



## Career Center

### Guide to Graduate School

#### Benefits of a Graduate Degree

##### A Graduate Degree....

- Can influence how fast and how far you advance in your career
- Can give you greater flexibility to change careers; in many fields (especially technology, teaching and business) the bachelor's degree has become an entry-level degree
- Can increase job satisfaction, in terms of the amount of responsibility you assume, the autonomy you have, and the content of the work you do
- Can result in increased salary

#### Deciding to Go to Graduate School

Engage in self-reflection and examine your reasons for pursuing an advanced degree.

##### Positive reasons for going to graduate school:

- You have a definite academic goal and/or career ambition
- You have researched the job market in your field and have weighed the costs of the degree against the benefits
- You are truly dedicated to learning and prepared for several years of intensive study

##### Negative reasons for going to graduate school:

- You are going because you don't know what else to do
- You are going as a way of putting off entering the world of work
- You are going because you feel pressured by others (e.g., family, academic advisor)

##### Advantages to working first:

- Recharge your batteries
- Allow you to gain content-specific experience
- Help you to gain confidence
- Spur motivation
- Offer you the chance to investigate a field that interests you

#### Considerations for Selecting a Program

Consider the following questions in deciding between a master's and a PhD.

- To what level professionally do you aspire?

- How do you feel about research?
- Are you interested in pursuing a career in academia?
- How does financial aid compare between the two degrees?
- Within a single department, are Master's students able to apply to the PhD program?
- Is it easier to get into the PhD programs if you are already a master's student in the program or to apply from the outside?

## Gather Information on Programs

Selecting a program is an important step that should be done carefully and with considerable thought. Your choice of program may impact your career path greatly, so it is best to look at all of the factors before selecting the best school. You will want to have enough details to make an informed decision about what program to attend before investing your time and money. Be sure to look nationwide; do not limit yourself geographically. Consider the following sources:

**Professors** Ask for suggestions from your undergraduate professors about what programs you should explore. They may know colleagues at some of the institutions you are considering.

**Published Guides** We highly recommend Peterson's Guides to Graduate School. Contact the schools that interest you to request more information-<http://www.petersons.com/>

**Graduate Students in Your Field** Ask your professors for the names of undergraduate alumni who have attended graduate schools in your field. Contact those alumni for their advice on programs. When you visit schools, ask to speak to currently enrolled students.

**Professional Journals** Note which faculty members are publishing in professional journals or textbooks in your area of specialization and the programs with which they are affiliated.

**Published Ratings** Periodicals such as *U.S. News and World Report* publish periodic ratings of colleges and universities. It is a good idea to consult several ratings for comparison. Also, be aware that these can be prejudiced toward research-oriented institutions.

**Parents & Friends** If your parents are paying for part or all of your tuition, they will probably want some input. Don't forget those closest to you when looking for suggestions.

## Research and Compare Schools

Aside from the basics such as geographic location and admission requirements, you may want to consider the following criteria when selecting the graduate school program that is best for you:

**Academic Reputation** Investigate the reputation of the institution as a whole. Remember that the reputation of the specific department and individual faculty members of the graduate program hold more weight than the reputation of the overall institution. Make certain you are applying to a program that has been accredited.

**Academic Approach** Does the department take a specialized or more generalized approach for their academic discipline? Which suits your needs better?

**Teaching Methods** Depending on your field, practical work experience in addition to classroom learning may be important. Is there an emphasis on research or on practical application?

**Facilities** Investigate the library resources available. What kind of accessibility will you have to original research? Check that the computer centers and labs are adequate for your research.

**Time Commitment/Attrition** How long does it take to complete the program and how many students drop out before completing? Be sure to ask students in the program for the realistic answer to this question.

**Size of Department** Can you get the attention you want from faculty members? How many faculty members are devoted to the department? Are they part-time or full-time? How many are tenured?

**Size of the Institution** Would you feel comfortable there?

**Student Mix** Consider the age, gender, and ethnicity of the student body. Would you be comfortable with there?

**Cost & Financial Aid/Scholarships** Assistantships or internships may be available which offer tuition in exchange for working or teaching on the campus. Do not rule out any program because of cost; if the program wants you, there may be additional funding of which you are unaware.

**Post graduation plans** Where have graduates obtained employment after graduation? Often, current students or faculty can tell you this.

**Housing/Living Expenses** Consider the cost of living in the area when weighing the total expenses: include housing, transportation and groceries. Investigate on-campus and off-campus possibilities.

Once you've considered all criteria, you can now rank your list schools. As criteria, use your personal interests and the relative likelihood of admission. Use three categories to rank: **reach schools**, "I don't think I have a good chance for admission but I am interested;" **possible schools**, "I have a fairly good chance for admission;" and **safety schools**, "I will definitely be accepted." You should apply to at least two schools from each category.

## What Do Graduate Programs Look For In A Candidate?

### Three (3) general criteria

- *Intellectual ability*: assessed by GPA, reputation of undergraduate school, difficulty of courses taken, and overall performance in courses related to the field you want to study.
- *Work/field-related skills*: work experience (whether you have managed resources, people, projects, or portfolios).
- *Personal characteristics*: evidence of leadership, maturity, integrity, responsibility, and teamwork.

## Required Admission Exams

Business School: GMAT: <http://www.mba.com/mba/TaketheGMAT>

General graduate programs: GRE: <http://www.ets.org/gre/>

Professional program testing: KAPLAN: <http://www.kaplan.com/TestPreparation/>

## The Essay

The essay or personal statement is intended to offer you the opportunity to express your goals, explain certain circumstances, and present yourself in a way that you cannot in a standard application. It should express your commitment to your chosen field of study and your motivation, creativity, maturity and personal individuality. Use the essay as an opportunity to match your personal and professional goals with both the field and the chosen academic program.

### DO:

- Stay within any length limitation
- Write in an active voice
- Include real life examples
- Make sure enthusiasm shines through

- Show evidence of focus, dedication and awareness
- Be honest

**DON'T:**

- Make yourself out to be someone you are not
- Dwell on weak points
- Employ dull chronological histories
- Disregard length limitation or lie

**The Interview \***

Many schools do not require interviews, but you can request one if you feel it would be helpful. If you are comfortable and confident with your interviewing abilities, requesting one is often a very good idea. Most interviewers are not concerned with your opinions; they are concerned with your ability to communicate effectively.

Some important tips include:

- Always review your application before you interview to emphasize the points you want to highlight
- Prepare for the interview with questions of your own
- Always follow appropriate professional behaviors (be on time, dress appropriately, and write thank you letters)
- Be aware of your non-verbal behavior such as tapping a foot, playing with a pen, or general fidgeting
- Practice for the interview and anticipate questions designed to assess your appropriateness for the program

\*Obtain and review the guide: *Preparation for the Graduate/Professional School Interview*

**Other Resources**

About: Grad School -<http://gradschool.about.com/>

Peterson's - College and Grad School Planning- <http://www.petersons.com/>

The Pursuing Psychology Graduate School Information- <http://www.uni.edu/walsh/linda2.html>

General Information about grad school-<http://www.gradschools.com/>

*Book: Graduate School Essays* by Don Asher

**How Can the Case Career Center Help?**

- Conduct a mock interview with a career professional.
- Have your CV/resume reviewed.
- Have your personal statement or essay critiqued.
- Visit the Accenture Resource Library to access additional materials.

**Case Career Center 206 Sears**  
<http://studentaffairs.case.edu/careers/> 216-368-4446