



## Graduate School Tips

AUBURN UNIVERSITY CAREER CENTER

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### WHY GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL?

- To obtain specialized knowledge in specific area of study
- To gain entrance into professions that require it: lawyer, counselor or physical therapist, for example
- To advance within a particular field of interest
- To conduct focused research and scholarship in particular discipline: history, sociology or chemistry, for example

### POST BACCALAUREATE OPTIONS

#### Professional Schools

- Include dental, medical, veterinarian, law and business
- May not need a specific undergraduate degree but may need specific (related or rigorous) undergraduate courses
- Often evaluate applicants heavily on academic success and ability to answer ethical/philosophical essays or communicate a fit through a personal statement
- Interested in applicant's community service, leadership, campus and association and work experience
- Weigh potential success on results of tests: e.g. LSAT, GRE and MCAT

#### Graduate Schools

- Offer many specialized paths. For example, a student interested in counseling could get a MEd (Masters of Education) in Counselor Education, an MA (Master of Arts) in Counseling Psychology or a MSW (Master of Social Work) in Social Work, with philosophical approaches and training differing for each
- Interested in applicant's community service, leadership, campus and association involvement, work experience and results of standardized tests (research if you will need both general and subject area exams)
- May require a credential file (e.g. education, pharmacy)
- May or may not increase salaries depending on the academic area
- Some may prefer related experience prior to enrollment

### APPLICATION TIMELINE

Start your evaluation of graduate programs a year prior to graduation. Here is an estimated timeline:

#### 12 Months Prior to Starting

- Research possible options; ask yourself, "What schools should I consider? Where do I want to live? What schools offer my area of study?"
- Research schools' webpages and use resources like gradschools.com and Petersons.com to learn admissions requirements, housing and financial aid deadlines, etc.
- Visit campuses and communities

- Narrow your top choices
- Practice and study for standardized tests (GRE, GMAT, MCAT, LSAT)

#### Twelve to Nine Months Prior to Starting

- Register and take required standardized test
- Review application materials and prepare required documents
- Ask for references
- Finalize personal statement

#### Seven to Nine Months Prior to Starting

- Complete application and financial aid forms
- Distribute recommendation forms (if provided) and self addressed, stamped envelopes to references
- Mail applications, watching deadlines for admissions and financial aid
- Call to verify all materials have been received

### EVALUATE PROGRAMS ON THE FOLLOWING AREAS

#### Program of Study

- Degrees and areas of concentration offered
- Field work or research options
- Percentage of students attending full- or part-time

#### Admissions Information

##### *Admissions Preferences*

- Does the program prefer recent graduates or individuals with work experience?
- Are there any prerequisites that you must meet before acceptance?
- Break down of admission criteria, relative importance of test scores, GPA, recommendations, and experience

##### *Admissions Requirements: What does each school require?*

- Graduate Admissions Test (GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT)
- Transcripts
- GPA
- Letters of Recommendation
- Application Essay/ Personal Statement
- Interview
- Portfolio or audition

#### Faculty

- Size and diversity of the department
- Publications and professional affiliations

#### Financial Aid and Assistantships

- Type of assistance available
- Process for applying
- Documentation needed

## Facilities

- Libraries, research, and lab space available
- Student Services available on campus
- Recreation and Clubs
- Medical Services

## Community

- Location (size of school and community)
- Services available outside of the university
- Housing options outside of the university

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### To how many graduate programs should I apply?

Generally, applying to four to six programs is sufficient, balancing your applications between highly and moderately competitive programs. Remember that each application will require a fee.

### What are the different levels of graduate degrees?

- **Master's Degree:** Available in most every field of study, generally taking one to three years to complete
- **Specialist:** Completed after a master's degree and generally prepares the individual for certification or licensure in a specific field, usually a one year program
- **Doctoral Degree:** Highest educational level, requiring original research and/or practical application, length varying between programs

## ASSESSING YOUR GRADUATE SCHOOL COMPETENCY

Note whether each of the 12 statements below are true, false or unknown for you:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. If I do not go to graduate school now, I may never go.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I can get a job in my field without a graduate degree, but not in my specialized area of interest.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I am unsure of my career goals and graduate school will help me clarify my interests.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I am actively exploring both graduate school and direct entry into the market place.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. My professors are encouraging me to attend graduate/professional school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I cannot work in my field of interest without a graduate degree.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The job market is crowded and a graduate degree will make me more competitive.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. A graduate degree will significantly increase my entry level salary.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I like school; I am not ready to leave the academic environment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I have career-related experience as part of my background.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. I have always known that I would go directly from undergraduate school into graduate study.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Most students enter my field of graduate study directly from undergraduate school.

The academic programs of study I am considering are: \_\_\_\_\_

My primary reason for considering graduate school now is: \_\_\_\_\_

## What financial aid options are?

Much of the financial aid at the graduate level is merit based, often in the form of a fellowship or assistantship. Most awards are given by the academic department under which you plan to study. However, there will also be general assistantships throughout the university (residence life, for example). Here are some types of assistantships which may be available:

- **Graduate Assistantships:** 10-20 hours work/week; typically pay full or partial tuition and offer a stipend
- **Teaching Assistantships:** Teaching, recitation courses and/or assisting a professor with office hours, half time (may be reserved for doctoral students)
- **Research Assistantships:** Assist professor with research; may lead to own research project
- **Residence Assistantships:** Room (in college residence hall), board and stipend are often offered