



NEXT STEP:

Graduate School...

Evaluating your future? Start taking steps that lead to the experience and education you want.

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For the purpose of this publication Graduate and Professional School processes and procedures are viewed the same.



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Graduate School Timetable

If you are thinking about graduate school there are some general dates to keep in mind. Application deadlines may range from the August prior to the start of your senior year, (early decision programs for medical schools using the American Medical College Application Service), to the spring and summer of your senior year for a few programs with rolling admissions.

Most deadlines for the entering fall class are between January and March. You should, in all cases, plan to meet formal deadlines; beyond this, be aware of the fact that many institutions with rolling admissions encourage and act upon early applications. Applying early to an institution is usually advantageous, as it demonstrates your enthusiasm for the program and gives admissions committees more time to evaluate the subjective components of your application. Applicants are not rejected early unless they are clearly below an institution's standards.

The timetable that appears below represents the ideal for most students who wish to enter a graduate program.

Junior Year, Fall/Spring

- ✓ Research areas of interest, institutions and programs.
- ✓ Discuss with advisors about application requirements.
- ✓ Register and prepare for the appropriate graduate admission tests.
- ✓ Investigate national scholarships.
- ✓ If appropriate, obtain letters of recommendation.

Junior Year, Summer

- ✓ Take required graduate admission tests.
- ✓ Write for application materials.
- ✓ Visit institutions of interest, if possible.
- ✓ Compose your application essay and resume.
- ✓ Check on application deadlines and rolling admissions policies.
- ✓ For medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry, or law school, you may need to register for the national application or data assembly service most programs use.

Senior Year, Fall

- ✓ Complete resume, letter of application and personal statement.
- ✓ Obtain letters of recommendation.
- ✓ Take graduate admission tests if you have not already done so.
- ✓ Send in completed applications.
- ✓ Pick up the free application of Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the Financial Aid Profile, if required.

Senior Year, Spring

- ✓ Check with all institutions before the deadline to ensure your file is complete.
- ✓ Visit institutions that accept you.
- ✓ Send a deposit to your institution of choice.
- ✓ Notify other colleges and universities that have accepted you of your decision, so they may admit students on their waiting list.
- ✓ Send thank-you notes to people who wrote your recommendation letter informing them of your success.

You may not be able to adhere to this timetable if your application deadlines are very early, as is the case with medical school, or if you decide to attend graduate school at the last minute. In any case, keep in mind the various application requirements and be sure to meet all deadlines. If deadlines are impossible to meet, call the institution to see if a late application will be considered. Decisions are often made by April, but this varies with each institution. Decisions can be made as late as June.

Helpful Web Sites

- Accepted.com-Personal Essay Assistance – www.accepted.com/help/essay_help.htm
- All about Grad School – www.allaboutgradschool.com
- America's Best Colleges – www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/eduhome.htm
- Association of American Medical Colleges – www.aamc.org/students/start.htm
- College Net – www.collegenet.com
- College Source – www.collegesource.org
- Financial Aid Information Page – www.finaid.org
- Gradschools – www.gradschools.com
- Graduate Record Exam – <http://www.gre.org>
- Graduate School Application Essays – www.rpi.edu/web/writingcenter/gradapp.html
- Kaplan On line – www.kaplan.com
- Law School Admission Council On Line – www.lsac.org
- Law School Directory – www.hg.org/students.html
- Online MBA Program Guide – www.online-mba-program.com
- Peterson's Guides – www.peterson.com
- Princeton Review – www.review.com/index.cfm

Graduate School Information Overview

Whether or not to go to graduate/professional school is an important and often difficult decision to make. Pursuing graduate study affords you the opportunity to delve more deeply into a subject area than you were able to in your undergraduate education. In most cases, you will also be able to work closely with professors and conduct research of your own. In addition, a demanding schedule with work, teaching, research, and classes will require you to develop personal motivation as much of your work will be independent. Because of the demands, as well as the rewards, (not to mention the costs), it is important that you give this decision all the time and focus it deserves.

We have all heard stories of the student who went directly from undergraduate to graduate study, partly out of indecision, only to be miserable in graduate school and still without a career direction. We would like to assist you in making the best decision.

