

So you are thinking about applying to graduate school. Here are some tips to help you develop a plan to get into the school of your dreams. This handout is meant to provide a general guideline for getting started. More detailed information and resources are available at the Career Center. Meet with your advisor to discuss graduate school.

Why should you go to grad school?

- You want to study something you are passionate about
- The job/career you want requires a graduate degree
- You are established in your career and can earn more money with a graduate degree

Why you should not go to grad school...

- To avoid the Job Market – sometimes it is best to spend time researching careers, working in a field that interests you and then pursuing graduate studies
- To please someone else – you must have a genuine interest in the academic subject

Getting started and evaluating graduate programs

A school's reputation is an important factor, but certainly not the most important when choosing a school. The most important criteria involve how well the program matches your specific interests, abilities, academic background, finances, and future goals. Do your homework and make sure a program will meet your needs.

- Know what subject/area of study you want to focus on
- Seek advice from faculty about types of programs and schools to consider
- Know which degree you want to attain
- Research several programs on a national scale; rank them based on your interest
- Consult with faculty members, alumni and currently enrolled students, as well as practicing professionals in your field
You may also gain valuable information to differentiate yourself from other applicants
- Look at professional associations, academic journals and the following websites for more information

<http://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools.aspx>

<http://www.princetonreview.com/graduate-school.aspx>

<http://www.gradschools.com>

Questions to think about and ask graduate programs

- What is the curriculum?
- How long does it typically take to complete the degree?
- What are the demographics of the students?
- What are the criteria for choosing teaching and research assistants?
- How reliable is the financial support?
- What types of jobs have been attained by recent graduates?
- Can I meet some current students?

Applying and application criteria

- Apply to at least two schools that seem like a good fit
- Basic criteria: grades, test scores (GRE, GMAT, MCAT, LSAT)
- Let the graduate program know about a resolved problem with a grade or grades in a particular semester
- Take tests only when you are ready! Do not take them just to give it a whirl...those scores will be seen!

Personal statement:

- Demonstrate interest and knowledge of the profession/area of study
- Highlight relevant experience
- Connect your interests to their graduate program
- Address your academic or career goals
- Include your own vision/mission
- Be interesting and unique...schools read a lot of these and you want to stand out

Letters of recommendation:

- Identify faculty who know you well and will write a positive, personal recommendation
- Discuss specific post-grad plans with them
- Provide background information including resume, grades, and papers
- Let them know when and where you are applying. Write thank you notes!!
- Ask for letters of recommendation before you graduate even if you are not applying – faculty know you best right now!

Becoming a top candidate:

- Contact programs you are interested in
- Identify a couple of professors in each program – connect your interests with their research
- Read some of their work BEFORE contacting them
- Email questions regarding the program and/or articles or books they have written
- Indicate your own interests and propose an area that you might want to pursue

How to pay for graduate school:

- Contact the Financial Aid Office from each school to find out what kind of aid they offer and how to apply
- Research options such as Teaching or Research Assistants, fellowships, grants, and loans
- Check out resources such as this: www.finaid.org

What should you do if you don't get in?

- Meet with faculty and staff to discuss deficiencies in your application: grades, test scores, etc.
- Apply to more schools, especially safe schools
- Demonstrate commitment and interest in the field by gaining work experience or taking relevant courses and reapply
- If you are waitlisted be sure to stay in contact with the schools and provide updates regarding most recent grades, awards, honors or relevant experience

Suggested Graduate School Application Timeline

Below is a suggested timeline for preparing, researching, and applying to graduate school. Every school may have different admission requirements and deadlines; be sure to research each of your prospective schools to adjust the timeline if necessary.

Junior Year

- Begin researching available programs
- Review grad school guides
- Request promotional program material
- Visit schools' websites and tour the school if it is geographically close to you
- Talk to faculty/alumni/current students in the program
- Start exploring financial aid resources including opportunities such as teaching assistant, graduate assistant, and fellowships
- Sign up for required standardized test and take a practice test

Senior Year – Fall Semester

- Write the first draft of your statement of purpose
- Request your letters of recommendation from faculty and be sure to tell them what program(s) you are applying and your career/study goals so they can write accordingly
- Order official transcripts
- Visit the Career Center to have a career counselor work with you on your statement
- Write your final draft of your statement of purpose
- Complete and submit all applications electronically
- Apply for aid available through scholarships and other opportunities

Senior Year – Spring Semester

- Complete and submit financial aid applications
- Visit prospective campuses if possible, and talk to faculty/students to help you make your final decision
- Follow up with schools to make sure your file is complete
- Send in the required deposit when you receive acceptance letters, and contact other schools to decline acceptances
- Write thank you notes to people that have helped you throughout the process