



APPLYING TO
GRADUATE
SCHOOL





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INTRODUCTION

If you plan to attend graduate school, you must take action early. Deadlines for admission and financial aid at many graduate institutions and for most national fellowships occur during the **fall semester** of the previous year. The following general information is to help you understand the process of applying to graduate school.

RESEARCHING & SELECTING A GRADUATE PROGRAM

CAREER SERVICES

APU Career Services is a great place to start collecting information on potential graduate programs. We have a variety of resources to assist you in your search (i.e. Peterson's Guides, area specific catalogs.) You can also come in and make an appointment to speak directly with our staff regarding your graduate school search.

OTHER RESOURCES

Peterson's Guides	www.petersons.com
Graduate School Listings	www.gradschools.com www.graduateguide.com
The Princeton Review Specialty Guides	www.princetonreview.com available in bookstores or Career Services

ACCREDITED VS. NON ACCREDITED SCHOOLS

When researching graduate schools, make sure that you learn whether or not the school is accredited in the subject area that you wish to pursue. Some areas of study (i.e. psychology, medical school, architecture) necessitate going to a school that has been nationally accredited.

THE APPLICATION PACKAGE

- ✓ THE APPLICATION FORM
- ✓ THE PERSONAL STATEMENT/CORE ESSAY
- ✓ FINANCIAL AID APPLICATION
- ✓ APPLICATION FEES
- ✓ TRANSCRIPTS
- ✓ LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION
- ✓ STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES
- ✓ PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

OVERVIEW

Applying to graduate school is similar to applying to undergraduate school. The main difference between the two application processes is the emphasis on recommendations and the academic focus on the part of the applicant. Additionally, entrance test scores, the type of graduate program taken and the grade-point average acquired during your undergraduate studies are also important.

THE APPLICATION FORM

Follow the instructions carefully and be sure to make a copy of the application for your own records. Use black ink, and have one or two people check for errors before you send the application in the mail. If the application is online, make sure to continuously check and save your application. When writing a personal statement online, write it in another program on your computer and save the file so you can cut and paste it into the application later.

PERSONAL STATEMENT OR CORE ESSAY

The personal statement or essay that is required with the application serves as a basic academic biography: it illustrates academic growth, describe personal objectives, and focuses on your highest academic objective (i.e. attaining a PhD). Not only should it address the questions asked in the application, it should express your enthusiasm and motivation about the program. It is also one of the main ways the university measures your communication skills, so check your grammar and spelling! The application usually states the required length, so make sure to keep your essay within those boundaries.

FINANCIAL AID APPLICATION

This application generally comes as a part of the application packet. In some instances, you may need to request the application from the institution's financial aid office.

APPLICATION FEES

Be sure to enclose the application fee with the application. Most fees range from \$25 - \$150. Write a check for the necessary amount and enclose it with your application. Some schools may have an application fee waiver for students with financial need.



TRANSCRIPTS

Either have your registrar's office send an official transcript directly to the admissions office of the schools to which you are applying or pick them up and address them yourself. Most graduate committees consider your cumulative GPA, your GPA of the last two years, your GPA in the last two years of your study, and your GPA in courses relevant to the field.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

These are an important component of your application to graduate school. Most universities require three letters; two should be from faculty in your undergraduate field of study. You may also ask employers from jobs or internships previously held. Make an appointment with the person from whom you wish to receive a recommendation. Never leave a note requesting a recommendation without first scheduling a meeting with that person. Remember to send a thank you note; your recommenders will appreciate it.

RECOMMENDATION GUIDELINES

Have your recommender emphasize what he/she knows about your:

- Character
- Academic performance
- Professional experience
- Volunteer activities
- Administrative skills
- Your exposure to your field of interest

If you need more than a general recommendation, provide the following additional information to the recommender:

- ✓ The name, title and contact information of the person to whom you are writing the letter.
- ✓ Specific skills and qualifications you have that you would like the recommender to highlight.
- ✓ Self-addressed stamped envelope.
- ✓ Deadline date.

STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES

Always check to make sure you are aware of which tests are required by the graduate program that you are applying to. The most common tests are the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), the Miller Analogies Test



(MAT), the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST) and the Law School Admission Test (LSAT).

PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

Some graduate schools include a personal interview as part of the admissions process. If your potential school requests an interview, treat it as you would a job interview: dress appropriately, be prepared to answer questions about the school and the program to which you are applying, highlight your past academic experience and your future goals, and sell yourself!

GRE INFORMATION

Most schools require the GRE. It is recommended that all students take the GRE even if graduate school is not in the immediate future. Your GRE scores are good for five years.

GRE TESTS: GENERAL & SUBJECT

There are two types of GRE tests: the *Subject* test and the *General* test.

The *Subject Test* measures mastery and comprehension basic to graduate study in these major fields:

- Biochemistry
- Cell & Molecular Biology
- Physics
- Math
- Literature in English
- Computer Science
- Psychology
- Chemistry

The *General Test* focuses on scholastic ability at the graduate level.