Making the Decision

Some Questions to Ask Yourself:

- What would I like to be doing five to ten years from now?
- Will graduate study assist me in getting there?
- What do I want to learn and accomplish from graduate study?
- Are there other ways to reach my goals?
- Do I know what to expect from graduate/professional school?
- What are the advantages of going to graduate school immediately after obtaining my B.A./B.S.?
- What are the advantages of waiting two to five years before going on for additional education?

Strategies for Making the Decision:

- Talk with faculty members about your decision, and about career fields and universities or colleges that would match your interests.
- Read graduate school catalogs and general directories on areas of study, such as Graduate Study in Psychology and Guide to Graduate Management Education. Use SIGI 3 located on the CMC Website or visit the Career Management Center Resource Center.

The Decision is Yes...Now Where to go?

1. Faculty.
2. Alumni who have volunteered to talk with you about their employment experiences
3. Career Management Center staff.
4. Resources in the Career Management Center and hyperlinks on the CMC Resource Center Website:
 - ❖ Peter's Guide to Graduate Schools in the U.S.
 - ❖ Peter's Guide to Graduate Programs in Social Sciences
 - ❖ Peter's Guide to Graduate Programs in Health Professions
 - ❖ Peter's Guide to Graduate Programs in Biology

- ❖ Peter's Guide to Graduate Programs in Physical Sciences
- ❖ Peter's Guide to Graduate Programs in Psychology
- ❖ Peter's Guide to Graduate Programs in Humanities
- ❖ Peter's Guide to Graduate Programs in Arts and Architecture
- ❖ Peter's Guide to Graduate Programs in Engineering and Computer Science
- ❖ Peter's Guide to Graduate Programs in Education
- ❖ Peter's Guide to Graduate Programs in Business

Narrowing Down Your Choices of Schools:

Write to the Graduate division of potential institutions or contact them via the internet for application materials, information on financial aid, a catalog, and information on a particular program or department. (This later information you may have to obtain from the department itself.)

Establish which criteria are important to you in the selection of a University or College. Factors you might wish to consider:

What will I be doing in three to five years after I complete my graduate program?

Inquire about the kinds of employment that are most accepted by graduates of the program you are considering. Visit the institutions and ask near-graduates what they expect to be doing after they graduate.

Attrition

Do students of this graduate department frequently fail to complete their degree programs? Once again, this is not something you will learn from the catalog or the department brochure. Visit the campus and ask both faculty and students.

Depth in the faculty

How many faculty members are in the department? Does the department's reputation rest heavily upon the shoulders of just one or two professors? What if they should go elsewhere?

Diversity in the faculty

Is there a variety of points of view in the department or are most of the faculty members' approaches to the discipline single-minded? Would you rather be a disciple or develop your own approach to the field?

Faculty publications

What have the faculty members published recently? This will give you an idea of whether the faculty's interests are similar to your own. In many cases, what the professors publish is what he or she spends the most time talking about both in and out of the classroom.

Availability of faculty

Are there several notable professors on the faculty? If so, ask the students how often they actually see or talk with them. Would you be likely to work with the notable professor on research, see him/her only in class, or just hear about him/her occasionally?

Internships and assistantships

Does the program have any planned practical experiences? If so, where would you be likely to work and what would you do?

Fellowships and funds

How much fellowship money is available? How many students receive fellowships? Are you likely to be among the lucky few?

Ph.D. production

How many Ph.D.'s has this department produced yearly? What is the average length of time it takes to complete the degree?

Assistance in finding a job

What percentage of graduates and degree candidates in this department succeeds in finding employment? To what extent does the department enable the graduate to find suitable work?

Admissions preferences

Does the department prefer to have a recent graduate of undergraduate institutions apply? Or, do they prefer applicants having work experience relevant to their field?

Versatility

To what extent can you use the degree to pursue other kinds of work? Is there much latitude for transferring this degree to other fields?

In addition, look at the size of the school/department, the city itself, transportation, geographical location, employment opportunities in field, cost of living, and opportunities to pursue extra-curricular interests.

Choosing a graduate school involves finding a program that matches your academic interests as well as your personal preferences and needs. After all, you will be there for at least two years, and probably longer if you are pursuing a Ph.D.

