

# Graduate School

## Why Go To Grad School?

Did you know that, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, a person with a master's degree can earn around \$13,000 per year or \$500,000 more over a lifetime than a person with a bachelor's degree, and earnings increase by about \$1,000,000 for each additional degree?

In a competitive employment environment, standing out from the crowd and making sure your resume rises to the top of the applicant pile is the first key to success. There are many reasons why an individual may decide to get a graduate degree; whether it is for the rewards that an advanced degree can provide such as a new challenge, career advancement or personal development, or one may consider the advantages of more job options and a higher salary. Whatever your reason may be, graduate school is a viable option to gain an edge in the market.

## Evaluating Your Goals, Plans, and Steps

Planning for graduate school requires an examination of skills, interests, and finances as well as personal motives. You must realistically assess what you want out of graduate school and what program will help you to successfully accomplish your goals. Before getting started you might find it helpful to consider the following questions:

- What are your life and career goals?
- What skills do you possess?
- Is graduate school necessary for you to accomplish your goals?
- How will graduate or professional school affect your future?
- Are you personally ready to tackle graduate school?
- Do you have the necessary ability and interest to be successful in graduate school?
- Why are you planning to attend graduate school?
- Have you investigated what career options are available to you at every educational level?
- Is there a market for these graduate level skills?
- Are you willing to invest time, effort, and expense to undertake a program that requires continued concentration in an academic setting?

Examining your life and career goals can help you to determine whether or not graduate school is right for you. These questions are designed to help you decide whether or not you need more education to pursue your goals, what type of advanced degree would best serve you in pursuit of your goals, and if another occupation may enhance your long-range career development.

## Choosing the Time – Right After College, or Wait a Year?

The years after college represent a unique opportunity to test your career interests and gain some traction in the workplace. For some, it may be more helpful to work for some time before pursuing a graduate degree. Consider the positive and negative aspects of studying now versus waiting:

- What are the advantages of waiting two to five years before pursuing graduate study in your field?
- What are the disadvantages of waiting two to five years before pursuing graduate study in your field?

## Choosing a School

Judging the quality of an academic department is not easy. A good starting point is to begin by finding ratings of the top programs in your field. Ranking lists tend to use criteria such as: attainments of faculty, quality of instruction, work and success of students, and administrative policy toward teaching and research. It is necessary to determine what is important to you and then attempt to gather your own information on the quality of the program. A few other suggestions you may want to consider when choosing a school is to:

- Develop a comprehensive list of schools and begin trimming it. Your faculty advisor can be especially helpful in indentifying programs that will be good matches for your interests and abilities.
- Visit each school's website and use your criteria in addition to others' suggestions.
- Consider making site visits to your first two or three choices. Be sure to talk with students in the program.

## Your Application and Interview

Graduate school applications are more complicated than undergraduate ones and usually consist of seven parts: application, personal statement(s), transcripts of all past academic work, letters of recommendation, national examination scores, financial aid forms, and the application fee.

**Applications and Personal Statements:** Imagine you only have five minutes to summarize how graduate school complements your career goals. The personal statement is the most important component of your application, and should not be a cookie-cutter cut and paste job that you submit to every graduate school. The personal statement is your moment to succinctly clarify who you are and what you want to do with your life. A few helpful suggestions to consider while writing your personal statement or essay are to:

- Pre-type a draft to help you compose answers
- Tailor your statement closely to the program for which you are applying
- Make sure your writing is clear and focused
- Keep it professional (use black type and appropriate font styles)
- Ask someone to proofread your application
- Review your draft application carefully before completing the final copy
- Save a copy of your application and statement for future reference

**Transcripts:** You must have official transcripts from each college or university you have attended forwarded to the admissions office at the graduate school(s) for which you are applying. It is YOUR responsibility to make sure the transcripts have been sent to each graduate school.

**Letters of Recommendation:** Most graduate programs will request two to five letters of recommendation. Many programs only accept letters of recommendation electronically after you designate the recommender in the online application. These references are *critical* to your application so choose wisely. Consider past professors, internship supervisors, or employers who can attest to your character and skills and how your experiences connect with graduate school study. In order to assist those you are asking, provide each person with:

- Information about you and why you want to attend graduate school
- Information about the graduate school to which they are writing
- A resume and transcript are recommended, or a summary of past relevant course work and experience

**Test Scores:** Most graduate programs require the results of graduate school admissions tests. The most common are:

- **Graduate Record Examination (GRE):** used by most academic graduate programs and some professional programs. Be sure to check the requirements of each school to which you are applying. [www.ets.org/gre](http://www.ets.org/gre)
- **Law School Admissions Test (LSAT):** is the only test used for application to law schools. [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org)
- **Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT):** used by most business/management schools. [www.gmac.com](http://www.gmac.com)

