APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

Taking the next step!

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Planning ahead is key in the graduate school application process. Begin the summer before your senior year of college or at least a year before you plan to attend graduate school. The timetable below can be used as a guide for the steps you need to take. No generalized chart provides the specifics you will need to meet your personal timeline. As you refine your own timeline, carefully examine each application for deadlines as they may vary significantly. Keep your timeline updated and be sure to follow it.

SUMMER

- Write a draft statement of purpose/personal statement.
- Start browsing through guides to graduate programs, websites, and college catalogs.
- Begin preparing or studying for the required standardized tests – GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT, etc.

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

- Meet with faculty members you know to discuss your personal statement and learn about possible programs.
- Ask for letters of recommendation.
- Begin to develop your personal timeline for the application process.
- Sign up for required standardized tests.

OCTOBER

- Take standardized tests.
- Determine the schools to which you plan to apply and request application materials.
- Finish your timeline based on each institution's application and financial aid deadlines.
- Complete your personal statement, adjusting it to meet each application's specific needs. Have it reviewed by several people who know your work and capabilities.
- Order transcripts from all post-secondary institutions you have attended. If fall term grades are expected, check with the registrar's office to see if a transcript including these grades can be sent in time to meet your deadlines.

NOVEMBER

- Complete application forms. Work using a rough draft until your application form is complete.
- Provide the individuals who are writing your recommendations all the information they will need.

DECEMBER/JANUARY

- Mail applications. Even if deadlines are later, it is good to submit the application early.

FEBRUARY

- Contact departments about the possibility of an on-site visit. It is helpful to visit the campus.

APRIL

- If you are applying for need-based financial aid programs, you may have to file a copy of your federal income tax return.

Deadlines

Apply as early as possible to be sure you get appropriate consideration for scholarships, assistantships, and fellowships. International applicants should remember that sufficient time is required to secure an I-20 or IAP-66, so early application is strongly recommended. Deadlines are program specific and can be determined by accessing the appropriate program's website.

You might consider contacting each graduate program of interest via telephone or e-mail to verify the deadline dates. Keep accurate records of each program's deadline dates. This will allow you to submit the application without errors, get your standardized test scores forwarded to the department, get multiple recommendation letters, obtain original transcripts and send all the application materials on time.

Admission Decisions

A graduate program's admission decisions will vary significantly by institution, degree program, and enrollment targets. The admission committee's decisions are made on an individual basis and based on numerous factors. Here are some of those factors:

- undergraduate GPA
- undergraduate institution and degree program
- standardized test scores
- letters of recommendation
- personal statement
- interview

- portfolio
- work experience

Your GPA is generally considered with in the context of your undergraduate major and undergraduate institution. A 3.0 or better should be your target goal! Applicants can compensate for a lower GPA with a good standardized test score. Your junior and senior GPA and/or the GPA in your major are frequently reviewed in addition to your overall undergraduate GPA. Also, work experience in your field of study may compensate for a low GPA or standardized test score.

Selecting a Program

Research graduate programs carefully to choose the one that will best suit your needs and talents. There are more than 1,800 institutions in the United States that offer graduate degrees and the variety of programs is enormous. Do not make the mistake of blindly choosing the best school you can get into. Finding the right fit is the most important factor. You need to talk with your professors, career counselors, advisors and alumni to help identify the graduate program and university/college that best suits you. Things to consider when choosing a program (in no particular order) include:

- Reputation
- Geography
- Cost/Funding
- Faculty Research Areas
- Interest, Abilities, Values
- Size of Institution/Program
- Library Holdings
- Research Facilities
- Placement Rates
- Visit the School and Community
- Meet with Faculty, Staff and Current Graduate Students

Funding It!!

How to pay for graduate school is a major question for most people. There are three basic ways to finance your graduate education depending upon the type of program in which you are interested:

Fellowships and Scholarships are grants that are generally awarded on the basis of academic merit. They are intended to attract the most highly qualified students and can be offered by a university, department, organization, or agency.

Research, Teaching, or Graduate Assistantships are usually supported by stipends to perform tasks such as conducting research, teaching or working for an office or department on campus. Many institutions also waive or reduce tuition for students with assistantships.

Grants and Loans are an important source of support for graduate students. This aid may come from the institution, a state, the federal government, or sometimes your employer.

Helpful Links

Grad Schools.com: *www.gradschools.com*
Peterson's Guides: *www.petersons.com*
U.S. News & World Report, America's Best Graduate Schools:
http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools
Test Registration - GRE: www.ets.org; GMAT: www.mba.com; LSAT: www.lsac.org; MCAT: www.aamc.org/students
Test Prep - Princeton Review: *www.princetonreview.com*
Funding Grad School - *www.collegeboard.com; www.finaid.org; www.fastweb.com; www.scholarshipcoach.com; www.scholarstuff.com*

Other Items of Note

- Test preparation has been proven to make a difference. Consider Princeton Review or other test prep agencies.
- Consider test preparation books, electronic guides, and courses.
- It is not recommended to take admission tests more than twice.
- Ideally, you should take your test toward the end of summer just prior to beginning your senior year.
- Test results are usually good for FIVE years!
- Applying EARLY can make a difference
- *Rolling Admissions Deadline* means programs have a quota. Program admission continues until the quota is met.
- Seek out the availability of graduate assistantships, fellowships and scholarships from the school and/or program to which you are applying.
- Applying early allows you to avoid the possibility of mistakes, missing materials and late reference writers.