

CAREER SERVICES
Graduate School Guide

Table of Contents

Graduate School: Choosing to Go.....	2
Smart and Creative Ways to Finance Your Education.....	4
Timelines and Checklist	6
Interviewing.....	8
Personal Statements	10
Entrance Exams	12
Letters of Recommendation	13
Alternative Routes: What to Do If You are Not Accepted.....	14
Going Global: International Graduate Programs	16

Graduate School: Choosing to Go

Choosing to go to graduate school is a big decision. Are you going for the right reasons?

Graduate school is the right decision when:

- You discover your passion for a field
- Your career choice requires a graduate degree to work in the field and for future advancement opportunities
- You are prepared to do research and other graduate-level academic projects/internships
- You have researched schools, programs, and requirements

Graduate school is *not* right when:

- You don't want to job search and applying to graduate school is an easy way out
- You don't know what to do with your undergraduate major and think that more school will help
- You think an MBA or a law degree are the only ways to earn money
- You feel pressured by your family to attend school

ACCREDITATION

Before applying to graduate school programs, it is essential to find out if the school *and* program is accredited by a governing body. This ensures that your program meets the state requirements for their field of study.

Go to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation website (www.chca.org) and search for the school and programs you are applying to.

CHOOSING A PROGRAM

Here are a few things to consider:

- How many students will be in your class? Will it be a small (5-10 students) or large (40+ students) classroom environment?
- What are the research interests of the faculty?
- What financial aid and tuition assistance programs are available?
- Where do you want to live? Can you do this program anywhere or only in select regions of the country?
- Does certification and/or licensure differ from state to state?
- Have you reviewed the website, course requirements, and entrance requirements?
- Have you talked to current students in the program, admission counselors and/or current faculty members?
- Did you visit the campus?
- Where do alumni typically find their jobs?
- What internship, research, and other experiential opportunities exist for students?

- Are transfer credits accepted, if applicable?
- Are you going to school full-time (9 credits) or part-time (usually 3-6 credits a semester)?
- Are you able to take electives?
- Is full-time work experience required for acceptance into the program?

TYPES OF DEGREES

Master

Typically, a master's degree is two years of post-undergraduate work, or 34-50 credits. Toward graduation, students will typically take comprehensive exams, complete an internship, or write a thesis. The Master of Science (MS) and Master of Arts (MA) are found in most academic subjects and schools. More specific degrees are those such as the Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master of Social Work (MSW).

Certificate of Advanced Study (CAS)

This is a specialization that you can receive after completing your master's degree if your field requires additional certification (e.g., school counseling).

Doctorate

A doctorate can take anywhere from three to 10 years to complete post undergraduate studies. The completion of this degree requires extensive research, writing, and practical experience. Most programs also require students to write a dissertation based on their field.

Some examples are:

PhD – Doctor of Philosophy (can be found in all academic areas)

MD – Doctor of Medicine

DPT– Doctor of Physical Therapy

JD – Juris Doctor (Attorney)

PsyD – Doctor of Psychology

EdD – Doctor of Education

DDS – Doctor of Dental Study

DPM – Doctor of Podiatric Medicine

Smart and Creative Ways to Finance Your Education

Let's face it: Education doesn't come cheap. However, if you do your research, you'll find that the path to funding your graduate degree is easier than you think.

The cardinal rule is to make sure that you explore all of your “free money” options first and avoid private educational loans if possible. Make sure to check if you qualify for these alternative routes FIRST:

Tuition Reimbursement Programs

These are offered through some places of employment or member organizations. These groups will reimburse their employee's or member's tuition. Restrictions may include the type and location of the school, successful completion of courses, GPA requirements, and degree program pursued.

School-Sponsored Financial Aid

Academic scholarships and need-based grants are offered through most colleges and universities to incoming graduate students. Speak to your financial aid counselor and academic advisor to see if you qualify for school grants or scholarships offered by the department/program you are entering.

Public and Private Scholarships/Grants

Scholarships and grants are easy to research online and are offered through many public and private organizations. Private awards are usually offered to members of churches, clubs, and professional associations. Public awards are offered to members of the general public who have a qualified GPA or an interest and commitment in a particular discipline or field of work.