- **Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL):** used to test English language ability of persons whose native tongue is not English. This test does not replace any of the others. [www.ets.org/toefl](http://www.ets.org/toefl)
- **Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT):** [www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat](http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat)
- **Dental Admission Test (DAT):** [www.ada.org/en/education-careers/dental-admission-test/](http://www.ada.org/en/education-careers/dental-admission-test/)
- **Pharmacy College Admissions Test (PCAT):** <http://pcatweb.info/>
- **Optometry Admissions Test (OAT):** [www.ada.org/en/oat](http://www.ada.org/en/oat)

**Financial Aid:** Graduate school requires a significant financial investment which you must carefully consider before submitting an application. If graduate school expenses are of concern to you there are financial aid resources available to graduate students, including:

- **Assistantships/fellowships:** Assistantships provide students with training and experience. Compensation may include a stipend and/or tuition reimbursement. A fellowship is an arrangement in which financial support is given without any obligation on the part of the student. Many academic departments will grant assistantships and fellowships as early as March, so learn the specifics for your program early.
- **Student Loans:** When considering a loan, carefully investigate loan terms. You must fill out the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** to apply for federal aid (<https://fafsa.ed.gov/>).
- **Grants or scholarships from the institution:** Schools may have merit-based and/or need based scholarships and grants. Check with the Financial Aid Office at your school for eligibility criteria as well as any required forms.

**Application Fees:** Your application is *not* complete until you have paid the application fee; many schools will not act on your application until they receive your fee. If you cannot afford the fees, find out if the school(s) has a “fee waiver” policy. Some schools will waive the fee if you can establish that you (and/or your family) do not have sufficient economic resources.

**Graduate School Interview:** Some institutions require an interview as part of the application process. Prepare for a graduate school interview as you would for an employment interview. To help you prepare, here are a few questions you may encounter during your interview:

- Why did you major in \_\_\_\_\_?
- Why did you choose to attend \_\_\_\_\_ College/University?
- When did you choose to enter this occupational field and why?
- How did you make the decision to apply to our program?
- What other programs are you considering?
- How has your undergraduate background prepared you for our program?
- What courses have you enjoyed the most?
- What courses have been the most difficult for you?
- What satisfaction have you gained from your studies?
- Do you feel your academic record accurately reflects your abilities and potential?
- Why would you be an asset to our department or program?
- What skills and experiences do you feel have prepared you for admission to this program?
- Why should we consider you for our program instead of several other equally qualified candidates?
- How many programs have you applied to besides our institution/program?
- What will you do if you are not accepted into our program?

## Making a Decision

It is required that once you begin graduate and/or professional school, you choose an advisor with whom you will work very closely. A strong advisor can facilitate your progress. Many programs permit you to choose your advisor. It may be helpful to conduct some background research on the faculty at potential places of study:

- Check the publications records of the faculty. Are they doing research/writing in areas of interest to you? Are they involved in organizations or activities that give you a common background or interest?
- Talk with faculty at Hamline to see what they know about people at each of your schools.
- Talk with alumni or current students at the schools to find out what the faculty are teaching and publishing.

If you need help exploring and applying to graduate schools or practicing for the interview, make an appointment at the Career Development Center to talk with one of our career counselors who would be more than happy to assist you.

## Resources

Program Information	Financial Aid
Graduate School Directory: <a href="http://www.gradschools.com">www.gradschools.com</a> Peterson's Education Center: <a href="http://www.petersons.com">www.petersons.com</a> Princeton Review: <a href="http://www.review.com">www.review.com</a> US News & World Report: <a href="http://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools">www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools</a>	<a href="http://www.studentaid.ed.gov">www.studentaid.ed.gov</a> <a href="http://www.scholarships.com">www.scholarships.com</a> <a href="https://fafsa.ed.gov/">https://fafsa.ed.gov/</a>

## Application Timelines

<b>Junior Year: Spring-Summer</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talk to faculty, advisors, counselors, and others to discuss graduate programs</li><li>• Read graduate program materials and review graduate program websites</li><li>• Determine admission and test requirements, application deadlines, test dates, etc.</li><li>• Study for graduate admissions test(s)</li></ul>
<b>Senior Year: September-October</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take graduate admission test(s)</li><li>• Write draft of personal statement/statement of purpose</li><li>• Request letters of recommendation</li><li>• Research financial aid options</li></ul>
<b>Senior Year: November-December</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Order official transcripts from Student Administrative Services</li><li>• Finalize statement of purpose according to the graduate program's requirements</li><li>• Complete applications. It is good to finish applications early so that you will have time to attend to any missing information</li><li>• Contact programs to make sure your application is complete</li></ul>
<b>Senior Year: January-February</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complete financial aid forms</li><li>• Contact schools about possibility of visiting (this may increase your chances of admission)</li><li>• Prepare for interviews. If applicable, interviews most likely occur in January, February or March</li></ul>
<b>Senior Year: March-April</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discuss acceptance and rejections with faculty advisors and career counselors to weigh your options</li><li>• Notify your school of choice of your acceptance and politely turn down other offers</li><li>• Send thank you notes to those that assisted in the process and update them of your acceptance!</li></ul>