



Considering and Applying to Graduate School

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Why Pursue Graduate Education?

- What are your goals? Assess your strengths, interests, motivation, etc.
- Greater depth of knowledge of a discipline – specialized knowledge concentrated in one area (although can also be interdisciplinary)
- Specific career training and credentials
- Research
- Value education, “just” for personal gain
- Why not graduate school? Just to wait out a poor job market may not be a good reason.

Types of Graduate Degrees

- Types: Academic or Research; Professional (nursing, education, business, engineering, fine arts, social work, law, medicine)
- Levels: Master’s and Doctoral; also post baccalaureate and certificate programs

Researching Graduate Programs

- Not the same as picking an undergraduate institution
- Faculty referrals and opinions very important; informational interviews, campus visits
- Start with directories and guides to identify programs, then MUST carefully review the program’s website for details:
 - Courses and curriculum
 - Faculty research interests, specialties
 - Test requirements (i.e., GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT)
 - Admission requirements or prerequisites (GPA, undergraduate degree, recommendations, etc.)
 - Rankings, reputation
 - Size of program, competitiveness/selectivity
 - Affordability, financing options
 - Location

Online Resources for Research:

- GradSchools.com: <http://www.gradschools.com/>
- GraduateSchool4You.com: <http://www.graduateschool4you.com/>
- Peterson’s Guide to Graduate Study: http://www.petersons.com/graduate_home.asp

Applying to Graduate School

General rule: apply to 5-7 programs (varies with competitiveness of the field and costs of applications)

- Application form / online account
- Statement of Purpose / Essays / Personal Statement
- Letters of Recommendation
- Official Transcripts
- Standardized Test Scores (DAT, GMAT, GRE, LSAT, MCAT, OAT)
 - DAT (Dental Admissions Test) - <http://www.ada.org/en/home-ada/education-careers/dental-admission-test>
 - GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test) - <http://www.mba.com/us/the-gmat-exam.aspx>
 - GRE (Graduate Record Examinations) - <http://www.ets.org/gre>

- LSAT (Law School Admission Test) - <http://www.lsac.org/jd/lsat/about-the-lsat/>
- MCAT (Medical College Admissions Test) - <http://www.ada.org/en/oat/>
- OAT (Optometry Admission Test) - <http://www.ada.org/en/oat/>
- Other items: resume, portfolio, co-curricular portfolio, writing sample/paper

Timeline for Applying to Graduate School

This is a general timeline for the total application process, assuming fall term enrollment. Some graduate programs have firm deadlines; some have “rolling admissions” and accept applications year-round. Timelines can vary greatly for professional program applications (e.g., law, medicine, MBA); pay careful attention to individual deadlines for the programs you are considering and plan accordingly.

- Spring/Summer (approximately 18 months in advance of the fall in which you plan to enroll)
 - As soon as you are aware of your interest in graduate school, begin talking to faculty for recommendations and suggestions of programs.
 - Use print and online guides to graduate programs to research programs. Review program websites.
 - Write a general rough draft of personal statement.
 - Begin to prepare for standardized tests. Depending upon application timelines and type of program, you may wish to first take tests in spring or summer, for possible retest in fall (if needed).
- August – September
 - Meet with faculty to discuss personal statement and goals, continue to research and evaluate programs to narrow down application pool.
 - Begin to ask faculty about providing recommendation letters.
 - Investigate application procedures and timelines for all programs of interest, to ensure you are able to submit all requirements in the necessary timeframe.
 - Sign up for standardized tests if not already done.
- October
 - Decide on programs you wish to apply to.
 - Take standardized tests (if not already done).
 - Review all financial aid application requirements and research options.
 - Complete your essays and personal statements. Be certain you have tailored your writing to the questions asked by each individual program!
 - Order transcripts from undergraduate institutions.
- November
 - Complete application forms.
 - Provide recommenders with all instructions and materials needed for recommendation letters.
- December / January
 - Submit applications. Even if deadlines are later, it is good to apply early.
 - Apply for financial aid options as early as possible to have the most options available to you.
- February
 - Contact programs about the possibility of visiting. Take trips if possible.

Financing Graduate Education

- Types of funding:
 - Fellowships or traineeships
 - Assistantships: Teaching, Research, Administrative
 - Scholarships
 - Grants and loans
 - Veteran benefits

- Special Tips:
 - ALWAYS complete the FAFSA – Free Application for Federal Student Aid
 - ALWAYS apply for financial assistance early
 - Don't assume funding sources are centralized on campus: graduate school versus program-specific sources of funding
 - Research grants in advance, as obtaining a grant might strengthen admissions chances for certain programs (e.g., NSF in the sciences)
 - ALWAYS research special scholarship programs

Other Considerations

- Urban versus rural location, transportation options, cost of living, housing options
- Recreation and leisure, arts and culture
- Career services and employment success of recent graduates
- Availability of internship/field placement/practicum sites (if required by program)
- Availability of part-time employment options