Graduate Student Assistantships

As a graduate assistant, you may provide administrative support, aide in research projects, or be a teaching assistant. Contact your financial aid advisor for tips on where to scout for the perfect assistantship. Positions are usually available within certain academic departments and divisions. For example, if you are interested in pursuing a career in sport management, explore your school's athletic department for positions. If you are interested in teaching sport management, then positions may be available within your academic department.

Fellowships

These allow graduate students to become part of an elite group of peers in the pursuit of knowledge or practice, while also receiving a competitive stipend. Fellowships are offered through many regional public and private organizations, such as the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship and the Guggenheim Fellowship. Deadlines vary, so research fellowships in advance by contacting the organization's national office or speaking with a financial aid counselor at your college well before you start the fellowship application process. A comprehensive list may be found on the Council of Graduate School's website (www.cgsnet.org).

Federal Loans

For graduate students, federal loans – specifically Stafford Loans – are one of the most common and economical ways to pay for school. Graduate students may borrow up to \$20,500 through a Stafford Loan per academic year while attending school at least part-time and may defer payments while enrolled. Details on federal loans can be found on the Federal Student Aid website (www.studentaid.ed.gov).

Personal Gifts

Contributions from family members are an easy and interest-free approach to fund your graduate school expenses. You can ask your family members for a small donation to cover certain expenses, such as a semester's worth of books, an annual school meal plan, or a portion of tuition. It never hurts to ask!

Private Loans

These should be a last resort when seeking ways to fund graduate school because they carry high interest rates that must be paid while enrolled. For more information, visit the FinAid website on private loans (www.finaid.org/loans/privateloan.phtml).

QUICK NOTES

Most graduate programs can last one to five years, so proper budgeting is necessary to ensure a fulfilling and affordable experience. Make sure you cover all of your bases when creating a student-friendly budget.

Consider these expenses:

- School tuition (class fees)
- Housing and utilities (rent, electricity, parking)
- Supplies (books, computer)
- Food
- Health (insurance, medicine)
- Personal expenses (car, cell phone, gym)
- Travel (airline expenses, bus fare)
- Additional school fees (lab/program fees)
- Miscellaneous expenses (clothes, entertainment)

Timelines and Checklist

If you're considering graduate school, there's no reason to wait until the last minute to get yourself organized. These helpful guidelines can keep you on track and make the process less stressful.

Junior Year

- Meet with your academic advisor to choose a broad spectrum of classes that will hopefully enhance not only your GPA, but the quality of your academic experience *and* your transcript. Remember, the more well-rounded your education, the better! If you're pre-medicine, branch out of the typical science arena and take a sociology or English class that interests you. The same rule applies to law school-bound students. Choose classes outside of your discipline to show graduate school admissions counselors that you not only enjoy other subjects, but can also excel in the field of work.
- Contact professors who are teaching or conducting research in a field that interests you. Set up an appointment and ask them for their input and guidance on how you can learn more about the subject.
- Get in touch with alumni who are currently studying or working in your field of interest. Contact the Alumni Association or Career Services for references. Invite him/her out for coffee or ask if you can have a short telephone meeting to ask about graduate student life, course study load, specific professors, and their areas of specialty. You may even make a great connection that could be a potential reference for your applications!
- Begin to collect literature and study materials on the graduate school entrance exam you need to take, such as the LSAT, GMAT, GRE, or MCAT. Make yourself familiar with the websites and application process (see Checklist, page 7). Start studying now. If possible, prepare for and take the test as early as possible (such as the spring semester of your junior year) so that you may have more opportunities to retake the test if you are disappointed with your first score. Entrance exams are scheduled year-round. Most are computer-based tests, so do your research early to ensure that you're adequately prepared for this important application component.
- Attend the Career Services Graduate School Information Fair to meet faculty or admissions counselors, and learn about various colleges and programs.

