



GRADUATE SCHOOL PREPARATION

WHY GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL?

- To obtain specialized knowledge in specific area of study
- To gain entrance into specific professions that require it
- To advance within a particular field
- To conduct focused research and scholarship in a particular discipline
- To pursue a career change or transition within a particular field out of personal desire or necessity
- To pursue teaching and/or research opportunities within higher-education with the goal of attaining a tenured faculty position at a university

BEFORE APPLYING, CONSIDER:

- Programs may be highly competitive with fewer spots available than most undergraduate programs
- Program cost, including funding and housing opportunities, may look differently at the graduate level. Programs may require unpaid internships and/or may not allow for students to work simultaneously while enrolled in a graduate program
- Return on investment from graduate school may be gradual. Depending on industry, you may still be required to obtain further experience/license/qualifications upon graduation
- Programs may require completion of a thesis in order to graduate. This requires a level of discipline and overall interest in

- Impact of potential strain/stress on personal life

TYPES OF GRADUATE PROGRAM:

- Coursework only
- Coursework and a special full-term project and/or internship/practicum
- Coursework and the writing/presentation of thesis or dissertation

POST-BACCALAUREATE OPTIONS:

PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

- Include dental, medical, veterinarian, pharmacy, & law
- 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, shadowing, research, campus and association and work experience
- Weigh potential success on results of tests: e.g. LSAT, GRE, and MCAT

GRADUATE SCHOOL

- 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

ONLINE GRADUATE PROGRAMS

- Choose an accredited program
- Decide if your learning style fits within the online coursework model
- May require short-term residency on campus (or nearby) during which time you may be required to complete exams in person and/or present your thesis
- Graduate Program versus Certificate Program

GRADUATE PROGRAM

- Usually requires 10-12 graduate level courses
- May require independent research with defense of thesis/dissertation and/or internship component
- May require applicant to submit standardized test scores to qualify for admission into program

TYPES OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS:

- **Master's Degree:** Available in most every field of study, generally taking one to three years to complete
- **Specialist/Certificate:** 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

CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

- Typically don't require tests for admission
- Focus on specific topic versus providing broad scope of instruction
- Usually requires 5 graduate level courses in a particular area
- May help you decide if you're ready to commit to a degree program in a non-threatening way

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-time or part-time

ADMISSIONS PROCESS

- Does the program prefer recent graduates or individuals with work experience?
- Are there any prerequisites that you must meet before acceptance?

FACULTY

- Size and diversity of the department
- Publications and professional affiliations
- Areas of research and reputation in field

FINANCIAL AID AND ASSISTANTSHIPS/ FELLOWSHIPS

- Type of assistance available
- Process for applying
- Documentation needed
- Package: housing provided? stipend given? summer paid? research involvement? teaching experience?

TYPES OF COMMON ASSISTANTSHIPS:

- **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 residence hall), board, and stipend are often offered

FACILITIES

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

COMMUNITY

- Location (size of school and community)
- Businesses, entertainment, and services

available outside of the university

- Housing options outside of the university
- Weather and political climate

APPLICATION TIMELINE

Start your evaluation of graduate programs at least one year prior to graduation.

ESTIMATED TIMELINE TO FOLLOW 12 MONTHS PRIOR

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

12 TO 9 MONTHS PRIOR

- Register and take appropriate standardized test if required
- Review application materials and prepare required documents (resume, cover letter, personal statement, recommendation letters/forms, etc.)
- Ask for recommendations from persons in which you have formed significant, professional relationships (professors, supervisors, colleagues, advisors, etc.)
- Finalize personal statement
- Research financial aid for graduate students including application process,

eligibility, loan options, etc. through studentaid.gov

9 TO 7 MONTHS PRIOR

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

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.

How to I find programs that I might consider?

- Talk to professors, other students, and industry professionals to get a sense of good programs.
- Identify needed accreditations or explore the website of the accrediting body to find programs.
- Explore research of interest and find authors/professors and where they instruct.

What financial aid options are offered?

- 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).

ASSESSING YOUR GRADUATE SCHOOL READINESS

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

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