

Graduate/Professional School Overview

Three to six months prior to applying

- Assess educational goals, career direction, financial resources, etc.
- Consider why you plan to go to graduate school
- Identify your strengths, interests, and values to decide what is best for you
- Meet with selected faculty/Career Center to discuss application requirements
- Research programs – faculty, facilities, alumni, data, etc. to decide programs/schools (summer before senior year)
- The *Peterson's Guides to Graduate Programs* (available online or in the Career Library) contains admission requirements, acceptance rates, and descriptions of most accredited programs
- Check out the web links for graduate and professional schools on the back of this handout
- Register and prepare for appropriate graduate admission tests
- Investigate national scholarships
- If appropriate, obtain letters of recommendation
- Write a resume, have it critiqued

Three months prior to applying

- Contact targeted programs with questions related to their requirements, programs, ask for admittance information, application materials, course information, and financial aid information
- Prioritize choice of programs
- Begin drafting essays for applications; work with a faculty member and the Career Center to critique responses
- Check financial aid web links on the back of this page, research fellowships, assistantships, or other financial aid sources
- Check on application deadlines and rolling admissions policies
- Take required admissions test(s)
- Request letters of recommendation from faculty, advisors, and former employers (give them your resume). Allow at least 1 month lead time.

Fall, a year before matriculating

- Complete applications completely (note each application deadline and allow yourself plenty of time to thoroughly complete all forms)
- PROOF your application materials carefully before sending
- Remind reference writers to complete their letters or online forms.
- Make a copy of your application for your records before submitting
- Submit completed applications – submit all materials early if possible
- Take admissions test(s) if you haven't already
- Research and apply for Financial Aid (FAFSA after Jan. 1)
- Request transcripts to be sent from Registrar's Office (you may want to wait for your fall grades before requesting your transcripts to be mailed) to graduate schools of interest

Winter, before matriculating in the fall

- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Financial Aid PROFILE, if required.

Spring, before matriculating in the fall

- Ensure your file is complete prior to institution deadlines
- Visit the institutions that accept you, ask questions
- Once accepted and decided, send a deposit to your institution of choice
- Notify other colleges and universities that accepted you of your decision so that they can admit students on the waiting list
- Send thank you letters to people who wrote recommendation letters, informing them of your success

Websites for General Graduate Schools & Professional School Resources

Graduate School Guides: www.graduateguide.com; <http://www.gradschools.com>

Peterson's Graduate School Bound: Research graduate programs and writing a graduate school application. Excellent keyword search feature. Includes detailed program descriptions. <http://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools>

Graduate School Rankings: U.S. News & World Report: Based on various criteria. <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/grhome.htm>

Graduate School Application Essays: How to write a super graduate school application essay. <http://petersons.com/gradchannel/file.asp?id=932&path=gr.gs.yourpersonal>

Statement of Purpose: Understand what a statement of purpose is and what schools expect from them. <http://www.statementofpurpose.com>, <http://www.princetonreview.com/grad-school-advice/statement-of-purpose>

Financial Aid Sites

Financial Aid Information: A wide range of information on aid, scholarships, university financial aid offices and related documents. <http://www.finaid.com>

Fastweb (financial aid search through the web): Search a database of more than 180,000 private sector scholarships, fellowships, grants, and loans.

Admissions Test Sites

<http://www.statementofpurpose.com>

Kaplan (www.kaptest.com) and Princeton Review (<http://www.princetonreview.com/grad-school>)
Fee based Online review sessions; both have free practice tests and advice

GRE On-Line: Includes info on test preparation, and includes practice tests, test dates and other information. <http://www.gre.org/>

Graduate School Admissions Council: The GMAT site to learn about the test, test preparation, test registration, test dates etc. <http://www.gmac.com/>

Law School Admissions Council: Good law school site containing LSAT information and law school forum dates. Lists all law school sites. <http://www.lsac.org/>

Association of America's Medical Colleges (AAMC): Comprehensive site including information on medical school, the, research, as well as student and applicant information. <http://www.aamc.org>

The Personal Essay: “Tell Me About Yourself”

The audience for your “personal essay” is an admissions committee composed of members of your future profession or academic discipline. When they read your essay, they will be seeking depth and substance, along with a true passion and commitment to your area of study. They will also be looking for individual traits or characteristics that make you an outstanding graduate school candidate.

