

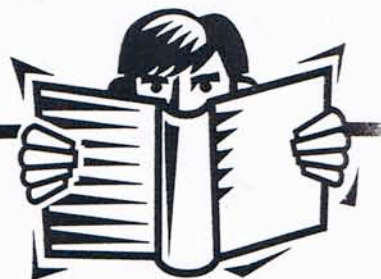
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BOOK REVIEW



How to get into graduate school

reviewed by Lorna Drew

David Mumby's valuable guidebook benefits not only Canadian and American potential graduate students, but also everyone else involved in the application process. His method involves a great deal of foresight, hard work and a hard sell, but the results are practically guaranteed. I only wish this helpful text had been available when I was an undergraduate hopeful.

Dr Mumby advocates starting the application process early. According to his formula for success, students should, at least by their second year, be establishing relationships with faculty members who might be potential referents. One really winning strategy suggests that canny students, as well as talking with professors, might volunteer to help with their research. This both endears the students to the professors (providing, of course, that the work is satisfactory) and provides relevant hands-on experience in the discipline that the student is hoping to study.

Relationships are also formed through socializing, and the author suggests that undergraduates attend department functions where they may meet both faculty and graduate students. The latter, having recently and successfully undergone the admission process themselves, make particularly valuable contacts. Many grad students are pleased to be asked to share their experiences (in which case, given the variations in points of view, more than one opinion should be solicited).

Professors will be pleased to note that Dr Mumby recommends the practice of good

classroom etiquette as a selling point in the applicant's favour. Those students whose attendance is poor or who appear to be bored will not leave good first impressions on potential letter-of-reference writers. The advice seems more sensible than cynical, for the author treats graduate schools as the employers they are, where students jockey for position in a tight job market. The assumption is that most students don't figure this out until fairly late in the application process. Those who have may find themselves being considered over students whose grades are their only asset. By the student's third or fourth year, when it's time to persuade an admissions board of one's high caliber, those wily few who laid the groundwork will be in the enviable position of knowing precisely where to go for help.

When it comes to the actual filling out of applications, Dr Mumby is superb. Step by pertinent step he goes through the process of writing curriculum vitae, cover letters, resumés, and personal statements. Nor are interviews neglected. His advice encompasses everything from what to say in order to appear both humble and savvy to how to shake hands with finesse. Wear something neat, he cautions, and omit the nose ring: some kinds of individuality are better expressed after acceptance.

I can't begin to detail the amount of valuable information this book includes. There is no base, in my academic experience, that

David Mumby has not touched. Even his formatting is strikingly user-friendly. Information of particular interest is boxed off in italics for easy accessibility. Each chapter concludes with a brief summary of its salient points. The text closes with a lengthy and detailed section listing resources for funding, career options, graduate program directories, advisement guides, essay guides, interview guides, Internet sites and writing the personal statement.

If students actually take the advice in this book to heart, Dr Mumby will be the darling of every campus in the land. Imagine classrooms seeded with impeccably behaved undergraduates, all aiming to please; students volunteering their research skills; admissions committees on the receiving end of beautifully-formatted documents which arrive well before the deadline with every piece of information intact. The mind boggles.

But of course, only those whose suitability and desire fits them for graduate school will take advantage of Dr Mumby's helpful manual. And when they do, they will surely reap the benefits. The doors of academia will open unto them.

Graduate School: Winning Strategies for Getting in With or Without Excellent Grades by Dave G. Mumby, Proto Press Publications. Hudson, Quebec, 1997, 251 pages, paper, \$24.95.

Lorna Drew is a freelance writer in Fredericton who recently received a PhD in English literature.