Senior Year

- Confirm your graduation eligibility with the registrar. Make sure all of your grades and course credits are accurately recorded on your transcript from each undergraduate institution you attended. Request changes if needed.
- Network with faculty and academic advisors about your graduate school plans. Share your interests, resume, and transcript with them and ask for recommendations on schools and research programs that would work best for you. Check if they have connections with faculty or staff at the schools that you are interested in and network with these contacts.
- Begin researching eligible graduate programs that peak your interest. Collect

literature and research materials from Career Services and the program/school website (brochures, financial aid information, department application forms, admission requirements, and graduate research/job opportunities available).

- Register for and take any required graduate/professional school entrance exams as early as possible in the fall semester if you have not previously taken them or if you need to improve your scores. Some test scores are delivered immediately, such as the GRE. However, exams such as the LSAT and MCAT are delivered up to six weeks after the exam.
- Set up appointments to tour campuses and program departments. Meet with faculty and staff who were recommended by your contacts and networks.
- Narrow your list of interested schools and check the application deadlines.
- Meet with a career counselor or your academic advisor to prepare your graduate/professional school applications.
- Request a recommendation letter from three to five references. Make sure you have the appropriate mix of personal, professional, and academic referrals and that each letter is addressed appropriately to each school/department.
- Request that your graduate/professional school entrance exam results be sent to all schools you are applying to.
- Complete all personal statements, resumes, and writing samples for the application as well as scholarships, assistantships, and fellowships.
- Request an official copy of your transcripts from each undergraduate institution you attended. Either mail the transcripts along with your application to each school you are applying to, or have the registrar's office mail the transcript to each school.
- Prepare and mail out final copies of all application materials. Make photocopies of all materials for your own personal reference. Include a photocopy of your entrance exam results if you have them (check to see if this is permissible first). Everything should be mailed or submitted online at least two weeks before the deadline. Be sure to include the application fees with your final package.

CHECKLIST

- Law School Admission Council (LSAC) and LSAT registration: www.lsac.org; Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and MCAT registration: www.aamc.org; Educational Testing Service (GRE exam): www.ets.org/gre
- Start saving early for application fees.
- Send thank you cards or emails to each advisor, counselor, professor, contact, or referral who has assisted you with your graduate school application or decision-making process.
- One week prior to the application deadline, call to verify that your application materials, references, transcripts, etc. were received by each school.
- If you receive copies of test results after your applications have been submitted, send a photocopy to each school.
- Carefully consider the options available and make your decision.

Interviewing

Some programs require students to complete an interview with the academic department to gain acceptance in the program. Be prepared.

Unlike job interviews, graduate school interviews are unique in how they are structured. Also, be prepared to pay for your travel expenses, as most programs will not provide this.

Types of Formats

- One-on-one with faculty or current graduate students in the program.
- Group setting with faculty, current graduate students, and other potential incoming students.
- Weekend visit to the campus to meet with the department, interview for admission and/or assistantship positions, and attend workshops, receptions and/or dinners.

Before Your Interview

- Know what you are getting into. Explore the program, the requirements, classes you will be taking, and the current research of the faculty.
- Understand your interests, goals, skills, experience, and qualifications. What's your passion? Why this program? What do you want to do with this degree?
- Be ready to talk about yourself and give concrete, specific examples about your prior experience (academic background, jobs, activities, volunteer work, internships, etc.).
- Practice and review typical interview questions and pre-questions to ask the interviewers.

During the Interview

- Listen, be engaged, and don't monopolize the conversation. Be yourself and be professional.
- In one-on-one sessions with current graduate students, ask what they think about the courses, the faculty, and their advisors. It can give you a good overview of the program. Also ask about their post-graduation plans and compare it to your aspirations. Current students may also be asked who they think should be accepted in the program.
- Remember: Even in social settings, such as dinner, you are always being watched and evaluated.