The Application Process

Most Applications Consist of Six Sections:

1. Application form
2. Personal statement/autobiography/essays/portfolio
3. Transcripts of past academic work
4. Letters of recommendation
5. Test scores (GRE, LSAT, MCAT, GMAT)
6. Financial aid forms

Application Deadlines:

Many schools have application deadlines well in advance of the entrance date. Be sure to check the particular department in which you are applying for the application deadline dates. You also need to be aware that financial aid deadlines are often different (and sometimes earlier) than the regular application dates. Be sure to register for the appropriate test well in advance of when the institutions need your scores. Begin the application process early. It often takes more time than you realize to complete the forms and to send the letters of recommendation and transcripts.

Filling Out Your Application Form:

In completing the application form and personal statement, make sure you type it or print legibly and that it is written in clear and concise language. It should state who you are, your goals, and why you want to attend that particular institution. For many schools, the written essay plays an extremely important role in the selection process. Have someone review your personal statement or essay and check for clarity and proper grammar.

Letters of Reference:

Most graduate schools require two or three letters of reference. Some schools may simply ask that you supply names and addresses, others will provide you with forms that you must give to the letter writers, and still others will request letters but have no specified form. Remember that for a very competitive program, a letter on departmental stationary directed to that particular program may give a better impression of you. Contact your references to see if they are willing to compose individual letters. References may use the same letter for all institutions, but individualize it with a schools address.

To assist in facilitating your reference requests:

- ✓ Provide references with information about you, (interests, classes you have taken, activities you have been involved in), and why you want to attend graduate school.
- ✓ Include information about the particular graduate school(s) that you are considering.
- ✓ Indicate the deadline that you need the letters sent by. Make sure to give them at least a month before the deadline date. Conduct a follow-up contact with faculty to ensure the letters have been sent.
- ✓ Give the writers pre-addressed, stamped envelopes.
- ✓ Send a thank you note to those who have recommended you.

If you are applying to more than one institution, it is important to record all activity related to the application process.

Getting Accepted:

Ensure Your Materials Are Complete:

Make sure that you have completed all of the necessary forms and that the appropriate office has received them. You should conduct follow-up telephone calls to confirm that the graduate school has received your materials. Never assume that because you have not heard from an office, your application is complete.

Research Advisors:

In graduate school, you will be working closely with your advisor, so you should conduct research on the individuals who most closely match your interests. The graduate catalog often lists the research interests of the faculty. Check in the college for publications written by each potential advisor. Are they conducting research/writing in areas of interest to you?

Write or call the faculty that interests you. Inform them you have applied to the program, what your interests are, and how your interests relate to their research. If possible, schedule a time to meet or at least talk on the phone. This way, when your application comes across their desk, it will mean more to them. By talking with the faculty, you will also find out if you are compatible in other ways beyond just research interests.

Visit the School You Are Interested In:

A visit to the school can be particularly enlightening. Does it match the description in the catalog? Sit in on the classes, talk with students currently in the program, talk with faculty, and check out the physical and social environment of the campus and community. Ask the questions of yourself and

others listed on the previous page. Is this a place you will feel comfortable living/working/studying in for the next few years?

If you cannot visit the school, ask for names of alumni in your area with whom you can discuss the program in greater detail. Check with faculty or the Office of Alumni Affairs to access names.

What Next?

Once your application is completed and you have talked with people at the universities/colleges, sit back, relax and enjoy your free time. Form a group of friends who can provide you with support once you start receiving responses from the institutions.

Feel free to contact the Career Management Center (CMC) at any time during your graduate/professional school decision-making and application process for assistance or information.

Financing Graduate School

Sources and Types of Aid:

Sources for Aid:

1. Graduate school's
2. Federal government
3. State government
4. Private foundations
5. Commercial institutions

I. Types of Aid:

1. "Free" money: Fellowships, scholarships and grants. "Free" money is taxable in whole or in part. There are two types:
 - a. Those tied to specific schools, programs, and departments. Ask the financial aid officer at the graduate school you are considering. Ask the chairperson of your future graduate department. Read the graduate school catalog and all financial aid materials.
 - b. Those not tied to a school, program or department. Examples include the National Science Foundation, Danforth Fellowships, etc. Read the Annual Register or Grant Support. Each award has specific requirements, which may not be based on financial need. They may be geared toward an area of study.
2. "Borrowed" money: Graduate school government loans or commercial institution loans. Generally, loans through graduate schools and the government are low interest and payment is deferred until your training ends. Commercial loans (banks) have a higher interest rate and may not be as readily available.
 - a. Graduate school loans are generally low interest and short term. Contact the financial aid officer at the graduate school and chairperson of future graduate department. These are often need-based.
 - b. Government provided (institutionally controlled) loans.
 - i. Stafford Loan – This loan is in the process of transition. To review the criteria for application contact the institution FA office and visit www.studentaid.ed.gov to see current interest rates; repayment starts six

- months after graduation; interest is paid by the government until you graduate. The loan is not based on financial need.
- ii. Health Education Assistance Loan (H.E.A.L.) – This loan is to assist students in health professions. Call the United States Public Health Service at 1 (800) 638-0824.
 - iii. Perkins Loan – This loan is awarded through the institution. Not all schools award the Perkins Loan to graduate students. Interest rate is currently 5%. Must demonstrate need (through FAF or GAPSFAS).
 - c. Commercial loans – Bank loans, savings and loan, and credit cards. Generally not very economical because they are long term and have high interest rates.
 - d. Other sources – Borrowing against stocks, savings certificates, or insurance policies.
3. “Earned money”:
 - a. Research, teaching, or residential assistantships. This is taxable income, and usually limits your course load, but can provide an excellent experience; limited number of positions available; often given to Ph.D. candidates. Not necessarily need-based.
 - b. Work Study – Amount is based on need and amount of money the graduate school is allotted by government. It is tied in to GAOSFAS or FAF. It can also be a good way to gather experience in your field.
 - c. Working outside of the institution. Use your job search strategy skills; you may want to gear work towards your studies.

II. Eligibility

Financial Aid Form (FAF) and Graduate and Professional School Financial Aid Service (GAPSFAS)

1. Both of the above organizations figure financial need and supply this to graduate schools (you identify which institutions). Most graduate schools use one of these two forms to determine the amount and kind of aid they will award you.
2. A fee is charged for this service.
3. Each graduate school specifies which form they prefer.

III. Tips

1. Apply for aid even if you think you are not eligible. Some grants are not based on need.
2. Contact the financial aid office of the graduate schools for which you will be applying and request information on every possible kind of aid (request early, as there are often deadlines).
3. If you are currently a high need student, you may be eligible for a fee waiver for graduate school applications and the GRE.
4. Consider your long-range goals. If you think you might want to teach or conduct research in your field, experience as a Teaching Assistant or Research Assistant can be invaluable.

IV. Resources

1. “Chronicle: Student Aid Annual” www.chronicleguidance.com
2. “A Student Consumers Guide: Five Federal Financial Aid Programs”
3. Graduate Schools catalogs.
4. Financial Aid Office institution applying to.

5. Graduate departments/programs to which you are applying.
6. For information on banks and other lending agencies that participate in college loan programs see list below.
7. ASU Financial Aid Office.

American Association of State Colleges and Universities (www.aascu.org)

Arkansas Department of Higher Education (www.arkansashighered.com)

State of Arkansas website (www.arkansas.gov)

U.S. Dept. of Education (www.ed.gov)

Association of American Universities (www.aau.edu)

Arkansas Student Loan Authority (www.asla.info)

Virtual campus tours (www.ecampustours.com)

Free Scholarship Search at Fund My Future (www.fundmyfuture.info)

Student Loan Guarantee Foundation of Arkansas (www.slgfa.org)

Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship Fund (www.aspsf.org)

Discover Arkansas (www.discoverarkansas.net)

Arkansas Science & Technology Authority (www.astar.ar.gov)

Interviewing for Graduate School

Before answering the following questions, it is important to remember that most interviewers will be looking for three elements when you answer questions:

- Your answer
- How well you can organize your things
- How well you express yourself

For more information about preparing for interview and answering questions, refer to the handouts available at the Career Management Center or <http://careers.astate.edu>.