For more information, visit www.gre.org

You need only take the General test unless otherwise required by a graduate school to which you are applying.

LINKS FOR OTHER TESTS:

- GMAT www.gmat.com
- LSAT www.lsat.org
- MCAT www.aamc.org/students
- MAT www.milleranalogies.com
- TOEFL www.toefl.org
- CBEST* www.cbest.nesinc.com

**California only*

FINANCIAL INFORMATION & AID

- **FAFSA:** You may want to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The simplest way to fill it out is online at www.fafsa.ed.gov.
- **Fellowships:** These range in amounts from one hundred to several thousand dollars and are given to enable a student to study without performing any work or services beyond excellence in his/her study.
- **Assistantships:** This form of assistance requires the student to work on-campus in return for compensation. Frequently these assistantships are available in areas like residence halls, classroom teaching, or participating in a research project.
- **Grants-in-Aid:** Grants are generally awarded on the basis of financial need and do not require work.
- **Loans:** Limited funds available for supporting graduate students. Contact the financial aid advisors at each school for specific information

IF YOU DON'T GET IN:

- 1) Get a job in your targeted field.
- 2) Volunteer or intern in your targeted field.
- 3) Apply to more schools.
- 4) Apply earlier next time.
- 5) Try, try, again!

OTHER RESOURCES

ORGANIZATIONS

National Association of Graduate Professional Students

<http://www.nagps.org>

The Council of Graduate Schools

<http://www.cgsnet.org>

The PEW Society

See Communiversit

IN-PRINT

Asher, Donald. (2000). Graduate Admissions Essays: Write Your Way into the Graduate School of Your Choice (Graduate Admissions Essays) Ten Speed Press.

Stelzer, Richard J. (1997). How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School. Petersons Guides.

Peters, Robert. (1997). Getting What You Came For: The Smart Student's Guide to Earning an M.A. or a Ph.D. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL: SUGGESTED TIMELINE

JUNIOR YEAR

- Make an appointment with a career counselor.
- Explore educational options which would prepare you for your career goal.
- Determine which schools offer your desired degree.
- Narrow down your list of schools to 3-5 potential schools.

SUMMER BETWEEN JUNIOR AND SENIOR YEAR

- Research faculty areas of interest.
- Contact the graduate school office, the academic department, and the financial aid office to request applications and literature from each school.
- Review school materials to learn all you can about available programs.
- Study or take a prep course for admission tests.
- Begin writing application essays.
- Make a list of prospective school deadlines for admission, housing, and financial aid.
- Visit the campus. See how well you like the surroundings, services, geographic area.

FALL OF SENIOR YEAR

- Request letters of recommendation from professors, supervisors, or whomever you have chosen.
- Get your application essay critiqued.
- Take standardized admission tests and order scores sent to your chosen schools.
- Send completed applications.
- Complete financial aid forms and forms for Graduate and Professional School Financial Aid Service (GAPSFAS), if required.

SPRING OF SENIOR YEAR

- File the FAFSA at www.fafsa.ed.gov.
- Check to make sure the schools you are applying to have all of your information and that your file is complete.
- Notify the schools where you decide to decline admission.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: How many schools should I apply to? There is no right or wrong number of schools that you should apply to. Generally, after you fully research different programs you should be able to narrow down your list of potential schools to about three to five schools.

Q: Should I take a break before pursuing advanced study? Possibly. If you are at all doubtful about your commitment to two to four more years of study, do not apply now. You will gain more respect if you are honest with yourself and use your break to further your reading, work in the field, or travel. You will know how serious you are about the academic world if you have experienced other modes of life. Be sure to keep in touch with faculty so they can write a letter of recommendation for you when you decide to apply. It is a good idea to take the GRE or other required entrance exams now while your studies are fresh in your mind. Your scores are good for five years.

Q: Does my intended graduate field of study have to match my undergraduate field of study? Not necessarily. Remember to check the admissions requirements for the program that you are interested in. Some graduate programs require you to have taken a certain number of classes in that area of study to be accepted in the program, while other programs require you to have an undergraduate degree in the same field of study. Some programs do not require a degree or classes in the same field of study, but may require you to take additional graduate courses to complete your graduate degree.

Q: I am a junior transfer student and do not know the faculty well enough to request letters..? Consider taking an independent study so that your professor can get to know your work style. Be active about developing relationships with faculty. Take the time to get to know them and let them know you. Your faculty can be your best friend when applying to graduate school.

Q: Should I apply for a Masters or a Doctoral Program and what is the difference? If you want to teach at the college level or do research, apply directly to a Doctoral program. For secondary school or community college teaching careers, a Master's degree is usually sufficient. It is also advisable to apply directly to a Doctoral program if your goal is to eventually obtain a Doctoral degree. If you are considering a Doctoral degree in the future check out school transfer policies to see if your master degree units would count for credit in the potential Doctorate program.

Q: How do I know if I am ready for graduate school? Check your finances to see if you need to apply for a student loan to cover the cost of graduate school and make sure you have met the academic requirements to get into the school you are applying to. Additionally, you should be prepared to invest about 2-4 years of your time in school.

