

Graduate/Professional School Preparation

Three to six months prior to applying (Spring of Junior year)

- Assess educational goals, career interests, financial resources, etc. Identify your strengths, interests, and values related to future career directions
- Is graduate school the best choice at this time? Consider why you plan to go to graduate school and if you have a clear vision for a particular program. Do you plan to attend full time or part time, online or in person?
- Join professional associations in your field and use their student resources and advice to consider advanced degrees in their field.
- Research programs. *Peterson's Guides to Graduate Programs* (online) contains admission requirements, prerequisites, acceptance rates, and descriptions of most accredited programs. Should you apply to a master's or doctoral program? Look at outcome data, facilities, research dollars, etc. to decide what programs/schools fit your plans. What degree will allow you to do what you want to do?
- Consult scholarly journals in your field to see what/where research is being done. Contact faculty in programs where you have genuine interest to learn more about their research and expertise.
- Talk with your faculty mentors and alumni to get advice and information. Attend Graduate and Professional School Fairs and talk with recruiters to gain specific information about programs.
- Study for required graduate admission tests in advance, take a free practice test early (Kaplan or Princeton Review are two options) to determine what you need to study. Set aside quality study time and schedule to take the exam before fall semester.
- Investigate national scholarships, graduate assistantships, etc.
- If appropriate, obtain letters of recommendation.

Three months prior to applying (Summer before Senior year)

- Narrow program options (5-8); contact targeted programs with questions related to admissions requirements, application materials, course details, and financial aid and scholarship information. Talk directly with the programs you are applying to for complete information regarding costs. Evaluate choice of programs.
- Understand admissions prerequisites and follow application deadlines, apply early.
- Draft essays/personal statements for applications; follow prompts carefully and have several people review it (faculty member, Career Liaison, etc.).
- Target each resume or curriculum vitae (CV) toward the specific programs and school.
- Secure names and contact information of 3-5 professional references (faculty, advisors, former employers, etc.). Talk with them about your plans and provide your resume/CV so they can target their comments. Allow at least one-month lead time. Most programs will send an electronic reference form link.

Fall, a year before matriculating

- Complete applications, early if possible. Application deadlines vary so allow time to thoroughly complete all forms. Carefully PROOF application materials before sending.
- Make a copy of application materials to reference during follow up and interviews.
- Ensure your file is complete prior to the program's deadlines, including test scores, references, etc. Remind references to submit responses before deadlines.
- Take (retake) admissions test(s) if scores are not satisfactory.
- Research and apply for Financial Aid, assistantships, etc. These deadlines are often earlier than the program deadlines.

- Request transcripts (online) be sent from Registrar's Office (confirm with program but you may need to wait for fall grades before requesting transcripts to be sent) to graduate schools of interest.

Winter, before matriculating in the fall

- Complete all financial and scholarship requirements.
- Schedule a mock interview with your Career Liaison; get interview attire.

Spring, before matriculating in the fall

- Prepare for interviews, if appropriate. Visit the institutions that accept you, ask questions
- Once accepted and your decision is made, send the deposit to your institution of choice. Notify other programs that accepted you of your decision so that they can admit students on the waiting list.
- If you are wait listed, send additional supporting information if appropriate.
- Email/send thank you letters to people who wrote recommendation letters, informing them of your success.

Graduate & Professional School Websites:

Peterson's Graduate School: <http://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools> Research graduate programs and the application process. Includes detailed program descriptions.

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

Graduate School Rankings:

U.S. News & World Report <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/grhome.htm>

Financial Aid Information:

How will I pay for a graduate program? Will this degree "pay off" in a higher salary, etc.? The range of financial support at the graduate level is very broad. Every institution allots their funds differently, you must communicate with them to learn of options.

- **Fellowships, Grants and Scholarships** - generally outright awards with no service to the institution required. They are generally highly competitive. There may be National Fellowships that could be applied for that are not directly related to the institution as well.
- **Assistantships** - require work duties such as teaching, research, administrative, student life at the institution
- **Loans**- Must repay funds, generally with interest.

