Graduate School

*Understanding Admissions & Applications*

Deciding to enter into a graduate or professional program can be a very rewarding experience. Applying to graduate/professional school is hard work, so it is important to think ahead and plan your application strategy.

When thinking about graduate or professional school, consider:

* your interests, skills and experiences
* knowledge of the occupational field
* schools offering programs of interest
* admission requirements

When considering graduate school, you need to begin researching your options early, as you may need pre-requisite courses to begin additional schooling. For example, pre-med students need relevant science course work; students interested in pursuing an MBA often need several years of work experience to meet application requirements.

The Career Education Office offers coaching to all students and alumni considering continuing their education.

**Self-Knowledge**

* Why do you want to attend graduate school?
* Are your interests your primary motivation or are they the motivations of friends and/or family?
* Are you interested in continued study for the purpose of immersing yourself into a subject area for pure knowledge or for employment opportunities?
* Do you have a clear idea of the career you want to pursue?
* Are you burned out academically and need to take some time off?
* Are you postponing the job search by going to graduate school?
* Can you identify your interests, skills, and experiences and describe how they relate to an occupational field?
* Can you balance continued education with other life roles?
* Are you motivated to continue your study for another two or more years?
* Can you afford to attend graduate school at this time?

**Field Knowledge**

* Do you have accurate information about your field of interest?
* Have you talked with professionals to see if an advanced degree is necessary for entry into the field?
* If an advanced degree is important, are there several options available in terms of programs?
* Would it be wise to work for a year or two to decide which graduate program to pursue?
* Do you have related experience through an internship, externship, or summer job?

*Schedule an appointment with a career coach to help you find
an internship, externship, or summer job.*

**Information on Specific Programs**

* Have you explored schools, which offer programs related to your field?
* Have you talked with people in the field to get their suggestions on schools/programs?
* Have you consulted with your professors about their graduate school experience and about the quality of graduate universities? They can also provide excellent guidance in terms of the overall graduate school experience and job market.
* Do you know the admission requirements for schools/programs of interest?
* Have you taken the appropriate graduate admission test (GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT, etc)?
* Have you reviewed the schools/programs website to gather information?
* Have you contacted the school to get information on the school/program?
* Have you opened a credential file for reference letters?

*The Career Library (Bagby 213) has FREE prep books for you to check out!*

**Researching Schools**

With hundreds of opportunities available, searching for the right program and the right school can be arduous. Visit the Career Education Library for resources to find the right fit for you. Try the Peterson’s Guide online for more information.

# Factors to Consider for Research

* Areas of specialization within the discipline
* Number of students enrolled in the program (Consider the male/female ratio and average age of the student body)
* Number of full-time faculty
* Distinguished faculty in the discipline
* Areas of specialty of the faculty
* Cost
* Housing
* Location
* Financial assistance: teaching assistantships, research assistantships, scholarships, fellowships, and other financial awards
* Reputation: talk with faculty, review professional journals and scholarly articles in the field of interest to determine who is on the cutting edge of research
* Placement statistics, if available
* Admission requirements: residency, quality point ratio or class rank, academic major and classes completed, references, deadlines, graduate school admission test(s)

# The Application Process

# Application materials for graduate programs will vary from school to school. Traditional application materials often include the following:

# completed application form

# submission of your test scores

# your official college transcript(s)

# letters of recommendation

# your personal statement or letter of intent

# Some programs require additional information such as your resume, writing samples, essays, examples of your work, or interview.

# Transcripts

Transcripts may be obtained by making a request to the Registration Office of each institution you have attended. Allow up to 4-6 weeks for your transcript to be mailed directly to your school of interest.

**Letters of Recommendation**

When considering who to approach for a letter of recommendation, be sure to select someone who can provide a relevant, accurate and positive representation of your abilities. Your program may specify if your letters must come from previous professors, employers, members of your community or a combination of all three.

# Personal Statement

Be aware that admission committees place significant weight on this portion of the application. Your personal statement should be the requested length, not longer nor shorter as a rule. Never exceed the space provided. While it is clear that you may not extend the limits of the page, sometimes there is no recommendation for how much to write; nor are you given much direction about what to say in your statement.

You can use the personal statement to emphasize your qualifications, interest in the field and why you think that you will make a good X, Y, or Z. You can describe your motivation for study or preparation for a career in the particular discipline, experiences which have contributed to your decision and your goals for the future. Before you begin writing, create an outline that lists the main topics you want to discuss. This will permit you to develop paragraphs that are organized and succinct. Be specific and use concrete examples.

Prepare several drafts, refining and editing each version with every re-write. Allow some time to lapse before reading your first draft, then read it aloud to yourself and listen carefully to what you hear. Be sure that you have written what you meant to communicate. If you stumble over your reading or a phrase sounds awkward, that’s a clue that you may need to revise your statements.

Have someone else read your essay and give you feedback. Some of the most valuable assessments of your essay come from questions that are raised when other people read your essay. If your writing is not clear, you are not communicating effectively. Ask a writing tutor in the Writing Center and a Career Coach in the Career Education & Vocational Reflection Office to critique your essay. Additionally, there are books in the Career Education & Vocational Reflection Office on writing a personal statement.

