



Preparing for Graduate School

Academic Timeline

CAREER SERVICES

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Whether you're in college or a working professional, finding the right graduate program takes planning! Experts suggest that you should start thinking about the admission process earlier than you probably think. To give yourself enough time, you'll want to start at least a year before you go. It's even better to give yourself two years!

Ideally, if you are an undergraduate, you should begin the application process the summer before your senior year. This means that you've done all your school research, visits, and collected all the needed forms beforehand. If you've already graduated from college, you should begin applying a year before you plan to enter school.

Whichever category you fall under, college student or working professional, priority number one is that you stay organized! Here is a suggested timeline for completing the steps required by most schools for admission to graduate study. Keep in mind that you may not be able to adhere to this timetable if your application deadlines are very early, as is the case with medical schools, or if you decide to attend graduate school at the last minute.

CONSIDERING GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

FRESHMAN & SOPHOMORE YEARS

While it is still early in your college career it is never too early to begin planning. Your freshman and sophomore years are an excellent time to explore majors of interest, academic organizations, student clubs and other organizations related to your career goals. As you become acquainted with the college and your course of study, begin talking to returning students in the same major about their choices and options. Also, be sure to talk to your professors and to take advantage of academic opportunities like research projects conducted with faculty members.

Areas on which to concentrate during this time

- **Begin researching academic areas and careers of interest**
 - Refer to the last page of this handout for the names and titles of references found in the Career Resources Library and helpful web pages.

- **Get involved in the classroom, student clubs organizations and professional organizations**
 - This is an excellent way to develop and strengthen leadership skills—a quality that graduate schools like to see.

- **Participate in research opportunities and special projects offered by professors or other professionals**
 - Ask to assist on research projects or ask them to refer you to other professors. If options are not immediately available, ask to be referred to other professionals and organizations engaged in similar activities.

- **Your grades**
 - A low GPA may jeopardize your acceptance into a program.

TWO YEARS BEFORE PROJECTED ENROLLMENT

JUNIOR YEAR

This is the time when you should begin to narrow down your interests and options. Remember most graduate programs require you to choose a specific career path. In graduate school there may be the opportunity to take a few elective classes but most of your coursework is pre-determined by the program you choose. Therefore, you want to be sure you pick the program that will help you reach your career goals.

- **Define your goals**
 - What do you want to be when you grow up? What is the name of the specific occupation you want to pursue? How will graduate school help you? What are you looking for in a program and in faculty?
 - Schedule informational interviews with people working in occupations of interest.
- **Increase knowledge in your chosen field**
 - Strengthen your resume by partnering with faculty or professionals with similar interests on research projects.
 - Assist with their research, attend their lectures and read recommended resources.
- **Research areas of interest, institutions and programs**
 - Browse graduate/professional school web pages or Career Services' web site. Visit the Career Resource Library to use our reference books.
 - Refer to professional organizations that guide your profession for additional information on graduate school programs.
 - Check with individual states regarding licensure, certification and practice requirements.
- **Attend information sessions/open houses/graduate school fairs and begin to visit campuses**
 - Come prepared with a list of questions and make sure you leave with all of them answered.
 - Talk to current students to get their perspective on the program, the faculty and the workload.
- **Identify the admissions exam(s) that you need to take**
 - Contact the graduate school for accurate information and due dates.
- **Register and take the required entrance exam**
 - Register ahead of time to secure your seat.
 - Bring your confirmation number with you and any other necessary items the day of the exam.
- **Begin researching financial aid options**
 - Check with individual schools to see what kinds of options are available to students.
 - Research scholarships and fellowships as well as graduate assistantships.
- **Identify references**
 - These individuals will write letters of recommendation on your behalf. Check with individual schools for specific guidelines regarding references.
- **Talk to advisors about application requirements**
- **Request an unofficial copy of your transcript and check for errors**

TWELVE MONTHS BEFORE PROJECTED ATTENDANCE

SENIOR YEAR (FALL)

Time management is key during these last 12 months. Areas on which to concentrate on during this time period are listed below.

- **Take required admissions exam**
 - Make sure to study and to prepare for the exam.
 - Make sure that test scores are sent to your schools of choice.
- **Begin writing and finalizing personal statements**
 - Answer the entire question.
 - Capture the attention of the reader from your opening sentence without going overboard.
 - Have multiple people read your statement for clarity and comprehension.
 - Expect to create multiple drafts of your personal statement. Remember, you want your personal statement to be perfect.
- **Request letters of recommendation**
 - Ensure that you give your references enough notice and thorough instructions explaining what you need to submit as part of your application.
 - Provide references with a copy of your resume and your personal statement—this allows them to personalize their references.
- **Continue working on Applications**
 - Double check due dates to ensure all application components are submitted on time.
- **Complete and mail applications**
 - Double and triple check to make sure your application is complete.
 - Ensure that you have included all necessary components, the application fee and the correct amount of postage.
 - Make a copy of each completed application for your own records.
- **Apply for financial aid**
 - Research all possibilities for financial aid.
 - Double check scholarship, fellowship and assistantship opportunities.
 - Check with your local religious organizations, community service groups, fraternity and/or sorority to see what types of scholarships are offered.
 - If you are interested in graduate or teaching assistantships—move fast. Competition is tough and many people will be applying for the same opportunities.
- **Visit campuses and meet faculty**
 - Visit your top campuses.
 - Meet the faculty members under whom you will be studying.
 - Do not leave until all of your questions are answered.

NINE MONTHS BEFORE PROJECTED ATTENDANCE

SENIOR YEAR (SPRING)

Below is a list of tasks that should be completed during the spring semester of your senior year or nine months before you plan to enroll in graduate study.

- **Complete and submit the FAFSA**
- **Follow-up with schools to make sure your application is complete**
- **Continue visiting campuses**
- **Attend interviews**
 - Prepare for your interview by reviewing Career Services' online tutorial "Acing that Graduate School Interview" or schedule a mock interview with a career counselor.
- **Compare offers**
 - Carefully evaluate all invitations to attend graduate school.
 - Compare and consider: tuition and fees, financial assistance, geographic location, faculty, program, success rates of students who have previously completed the program, etc.
- **Send thank you notes to those who assisted you**
- **Decide on a program and notify the school of your acceptance**
 - Follow the instructions included in your notification package to formally notify that institution of your acceptance. Be sure to include the required deposit.
- **Decline offers from other schools**
- **Consider alternatives**
 - If necessary, you may need to look into taking out a loan to cover tuition and fees.
 - If you were not accepted into the program of your choice, contact the school to see what you can do to improve your application. Determine if now is the best time for you to attend graduate school. This is a good time to self-reflect and to adjust your goals as necessary.

BOOK RESOURCES

- *Peterson's Graduate Schools in the U.S., 2007*
- *The Graduate Student's Complete Scholarship Book*
- *Paying for Graduate School Without Going Broke*
- *Graduate Admissions Essays: Write Your Way Into the Graduate School of Your Choice*

These books are located in the Career Resources Library

INTERNET RESOURCES

- www.mcdaniel.edu/5730.htm
- www.gre.com
- www.gradschools.com
- www.kaplan.com
- www.graduateguide.com
- www.gradschoolforum.com/
- www.rpi.edu/dept/llc/writecenter/web/gradapp.html
- www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/tasks/graduate.shtml
- www.lsac.org/
- www.4icu.org/
- http://depts.washington.edu/hssexec/hss_gradproglis.html
- www.careercenter.umd.edu/crws/gradschl.asp
- www2.edweek.org/agentk-12/states/
- www.gradprofiles.com/