



The graduate school planning process is one which requires a great deal of thought and time. This Success Guide provides an overview of details such as the application process and standardized testing, while providing tips to help you be successful.

Reasons to go to graduate or professional school...

- Advanced education is required in the career(s) which you are considering.
- A graduate degree can help you advance in your career choice.
- You have a strong interest in a particular subject area, and wish to continue studies within that subject area, either for career advancement, or personal satisfaction.

Reasons NOT to go to graduate school or professional school...

Graduate school requires a great deal of time, money, support and motivation. You need to schedule an appointment with your Career Consultant if any of the following situations apply to you:

- You are unsure about what you want to do and think graduate school will help you discover your interests.
- Graduate school seems like a safe place to be while you are discovering your interests.
- You are afraid you will not find a job.
- You don't know of any careers available for your major.

Research and self-assessment

- Define your career goals and potential areas of specialization.
- Schedule an appointment with your career consultant to further discuss your goals and objectives.
- Talk with professors in your area of interest regarding program strength and reputation. Ask them about their own educational experiences.
- Review materials in the Career Collection in the Reference section on the first floor of the Hunt Library, such as the books on graduate school, to assist you in identifying programs and reviewing rankings. Online resources include [Peterson's College Search](#), [The Graduate Guide](#) or [US News and World Report](#).
- Peruse program websites to review important program information such as coursework, faculty members and their areas of research, notable alumni and career resources. It may help you to schedule a campus visit.
- Register online at college/university websites to receive additional information on their programs and events.
- Speak with alumni regarding programs they have completed.
- List tentative decisions about your future and develop several realistic scenarios (whether or not to apply to graduate school, what to do if the schools you are interested in waitlist you, etc.).
- Make careful note of program deadlines.



The application process

- Most applications can now be completed online.
- A typical application includes the application form, an application fee, letters of recommendation, transcripts, an essay/statement of purpose or bibliography, and test scores.
- **Pay attention to application deadlines!!** Begin to review these at least a year before you plan to apply.
- Some types of schools will use a common application which allows you to apply to multiple programs at the same time.
- The best time to apply is when you feel your application is the strongest.
- For programs with rolling admissions, it is to your advantage to apply early and NOT wait until the last minute.
- Check with all institutions before the deadline to make sure your applications are complete.

Standardized testing requirements (GREs, GMATs, MCATs, LSATs)

- Ascertain the entrance exam requirements for each institution to which you will be applying.
- Register for a testing date. Schedule your test early enough in the application process in case you need to take it again before your final materials are due.
- Practice your exam using online resources, a practice book or a course from Kaplan or the Princeton Review. Never go blindly into these exams without practicing! Learning the test structure is important to your success.

Further information on common standardized tests:

[Graduate Management Admission Test \(GMAT\)](#)

[Graduate Record Exam \(GRE\)](#)

[Law School Admission Test \(LSAT\)](#)

[Medical College Admission Test \(MCAT\)](#)

Developing your personal essay (statement of purpose)

- Most applications will require you to write an essay about why you would like to attend graduate school and in particular, their institution. Other essays may be required.
- Essay topics are very open-ended, and for good reason. You must demonstrate to the admissions committee that you can answer this question in a clear, concise, and personable manner.
- Some schools will give you the opportunity to complete an optional essay in which you detail any weaknesses in your application or additional things you would like them to know about you. It is wise to write this essay even though it is described as optional. This is your chance to discuss your positive attributes and make your case for admittance



- See sample essays in Don Asher's Graduate Admissions Essays and other books in the Career Collection in the Reference section on the first floor of Hunt Library.
- Have your essay reviewed by a professor and your Career Consultant.
- Double check the essay to ensure it is error free..

Obtaining your recommendation letters

- Three recommendation letters are usually required
- To write your recommendations letters, you could ask: professors, past or current internship/work supervisors, advisors, or other people who know you well (not your peers or friends).
- Contact faculty members well before they begin their busy fall semesters; summer is an ideal time to reach out to them.
- An effective method to ask a person to write you a recommendation is: "Would you feel comfortable writing me a positive recommendation?"
- Make sure each person writing you a recommendation knows what type of programs to which you are applying and even the kinds of things you would like them to emphasize about you. Send them a copy of your resume and any supporting materials from your application.
- Send your recommenders polite reminders about application deadlines and ensure that your materials were submitted.
- Decide if you want to manage your letters of recommendation, if you want to utilize the Career and Professional Development Center's credential file service, Interfolio, or if each referral will handle recommendations directly.
- Note that some programs will accept general recommendation letters, but some will have detailed forms requiring your recommenders to evaluate you on several specified attributes.

Scholarships, fellowships, grants and financial assistance

- Apply for fellowships, scholarships and financial aid programs early and pursue both individual school and national programs.
- Discuss opportunities for graduate, research and teaching assistantships with faculty members and admissions officers. These often come with stipends and tuition wavers to help you finance your education. Completing internships during your study can assist with finances as well.
- Visit our [Fellowships and Scholarships Office](#) or review online resources such as [Peterson's](#)