

# Graduate School

An undergraduate education provides a broad knowledge with a specialization in a major area of study whereas a graduate education is an intense focus on an exclusive area of study. In most cases graduate degrees are oriented towards either research or professional preparation. There are many different types of graduate degrees which generally fall into one of two categories: a master's degree usually involves 1-2 years of full-time work to complete and a doctoral degree can take 4-6 years to complete. It is also possible to attend graduate school as a part-time student.

## Should I Apply to Graduate School?

Graduate school is a big investment in time and resources and is not a decision to be taken lightly. The decision to go to graduate school should involve thoughtful reflection and planning. Before beginning the application process, consider your goals in obtaining further education. Some questions to consider include:

- Do I know what specialty area I want to pursue if I attend graduate school? Am I ready to commit to a more intense area of focus on a specific subject? What do I want to accomplish in graduate work?
- Am I considering graduate school because I do not know what else I can do? Am I considering graduate school because I am not ready to pursue employment opportunities?
- Does the career I want to pursue require an advanced degree? If yes, is it necessary that I pursue the advanced degree immediately after completing my undergraduate degree?
- Is it possible that I can get an entry-level position and eventually apply to graduate school? Do employers in my field of interest cover a portion or all of my expenses for graduate school?
- Am I financially prepared to attend graduate school? Are there graduate, teaching or research assistant opportunities to help fund my education in the field I want to pursue?

## Determining the Right Program

Once you decide to attend, the first step is to do research to determine to which schools you want to apply.

- Talk to your advisor and faculty in your field of interest.
- Look at professional journals and publications.
- Check out books and reference materials including the Peterson's Guide: [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com) (can also be found in the UP library and the Career Center).
- Visit program websites and request information if needed.
- Talk to admissions representatives and communicate with program directors and faculty members at the schools you are considering. Clarify questions that you might have about the application process and program.
- Consider talking to students who are enrolled in the program.

## The Application Process

Typically graduate and professional programs have similar application procedures. Most schools require applicants to take a standardized test such as the GRE, GMAT, LSAT, or MCAT before applying. In addition, you will need to submit college transcripts, an application form and fee. Most schools also require a statement of purpose, letters of recommendation, and in some cases, an interview. Deadlines for submitting application materials are often in January and February, but many programs have rolling admissions. Be sure to keep track of deadlines and send all materials in on time. Follow these steps to get started in the application process:

- Make a plan! Schedule yourself for the required test(s), draft your written statements, order transcripts, and talk to faculty members about letters of recommendation
- Take the required standardized tests

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- Complete the graduate school application and a financial aid application
- Draft additional required materials which may include a resume/CV
- Have materials reviewed by the Career Center and professors
- Request letters of recommendation

## **The Written Statement**

The statement of purpose is a graduate or professional school's non-numerical introduction or exposure to the way you think and express yourself. It serves as a reflection of your personality, intellect, and career goals. Admissions committee members are seeking insightful, revealing, and genuine statements that suggest you have successfully gone through a process of reflection and discernment. Be sure to ask your advisor and faculty members to read and critique your statement. The Career Center has resources available on writing personal statements and can provide feedback.

## **Timeline**

To increase the chance of acceptance, individuals are usually encouraged to apply to several different schools. Do not limit yourself to only prestigious or competitive programs; apply to schools where your chances for acceptance are also *very good*. Keep in mind that some schools want candidates to have applied experience and that it is acceptable to wait a year or two before applying. The timeline below is a general guide for steps and tasks typically associated with the application process. The timeline represents the *ideal* timing for the application process. Every applicant's situation is unique. Some candidates may complete these in a year and some may begin the process after taking time off.

### **Graduate School Timeline**

*Adapted with permission from the Career Center at University of California, Berkeley*

#### **Preparation Year**

- Begin researching programs in your field of interest
  - <http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools>
  - <http://www.princetonreview.com/>
- Develop and prioritize a list of programs to which you want to apply
- Collect information about required test(s)
- Determine if you can prepare for the appropriate test(s) on your own or if a prep course is needed
- Talk to faculty members who you are considering asking for letters of recommendation
- Start exploring financial aid resources including scholarships, loans and teaching or research assistantships
- Order an unofficial transcript from the Registrar or online at Pilots UP and check for any discrepancies
- Begin preparation process and take admission test(s) when ready
- Begin writing application essay/statement of purpose
- Request letters of recommendation from faculty
- Have essays reviewed by faculty or Career Center staff member
- Order official transcripts from Registrar
- Write final draft of application essay/statement of purpose
- Complete and mail your applications or submit your online applications

#### **Application Year**

- Complete and submit financial aid applications
- Visit prospective campuses, if possible, and talk to faculty/students to help you make your final decision
- Follow-up with schools to make sure your file is complete
- After receiving acceptance from the school(s) of your choice, send in the required deposit and contact other schools and decline acceptances
- Write thank you notes to people who helped you