Financial Aid sites:

A wide range of information on aid, scholarships, university financial aid offices and related documents. <http://www.gograd.org/financial-aid/>; <http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/grad.phtml>;
Fast Web = <https://www.fastweb.com/> (database of more than 180,000 private sector scholarships, fellowships, grants, and loans)

Admission Testing Sites:

Take a FREE practice test to gauge how well you will score and then use it as a guide for study purposes.

Companies such as Kaplan www.kaptest.com and Princeton Review

<https://www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings/best-colleges?ceid=hp-carousel-1-best-382#>

Both offer provide formal review sessions/classes that are fee based.

Some programs will require specific subject tests, as well. Read admissions requirements carefully.

GRE: <http://www.gre.org/> info on test preparation, practice tests, test dates, etc.

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

Law School Admissions Council: <http://www.lsac.org/> Compare programs and find LSAT details.

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

The Personal Statement: “Tell Me About Yourself”

The audience for your “personal statement” 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 abilities, background, interests, and plans.
- Explain your specific interests in this particular graduate program.
- Account for any conspicuous weaknesses in your record.
- Demonstrate your writing ability and communication skills.

Websites that provide Graduate School Personal Statement Advice:

<https://www.petersons.com/blog/graduate-school-statement-of-purpose/>

<http://www.statementofpurpose.com>

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 kind of job do I eventually want?
- What type of training am I seeking? Why now?
- 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? What are my strengths and motivations related to this field: personal, academic, and experiential?
- Why do I want to be a part of this program? Why would this program want me?

- What have I learned so far and what do I hope to gain? Can I trace my interest and motivation to any concrete experience?
- What experiences have taught me the most? 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?
- 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 draft, list pertinent information to the admissions decision. The list may include professors, courses, books, research projects, ideas, extracurricular and volunteer activities, special skills, honors, and awards.
- Start thinking about your essays early. Develop an outline with three or four points you want to make. The admissions committee reads essays thoroughly and carefully. This should be your best work and set you apart from other candidates.
- Read the application essay questions carefully. What information, approach, or emphasis is the question asking for? Answer all questions and address issues outlined (word limit, etc.) Attention to detail is critical.
- You may formulate a general essay but each application should contain a targeted essay which specifically answers the questions asked by that school. 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.
- Your spirit, character, and uniqueness should come through. Your writing should be formal and grammatically correct. See sample essays and how to manage the application process in “Graduate Admissions Essays” by Donald Asher (in Career Development Office library).
- Strive for a strong opening line and paragraph. Look for something beyond the predictable, something that demonstrates the qualities that set you apart from other candidates. Tell stories about how you have prepared and what makes you prepared, competitive 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 and an objective person (such as faculty or a career liaison) critique and proofread your essays

How do PROGRAMS make their decisions?

It depends on the program. Some look at test scores and grades, others look closely at recommendations, while others focus on the reasons why you are applying to their program. Still others may have specific needs to fill that aren't related to any scores or recommendations. Weight could also be given to area of interest or past involvement with their particular program, etc.

How do YOU make your decision? Here is a possible decision-making example.

GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING CHART			
Use the following chart to determine the best "match" between interests and various degree programs.			
Overall GPA:		Graduate Admission Test School (GRE, GMAT, etc.):	
Criteria	Program A	Program B	Program C
University			
Program/Department			
Highlighted features of the program			
Degree Awarded (MA, MS, PhD., etc.)			
Average time required to complete degree			
Acceptance rate (if known)			
Average GPA of most recent entering class			
Average test scores of recent class			
Prestige of university (rate: high to low)			
Prestige of program (rate: high to low)			
What is the placement rate of graduates?			
Faculty-student ratio			
Is faculty's research of interest to me?			
Number of full-time/part-time students			
Average age of students in program			
Tuition costs			
Assistantships/Fellowships/research/grants offered?			
Have I been offered financial assistance?			
Desirable geographical location?			
Other factors important to me (list below)			
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