The Graduate School Application Process

Presented by the
Career and Professional
Readiness Center
Is Graduate School Right For You?

- Do you enjoy the field enough to commit to one to seven more years of school?

- What do you expect to happen as a result of going to graduate school? Are you reasonable sure of your career goals?

- Is graduate school necessary for entry into your chosen field?

- Are you ready for more school, or are you “burned out”? Would you have difficulty re-adjusting to school after a “break”?

- Are you trying to postpone entering the “real world of work”? Would work-related experience help you clarify ambiguous career goals?
Is Graduate School Right For You?

- Do you have a strong GPA? Are you a strong candidate?
- What are the direct and indirect costs of graduate school and your financial resources? Might a future employer subsidize your graduate education?
- How much will your job and salary prospects be enhanced by a graduate degree?
# How To Build a “Universe” of Possible Schools

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<th>Steps</th>
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<td><strong>Ask professors</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Review online resources:</strong></td>
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  - Petersons.com  
  - Gradschools.com |
| **Ask students and alumni of prospective programs what it's like** | |
| **Read academic and professional journals in your field (where did the authors go to school)?** | |
| **Talk to recruiters at Graduate School Fairs** | |
| **Talk to career professionals in your field(s) of interest** | |
| **Utilize professional association resources** | |
| **Assess your geographic preferences** | |
| **Review rankings if schools are highly competitive** |  
  - Gourman Report  
  - US News |
Build Your “Universe” of Schools

Identify 20 graduate programs (nationwide)

Divide your list into three categories
- Safe – you are confident you can get in
- Maybe – it’s possible you could get in
- Reach – it may be difficult for you to get in

On average, people apply to 6 – 12 graduate programs. Apply to schools in each of the three categories
Criteria for Evaluating Graduate Programs

- Admission Requirements
- Programs Offered
- Faculty
- Retention
- Class Demographics
- Physical Resources

- Cost
- Geographic Location
- Size
- Licensure/Certification
- Career Assistance
- Campus Culture
Application Enhancers

- Apply at least four weeks in advance of deadline. For rolling admissions, apply early. Allows time to troubleshoot problems.
- Establish a connection with professors in the program. Outreach must be intentional and professionally focused on their work and your related interests.
- Visit the campus. Meet with program representatives. Make a positive in-person impression.
- Ensure that applications are neat and free of error, utilize the sloppy copy approach.
- If listing references, include complete contact information. Always ask before listing.
- Be organized. Know the requirements and the deadlines for each school.
How Do Graduate Schools Decide Whom They Admit?

- Grades
- Standardized Test Scores
- Essay/Personal Statement
- Letters of Recommendation
  - Work Samples
  - Interviews
How Do Graduate Schools Decide Whom They Admit?

1. Grades
   - How to supplement a lower than desirable GPA
     - strong letters of recommendation
     - high graduate admission test scores
     - a well-written statement of purpose
   - Emphasize various aspects of your UGPA
     - the cumulative
     - the major
     - the final 2 years
     - the progression
How Do Graduate Schools Decide Whom They Admit?

2. Standardized Test Scores

- GRE – (arts and science)
  two exams offered; general test and subject test
  www.gre.org

- LSAT – (law)
  http://www.lsac.org/

- GMAT – (business)
  www.mba.com/mba/thegmat

- MCAT – (medicine)
  http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat/
3. The Essay/Personal Statement is your opportunity to:

- Convey long and short-term career goals
- Present desirable personal abilities, background, interests and plans
- Describe your relevant experiences and give evidence of your knowledge, competence and motivation
- Explain your special interest in this particular graduate program
- Account for any conspicuous weaknesses in your record
- Demonstrate your writing ability and communication skills
The Personal Essay
Writing Tips

• Brainstorm

• Give yourself plenty of time

• Answer the question

• Strive for an impactful opening

• Incorporate spirit, character and uniqueness within a formal and correct writing style

• Use graduate level language
The Personal Essay Writing Tips

• Answer the question, “Why Here?”

• Remember to include the things you will be doing between the time you apply and the time graduate school starts

• Don’t dwell on weaknesses; minimal explanation, if at all

• Write with documented confidence

• Finish the essay with a statement of vision – your impact on society

• Proofread your essay; absolutely no grammatical or spelling errors

• Solicit feedback from faculty members
4. Letters of Recommendation

- Most graduate programs will request 3 to 5 letters.

- Choose recommenders based on their ability to evaluate your academic and/or work performance based on personal observation in a strong way. At least one, preferably two, from faculty members in your major field.

- Develop these relationships semesters before you need the letters.

- Schedule and appointment to request the letters from your recommenders early in the fall semester.

- Make them aware of your reasons for going to graduate school and your interest in specific programs. Ask if they would be comfortable making a strong recommendation for you for graduate school. Listen for any reticence.

- Provide them with forms, stamped addressed envelopes and your background information. Identify key points that you would like to emphasize.

- Follow up to ensure that letters have been completed and sent within appropriate timeframe.

- Keep letter writers apprised of your progress and outcomes.
5. **Work samples**  
Be sure to have a professor review your submissions

6. **Interviews (in some cases)**  
Standard questions:
   - Why here?
   - Where else are you applying?
   - What are your academic strengths and weaknesses?
   - What are your post-degree plans?
Financial Aid

Teaching Assistantships
Research Assistantships
Graduate Assistantships
Fellowships and Grants

*Assistantships and grants are highly competitive and have early deadlines!*

Loans
Things to do if you don’t get in:

- Apply to more safe schools
- Go to summer school at a choice school; ask them to re-evaluate
- Take one class at a time as a non-matriculated student to prove you can do the work
- Volunteer or do an internship
- Work and get experience in the field
- Get an intermediate degree