Through the personal essay, you have a unique opportunity to:

- Convey your long and short-range career goals.
- Present yourself as an individual with desirable personal abilities, background, interests, and plans.
- Explain your special interests in this particular graduate program.
- Account for any conspicuous weaknesses in your record.
- Demonstrate your writing ability and communication skills.

How to get started:

It is imperative that you conduct a thorough self-assessment of your interests, motivations, and career goals before you begin to write.

- Why do I want to pursue a graduate school program?
- What are the special features, approaches, or values of this particular program?
- How do my interests, values, strengths, experiences, ambitions, and plans relate to what this program offers? Why do I want to be a part of this program? Why would this program want me?
- What is my interest and motivation in this field? What have I learned so far and what do I hope to gain? Can I trace my interest and motivation of any concrete experience?
- What are my strengths related to this field: personal, academic, and experiential?
- What experiences demonstrate my competence and motivation in this field?
- Do my relevant experiences fall into any pattern? Broad exploration? Increasing focus? Tackling greater and greater challenges?
- What kinds of experiences have taught me the most?
- Who/what situation has had the most influence on me to pursue graduate study?

Tips to help you write an effective personal essay:

- Before you write your personal essay, list information that may be pertinent to the admissions decision. The list may include professors, courses, books, research projects, ideas, extracurricular and volunteer activities, special skills, honors, and awards.
- Give yourself plenty of time. Start thinking about your essays early. The admissions committee reads essays thoroughly and carefully. This should be your best work.
- Read the application essay questions carefully. What information, approach, or emphasis is the question asking for? Answer all questions and address issues outlined (work limits, etc.; attention to detail is critical).
- Develop an outline with three or four points you want to make.

- You may formulate a general essay in advance but make certain that each application contains an essay which specifically answers the questions asked by that school.
- Your spirit, character, and uniqueness should come through, but your writing should be formal and correct. See sample essays and how to manage the application process in “Graduate Admissions Essays” by Donald Asher (in Career Center library).
- Each essay should explain why you have chosen that particular institution. Does it have an excellent specialization in your area of interest? Is there a particular faculty member whom you expect to work with or you have had contact with already? Is the program recommended by a faculty member? Adapt your essay accordingly.
- Strive for a strong opening line or paragraph. Look for something beyond the predictable, something that demonstrates the qualities that set you apart from other candidates. Tell stories about what makes you special and unique.
- Specific knowledge, skills, and insights acquired through internships and other work experiences – paid or volunteer and related to your proposed field of study – are particularly strong material.
- Any experience that demonstrates interpersonal talents, entrepreneurial skills, ability to perform under stress, unusual background, important lessons learned, or a genuine commitment to a worthy cause could be appropriate if you demonstrate the relevance.
- Draft! Draft! Draft! Good writing is writing that is easily understood. Have one good writer critique your essays and another proofread them, such as faculty or a career counselor.

General questions to ask yourself before applying:

- Why am I applying to graduate school?
- What are my interests?
- Why do I want to do this now?
- Should I apply to a master’s or doctoral program?
- What kind of job do I eventually want?
- What type of training or experience am I seeking?
- Should I consider a full time or part time program?
- How will I pay for a graduate program?
- If not graduate school, then what?

GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING CHART

Use the following chart to help you determine the best "match" between your interests and various advanced degrees programs.

My overall GPA: **My Graduate Admission Test School (GRE, GMAT, etc.):**

Criteria	Program A	Program B	Program C
University			
Department			
Degree Awarded (MA, MS, etc.)			
Avg. time required to complete degree			
Acceptance rate (if known)			
Avg. GPA of most recent entering class			
Number of full time students			
Number of part time students			
Avg. age of students in program			
Faculty-student ratio			
Is faculty's research of interest to me?			
Tuition costs			
Assistantships available?			
Fellowships/grants available?			
Have I been offered financial assistance?			
Prestige of university (rate: high to low)			
Prestige of program (rate: high to low)			
What is the placement rate of graduates?			
What is the size of the library?			
Rating of computer facilities			
Desirable geographical location?			
Other factors important to me (list below)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 			