Interviews will vary among programs and the individuals conducting the interviews. Questions may be direct, indirect, hypothetical or behavior-based. Below is a sampling of questions you might be asked during an interview:

Personal Characteristics/Skills/Strengths:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What is your strongest personal asset?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses as a student?
- Name three strengths that you possess and why you consider them strengths.
- How would one of your friends/teachers/supervisors describe you?
- What would a supervisor or professor tell me are your strengths?

Academic Experiences/Performance:

- Why did you major in _____?
- Why did you choose to attend _____ University/College?
- 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 did you consider?
- How has your undergraduate background prepared you for this program?
- What courses have you enjoyed the most?
- What courses have been most difficult for you?
- What satisfaction have you gained from your studies?
- Tell me about the research project you completed with Professor _____?
- Do you feel your academic record accurately reflects your abilities and potential? Why?
- How would you rate yourself in the following areas?
 1. Reading and comprehension
 2. Analytical skills
 3. Communication – oral, written and listening
- What did you not like about the College/University you attended?
- Tell me about a professor or supervisor that you didn't like and why.
- Why would you be an asset to our department? How would you be able to contribute to our 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 are your plans if you are not accepted to our program?

Extracurricular Activities:

- What extracurricular activity has been most satisfying to you?
- What is the most significant contribution you have made to your institution?
- What activities do you enjoy most outside of the classroom?
- Do you have any hobbies or outside interests? Please tell us about them.
- Tell me about any volunteer experiences in which you have participated.

Weaknesses:

- What challenges do you think you might face in the graduate program?
- What would you say is an area in which you need improvement?
- What would you change about yourself and why?
- What skills or abilities do you hope to strengthen through this program?

Goals:

- What has motivated you to pursue this academic field?
- What are your short-term and long-term goals?
- Why do you want a graduate degree in _____?
- How do you see this program fitting into your career goals?
- Tell me about a goal you have set for yourself and how you have achieved it or intend to achieve it.

Leadership/Teamwork/Problem Solving Skills:

- Tell us about a major accomplishment and how you achieved it.
- Tell us about a situation in which you showed initiative.
- Tell us about a team project in which you were involved. How did you contribute to the team in achieving its goal?
- Tell us about a time you assumed a leadership role.
- Tell us about a recent significant problem you faced and how you handled it.
- Tell us how you handle stress.
- Tell us about a time you had a number of assignments due. How did you make sure you completed the assignments on time and that you did a good job?
- Tell us about a time when you were confronted by a fellow student, co-worker, or a customer. How did you handle the situation to resolve the conflict?
- Tell us about a time you were faced with a difficult situation and how you handled it.
- Tell us about a mistake you made and how you handled it.
- Define teamwork (or success... quality... fairness)
- What was the last book you read or movie you saw?
- How will you make the world a better place?
- If you could have dinner with someone (living or dead), who would that person be? Why?

Field Specific Questions and Current Events;

You will undoubtedly encounter questions that relate specifically to your chosen field of study. Be certain that you are aware of current trends, issues, and controversies in your field so that you will be able to answer questions intelligently. Here are a few examples:

- What do you believe to be the major trends in your intended career field at this time?

- What do you think about _____ (current event)?
- What problem in the world troubles you most? What would you do about it?
- What is the most important development in this field over the past 25 years, and why?

Questions Applicants Might Ask an Interviewer:

Asking questions not only helps you as a candidate determine the “fit” of the program with your desired academic and career objectives, but it also communicates to the selection committee the extent of your interest in their program:

- What characteristics distinguish this program from others in the same academic field?
- How long does it take typically to complete the program?
- Where are recent alumni employed? What do most graduates do after graduation?
- What types of financial aid are offered? What criteria are used for choosing recipients?
- What opportunities are available through the program to gain practical work experience? Are there opportunities such as assistantships, fellowships or internships available?
- Are there any scholarships or fellowships available? How do I apply?
- Do most students publish an article/conduct research prior to graduation?
- I have read articles written by _____ and _____. To what extent are students involved in assisting these faculty members with related research projects?
- What types of research projects are current students pursuing?
- How are graduate test scores, grades, letters of recommendations, and personal statements evaluated for the admissions process?
- What is the selections timeline? When will candidates be notified about their acceptance into the program?

Develop A Plan to Manage the Process

Began to develop your plans on how to manage your processes, procedures, and timelines to apply to graduate/professional school.