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- If you're not accepted into graduate school, what are your plans?
- Why did you choose to apply to this graduate school/program?
- What do you know about our program?
- What other schools are you considering?
- In what ways have your previous experiences prepared you for graduate study in our program?
- What do you believe your greatest challenge will be if you are accepted into this program?
- In college, what courses did you enjoy the most? The least? Why?
- Describe any research project you've worked on. What was the purpose of the project and what was your role in the project?
- How would your professors describe you?
- How will you be able to make a contribution to the field you plan to pursue?
- What are your hobbies?
- Describe your greatest accomplishment.
- Tell me about your experience in the field you plan to pursue. What was challenging? What was your contribution?
- What are your academic and career goals? How will this program help you achieve your goals?
- How do you intend to finance your education?
- What skills do you bring to the program?
- How will you be an asset to the University's research commitment? (if there is one)
- What motivates you? Explain and provide examples.
- Why should we accept you and not someone else?
- What do you plan to specialize in?
- What do you do in your spare time?

QUICK NOTES

1. Want more information on how to prepare for interviews? Make sure you pick up a Career Guide at Career Services!
2. Did you send a thank you note to everyone you had an interview with? Collect the interviewers' business cards and make sure you send the thank you note within 24 hours of your interview.
3. Even though you are not interviewing for a job, make sure you dress professionally and wear a suit.
4. Do you have what it takes? Questions may be structured around communication skills, academic and personal maturity, passion, motivation, and being a self-starter.

Personal Statements

The personal statement is your chance to express your personal story, goals, and passion to the admissions committee. This is much different than the essays you wrote to get into undergrad.

A graduate-level personal statement is used to assess a student's writing and communication skills, dedication to the field, and maturity. It is an important piece in the overall application.

You will see two types of questions being asked:

1. A general, comprehensive personal statement, asking why you are applying to the school/program.
2. Specific questions for the program (you may also see this in supplemental applications).

Getting Started

When brainstorming, ask yourself the following:

- What is *your* story?
- How are you unique?
- When did you first become interested in the field? When did that mature (through an internship, classes, community service, etc.)?
- What life and academic experiences have you had?
- What are your career goals?
- What do you want to get out of the program?
- What obstacles or challenges did you have to overcome?
- What makes you a strong candidate for the program? What skills do you have (leadership, communication, etc.)?

General Tips When Writing

- Think of your story. Paint a picture in the committee's mind using concrete examples from your own experience.
- Think of "Who am I? Why do I want this program?"
- Grab the reader's attention, especially in the first paragraph.
- Think of your theme, or what connects or ties in your entire statement.
- Know that you are inviting the reader to learn about you on a deeper level.
- Remember to answer the question: "What are they looking for?"
- Do your research on the program.
- Proofread, spell check, get it reviewed with Career Services and your academic advisor, faculty, or department.
- Focus on your college experiences instead of high school.
- Know that this represents your graduate-level writing and communication skills! Spend a good amount of time making this statement one that you are proud of.

POSSIBLE PERSONAL STATEMENT QUESTIONS

- Describe the world you come from – for example, your family, community or school – and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.
- Discuss how your interest in the subject developed and describe any experience you have had in the field – such as volunteer work, internships and employment, participation in student organizations and activities – and what you have gained from your involvement.
- Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution, or experience that is important to you. How is it unique? Does it relate to the person you are?
- Write about coursework, experiences, or research related to your graduate school interest, such as completing a thesis, working with a professor, or volunteering for a community outreach program.
- Why does this particular school or program fit your goals? (Extensive knowledge about that school or program is essential for this to truly succeed.)
- Discuss your overcoming of any difficulties or adversity in your life. This may include difficulties in your personal life, academic life, or in your local/college community. Be sure to explain how this contributed to developing qualities that will make you a good candidate for the graduate program/school.
- Examine a tragedy in your life (loss of a parent or someone close, a severe accident) or a triumph (recognition for your outstanding performance, overcoming a disease). Discuss how you have grown from this experience, and be sure to explain how this contributed to developing qualities that will make you a good candidate for the graduate program/school.
- Write about the most important course, professor, or event that happened to you in college.
- Write about your passions, ideals, or favorite hobbies and how they are related to your choice to attend graduate school and pursue a graduate program.
- What are your professional plans upon completion of your degree?
- Discuss any information that you believe will help the Admissions Committee in the evaluation of your application.

