait for your results to be confirmed – it might be too late by then!



Contacts and useful websites

ECO Careers Advisor:

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<http://www.findamasters.com/>

<http://www.prospects.ac.uk/>