# Test Preparation Guides

There are several reliable reference guides that include step-by-step instruction on tackling your respective tests. All guides include several practice tests either in a paper and pencil format or a computerized version. We recommend guides published by Peterson’s or The Princeton Review. Guides and practice tests are available in our Career Education Library for checkout.

**Test Preparation Services**

Kaplan is an excellent test preparation service that affords learners the opportunity to immerse themselves in designated examination study. For a complete listing of class locations, dates and fees, visit the Career Education website. Students are also encouraged to work with their faculty advisors related to specific disciplines.

**Paying for Graduate School**

Money to attend graduate school is available through your chosen colleges and universities, governmental sources and private foundations. Applicants seeking financial assistance are encouraged to contact the Financial Aid Office at each school of interest to gain specific information and learn about college or program specific funding opportunities. Applicants should research this subject early as many deadlines fall months prior to your anticipated attendance.

Loans and GrantsLoans and grants come in a variety of denominations based on your demonstrated financial need and are available through state, Federal and private loans.  Educational loans are traditionally charged a lower interest rate and must be repaid.  Grants, however, do not have to be repaid and may not be available at all institutions. Federal Aid is received by completing the [FAFSA](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). Check their website and with the school of your choice's financial aid office for the filing date. Apply early.

ScholarshipsMost graduate programs offer scholarships for incoming and returning students.  Work with the Financial Aid Office at your respective institution to learn more.

Graduate and Research AssistantshipsGraduate and Research Assistantships are excellent sources of income for students while providing relevant work experience.  Graduate and Research Assistants traditionally work within their program of study on a part-time basis either in a teaching or research capacity.  For more information about Assistantships, contact the office of your program of interest.

Financial Aid NotificationOnce you have completed and submitted your FAFSA, the information is then sent to your school(s) of choice.  (You will indicate your choices on your FAFSA). The institution will then review your records and determine what funding you are eligible to receive. All institutions have their own designated notification date. If awarded, you will receive your notification in writing and it will include your **academic year award package** which is then distributed evenly over semesters or quarters.  You will also receive further instructions on accepting or declining the offer.

Planning Ahead
Your financial aid only covers the academic year and must be renewed annually; a separate filing process is required for summer classes. While it may be tempting to accept your entire award package, budget your expenses and determine a close estimate of your needs - for the upcoming year as well as any future years you will be enrolled in classes. What you borrow, you must pay back.

Loan RepaymentMost Federal programs allow students a six-month grace period upon graduation before going into repayment. Should you take a leave of absence during your program, this grace period may take effect. Take this into consideration and work closely with your institution's Financial Aid Office should changes occur with your enrollment.

Traditionally, students interested in receiving Federal financial aid must first complete the FAFSA, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Submitting your information by the priority filing date is critical as it will determine your total aid package. The Financial Aid Office at your school(s) of choice will publish these dates.

# Graduate School Interview Questions

Getting an interview is a significant step towards winning acceptance to the graduate program of your dreams.

**What questions can you expect?**

* 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 this career?
* What do you know about our program?
* Why did you choose to apply to 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 this field?
* What are your hobbies?
* Explain a situation in which you had a conflict and how you resolved it. What would you do differently? Why?
* Describe your greatest accomplishment.
* Tell me about your experience in this field. What was challenging? What was your contribution?
* What are your 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 help your mentor in his or her research?
* Are you motivated? Explain and provide examples.
* Why should we take you and not someone else?
* What do you plan to specialize in?
* What do you do in your spare time?
* What can be determined about an applicant at an interview?

**Questions to Research/Ask Graduate and Professional School Representatives**

* What is your process for reviewing applications?
* Does your school have early admissions? Is there any advantage to applying early?
* When do you typically inform applicants about admissions decisions?
* How important is the personal statement in your admissions process?
* What kinds of recommendations are most helpful?
* What joint degree programs are offered?
* How is the program curriculum organized?
* How would you describe the faculty-student relationship/ratio?
* Describe the physical location of the school.
* Describe the on and off campus housing opportunities for students.
* How is financial aid handled at your school? When do you notify the student of financial aid?
* What are the average costs at your school for tuition and all other expenses?
* What makes your school unique?

# General Timeline

Applying to graduate school takes time and consideration. The earlier you begin your graduate school search, the smoother the process will be. Be sure to check with each graduate or professional school for exact deadlines because they will vary from program to program.

**Six Months Prior to Applying**

* Research areas of interest, institutions, and programs
* Visit schools
* Talk to advisors about application requirements
* Register and prepare for appropriate graduate school admission tests
* Investigate national scholarships
* If appropriate, obtain letters of recommendation

**Three Months Prior to Applying**

* Take required graduate admission tests
* Write your application essay/personal statement
* Check on application deadlines and rolling admissions policies
* Register for any national application or data assembly service, if applicable
* Obtain letters of recommendation
* Send completed applications
* Pick up the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Financial Aid PROFILE, if required
* Practice interview questions and/or schedule a mock interview with a Career Coach.

**Early Spring, Before Enrolling in the Fall**

* Check with all institutions before their deadlines to make sure that your file is complete
* Visit institutions that accept you
* Send a deposit to your institution of choice
* Notify other colleges and universities that accepted you so that they can admit students on their waiting list
* Send thank-you letters to people who wrote your recommendation letters, informing them of your success