QUICK NOTES

Things to Avoid When Writing a Personal Statement

1. Don't use clichés.
Example: "I wanted to be a doctor ever since I was four years old."
What experiences have you had that fostered your passion to go into the medical field?
2. Don't rewrite your resume.
3. Don't write the same statement for each program. Remember to change and update where you need to.
4. Avoid controversial topics, especially if they are unrelated to the program.
5. A personal statement is **not** a journal entry.
6. Don't copy other students' personal statements. Avoid sounding generic and like everyone else.

Entrance Exams

Entrance exams are one of the most important components of your graduate school application, especially in a competitive school or program.

There are several different entrance exams that vary by program.

GRE – Graduate Record Examination

This is the most common exam requirement you will see for academic programs. It is composed of three sections: analytical writing (typed essay), verbal (multiple choice), and quantitative (multiple choice). The GRE is a computer adaptive test, which means questions are selected based on your answer choices from previous questions, so the difficulty of the exam tailors itself to your level of ability. www.ets.org/gre

LSAT – Law School Admission Test

The LSAT is a requirement for all American Bar Association-accredited law schools. Not a pre-law major? No big deal. The LSAT measures analytical reasoning, logical reasoning, reading comprehension, written ability, evaluation, and the ability to support or persuade a point of view. www.lsac.org

GMAT – Graduate Management Admission Test

The GMAT is a requirement of most accredited business schools. Like the GRE, this is also a computer adaptive test, where your next question is determined based on your answer of the previous question. There are three sections: analytical writing, quantitative, and verbal. www.mba.com

MCAT – Medical College Admission Test

This is a requirement of all students to gain acceptance to medical school in the United States and Canada. It measures a student's scientific knowledge (physical and biological science), writing (communication skills), and verbal reasoning. www.aamc.org/mcat

QUICK NOTES

No matter which exam is required for entry into your program, you should always use a current study guide to help you.

Want to take a class? There are many local options when choosing which one is right for you. Some specialize in test-taking strategies rather than subject material review.

Here are a few online resources:

- PrincetonReview.com – get information about the exams, sign up for classes, and connect with educational information
- Inlingua.com – one of the world's leading language centers that also specializes in graduate school test preparation
- Kaplan.com – focuses on test preparation, education, and admissions; they have many locations throughout the state
- ETS.org – administers and interprets scores including the GRE

Letters of Recommendation

A letter of recommendation is a detailed statement that discusses your accomplishments, skills, abilities, personal experiences, and the reason you are suited for a school's program.

Letters of recommendation are usually written by a professor. Most programs require at least three of them.

Who should you ask?

- At least two of your letters should come from faculty members who you have a good relationship with. A third can come from a current or previous employer and/or administrator at the institution.
- You want the person to be able to speak about you in a good light and provide specific examples of how you developed as a student.

When should you ask?

- At least eight weeks before the deadline.
- Remember: Faculty members are busy, and they are probably writing several other letters for students. Give them enough time and follow up at least three weeks before the deadline.

How should you ask?

- Be sure to set up an appointment with the individuals that you plan on asking.
- Ask them if they have time to write a positive recommendation letter for your graduate school applications. If they hesitate or say no, find another reference.
- If they accept, create a folder for each program/school you are applying to. In each folder have the following:
 1. Your resume/curriculum vitae
 2. Prior work that you completed in their class
 3. Descriptions/printouts of the programs
 4. Your personal statement
 5. Stamped and addressed envelopes
 6. Any other relevant information

QUICK NOTES

Resume/Curriculum Vitae

When filling out your graduate school application, you will need to attach your resume or CV to it. Also, they may ask you in the application to expand on some experiences that may already be described on your resume. Be sure to pay particular attention when filling them out.

Some topics to include on your graduate school resume that you may not have on your job searching resume:

- Professional affiliations and organizations
- Research experience
- Volunteer experience
- Community service
- Honors and awards
- Academic projects
- Leadership experience
- Clubs, organizations, and extracurricular activities

Alternative Routes: What to Do If You are Not Accepted

Being deferred or not accepted by a school should never dampen your future plans. Rather, see this time as an opportunity.

