

APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

Advanced, focused, scholarly and specialized knowledge are usually the terms that differentiate a graduate degree program from an undergraduate one. Therefore, graduate or professional education is an appropriate choice if you want to explore a field of knowledge in greater depth than undergraduate education allows or if you need a specific kind of professional education to move toward your career goal.

However, if your career goals are not crystallized, it may make more sense to explore your interests through an internship or job before committing your time and money to a graduate program. Work experience may help you discover rewards and challenges in new places and unearth attractive non-academic paths in your field of interest; it will also help you learn about yourself - your preferences, values, and abilities. In addition, having a clear career goal and some related experience makes you a more attractive candidate for admission to most graduate programs. Keep in mind that it is not at all unusual to go on to graduate school several years after completing an undergraduate degree.

Gathering Information on Graduate Programs

- Begin by consulting with faculty in your discipline for recommendations on where to apply. Faculty can be a valuable resource for information on graduate programs based on their own experience and contacts as well as the experiences of previous students.
- Graduate and professional school directories are available in the Career Library. Detailed information about almost all graduate/professional schools can be found on-line.
- Your criteria for selecting potential graduate programs may include the research interests of the faculty; the philosophy or training model of a department; program size; work, teaching, and research opportunities; requirements for graduation; financial aid packages; career services; and location. Visit schools whenever possible.

Applying to Schools

After selecting several schools of interest, look at their application forms, information about specific department offerings, financial aid, and housing.

The following are generally part of an application package:

Bachelor's Degree - An undergraduate degree is almost always required. An academic major relevant to your future course of study may be required for graduate school; however, some programs, for example many MBA programs, prefer prospective students to have taken an undergraduate major other than business. Many professional schools seek a diverse student body and are more flexible about undergraduate curricula and work experience.

College GPA - Schools generally seek a minimum GPA of 3.0. Most schools pay special attention to academic performance during junior and senior years, and to grades in your major or proposed field of graduate study.

Letters of Recommendation - These are a critical part of your application as they are one of the tools an admissions committee uses to evaluate your potential as a student and a future professional. Letters can be used to reinforce and highlight assets you could bring to a program. An application typically requires three or four letters, with at least two from faculty in your major area of study. Make sure that the people you choose are comfortable writing a reference for you and that they have all the necessary information on your goals, skills, and experiences to write an effective letter. Allow several weeks (or longer if you can) for letters to be completed.

Clark has a partnership with Interfolio, an online letter of reference file service. Interfolio is an easy way to store and send application materials to graduate and professional schools. For more information on how this service works, please go to: <http://www.clarku.edu/offices/career/graduate/interfolio.htm>

Personal Statement - In addition to letters of recommendation, you will be required to write at least one essay to support your application. This statement is an important opportunity to showcase your character, accomplishments and future plans and to illustrate your interest in a particular institution and program. What can you contribute to the program with respect to skills, research interests (particularly important if they parallel those of faculty), and related experiences? Demonstrate your creativity, self-motivation, initiative and discipline through your academic and work-related experiences. Be clear and concise. Remember that this is also a writing sample.

Admission Tests - The GRE (for many graduate programs), the GMAT (for management programs), the LSAT (for law schools), and the MCAT (for medical school) are the typical admission tests. Research your programs to find out what exam is required and the minimum scores necessary for consideration. Registration forms for the GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT and other tests are available in Career Services. The general GRE is administered by computer; advanced subject tests are still given in paper format.

Websites: www.gre.org - information on paper and computer-based GRE testing
www.princetonreview.com - practice for the GREs

Financing Graduate School

Options for financing graduate study can include scholarships, fellowships, grants, work-study, assistantships, tuition waivers, and loans. Begin research early. Some school financial aid deadlines are earlier than the deadline for admissions. In most cases you will need to complete the FAFSA form (available in the Financial Aid Office) and a form provided by the particular graduate program. The Academic Advising Office has information about scholarships and fellowships.

Website: www.finaid.org - general information on financial aid

What Assistance Can Career Services Provide?

- *Individual advising appointments*
- *Workshops* on the graduate/professional school application process
- *Admissions Test Study Guides* - to help you prepare to take one of the standardized tests.
- *Personal statement* critique service.
- *Books* on financing graduate school and writing personal statements.

Web Sites to Help You Gather Information

Gradschools.com

<http://www.gradschools.com>

A directory format with listings categorized by subject. Also offers Sources for Information on Diversity Programs including scholarship/fellowship resources.

Petersons.com

<http://www.petersons.com>

A comprehensive listing of accredited graduate programs plus other resources to assist with the application process.

Council of Graduate Schools

<http://www.cgsnet.org>

This site offers information on applying to graduate schools, financial aid, scholarship and fellowship resources.

Applying to PhD Programs

<http://www.clarku.edu/offices/career/forgrads/phd.cfm>

This section of the Career Services website includes detailed information on researching graduate programs and securing funding.

A Suggested Timetable

Junior Year, Fall and Spring

- Research programs and institutions.
- Register, prepare for and take appropriate graduate admissions tests.

Students interested in applying for a Fulbright, Rhodes, or other scholarship should contact Academic Advising during their junior year.

Juniors interested in law school should contact Professor Mark Miller in the Government Department or the Director of Career Services, both of whom serve as prelaw advisers.

Students interested in medical, dental or veterinary school should contact the biology department and speak to the Chair of the Pre-Medical/Pre-Dental Advisory Committee.

Junior Year, Summer

- Visit institutions of interest if possible.
- Draft your application essay.
- Check on application deadlines and rolling admissions policies.
- Register, prepare for and take appropriate graduate admissions tests.

For medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry or law school, you may need to register for the national application service that most programs use.

Senior Year, Fall

- Obtain letters of recommendation.
- Take graduate admissions tests if you haven't already.
- Submit completed applications well before the application deadline.
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Senior Year, Spring

- Check with all institutions before the deadline to make sure your file is complete.
- Visit institutions that accept you.
- Send a deposit to the institution of your choice.
- Notify other colleges and universities that accepted you of your decision so that they may admit students on their waiting list.

Adapted from Peterson's Guide to Applying to Graduate and Professional Schools

updated 9/2010