You can use this time to strengthen your skills and knowledge to make you a more competitive applicant in the future. Here are a few tips that can give you an edge the next time you apply:

1. Do you have a relationship with a recruiter or admissions counselor at the school? If so, ask to schedule a face-to-face or telephone appointment with them and simply ask what you could do to make you a favorable candidate. It never hurts to ask!
2. Go over your entire application (all essays, personal statements, grades, past coursework) with a career counselor or academic advisor. Ask their opinion on the strongest and weakest aspects of your materials. Take notes on their suggestions and work from there.
3. Apply earlier next time around (at least six weeks before the deadline).
4. Do more research and pick a new pool of safe schools you are interested in and, if needed, weed out schools you are no longer interested in. Start saving now and apply to twice as many schools next time. Expand your choices and your chances of getting accepted will increase.
5. Schedule an in-person or telephone interview with faculty at all interested schools. If you have a job, then you may need to take time off for these interviews. Dress up for the interview and make a big impression during the meeting by showing them your interest and determination to progress in their graduate school.
6. Take a few post-baccalaureate summer classes in your field of interest at a competitive university near your town and ace them! It may cost more than taking classes at a community college, but it will show the admissions committee that you're capable and determined. Remember, the most recent grades count the most!
7. Take a respected test preparation course and devote at least two to three hours a day to studying for the admissions test. Many companies offer competitive prices for a variety of short- and long-term courses. Give it your all and you're sure to see success!
8. Get a job, internship, fellowship, research position, or even an unpaid volunteer position in the targeted field. Not only will this help you network

with professionals, but it will show your determination to succeed in the field and may even score you a few referrals for new recommendation letters.

9. Get certified in an aspect of your targeted field or acquire an intermediate degree. For example, if you're interested in law school, get your paralegal certificate before you reapply. If you're interested in medical, dental, or pharmacy school, look into getting a surgical technician, dental hygienist, or pharmacy technician certification, respectively. Put this certification on your resume and discuss it in your personal statements.
10. Narrow down your list to the top five schools you are interested in and get involved on the campuses of these schools. Does their law school have a community-wide event or forum scheduled next month? Does their medical school offer free health screenings for young adults? Does their business school offer free weekend courses for the community? Do some research to find out! Attend everything; include and discuss your attendance in your resume or personal statements.

QUICK NOTES

Sometimes, getting older and trying again (as many times as it takes) is all it takes in achieving your goal of attending graduate school. Fortunately, there are many opportunities for a fulfilling and challenging experience during the gap year that could benefit your application and your mind.

- AmeriCorps – www.americorps.gov
- Teach for America – www.teachforamerica.org
- Peace Corps – www.peacecorps.gov
- Habitat for Humanity – www.habitat.org
- City Year – www.cityyear.org
- Dynamy – www.dynamy.org
- Carpe Diem Education – www.carpediemeducation.org
- Chicago Inner-City Teaching Corps – www.icctc-chicago.org
- Jesuit Volunteer Corps – www.jesuitvolunteers.org

Going Global: International Graduate Programs

Choosing to attend an international graduate school is gaining popularity in the United States as more scholars and businesses view education as the universal tool that links cultures and humanity.

Below are some examples of admired international programs that offer concentrations in liberal arts and sciences, medicine, law, business, public policy, and economics.

Oxford University – Oxford, England
Liberal arts, sciences, business, public policy, and politics
www.ox.ac.uk

London School of Economics and Political Science – London, England
Government, economics, law and management, and international relations
www.lse.ac.uk

Ross University School of Medicine – Dominica, West Indies
www.rossu.edu/medical-school

Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine – St. Kitts, West Indies
www.rossu.edu/veterinary-school

Georg Simon Ohm Management Institute – Nuremberg, Germany
Business management
www.gso-mi.com

Thunderbird School of Global Management – Geneva, Switzerland/
Beijing, China/Monterrey, Mexico
Global management, international business, and global affairs
www.thunderbird.edu

Bond University – Queensland, Australia
Liberal arts, sciences, information technology, law, medicine, and hotel/resort management
www.bond.edu.au

American InterContinental University – London, England
Business and international management
www.aiulondon.com