



Graduate & Professional School Decisions

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Is Graduate School for You?

Graduate school is both time-consuming and expensive. Therefore, you should seriously consider your motives and goals for pursuing an advanced degree before beginning the extensive application process. There are numerous reasons people choose to attend graduate school; the following are eight of the more common ones:

1. See graduate school as a way to put off looking for a job
2. Consider graduate study because everyone else is pursuing advanced degrees
3. Have not decided what type of career to pursue and therefore opt to stay in school
4. Believe there are no available jobs
5. Are interested in specializing in a particular field of study
6. Are pursuing a professional position requiring an advanced degree
7. Hope to earn a higher salary with an advanced degree
8. Need graduate courses for professional continuing education requirements

Although these are all valid arguments for attending graduate school, reasons five through eight are some of the more pertinent ones. Naturally, an advanced degree can never guarantee you will land a higher profile position, earn a better salary or gain personal fulfillment; but these rationales are certainly more legitimate than allowing fear, peer pressure or laziness to dictate your future.

The most logical reason for considering graduate school centers on the need to possess an advanced degree to enter a particular position, occupation or career field. It is best to have a clear understanding of such career goals before applying for graduate schools and programs. Having an understanding of your career goals includes being aware of such variables as your personal interests, abilities, skills and values.

If you are unsure about such variables or your specific career goals, consult the Self Evaluation

and Discovering Career Options ready references for further assistance and make an appointment with CASNR Career Services for a personal brainstorming and/or strategy session.

Choosing the Right Institution and Program

Once you have discovered the type of occupation of interest to you, you will want to examine and select a graduate program that is right for you and that career goal. When examining potential programs, consult college professors or individuals working in positions of interest to you on their opinions about the graduate schools and programs you are researching. Also, if possible, visit the campuses of those schools you are considering and talk to both professors and students in your targeted programs. When researching programs, be sure to identify the following points:

- How many years will it take to obtain your degree?
- What types of courses will you be required to complete?
- Does the program require you to complete a thesis or major research project?
- Does the program require you to complete an internship in your field?
- Does the program offer fellowships, scholarships or graduate assistantships?
- How many credit hours does the program involve?
- Is the program accredited, and if so, by whom?
- Will the program provide you with credentials and/or enable you to complete certification or licensure requirements needed for your particular position, occupation or career field?
- Will the program limit your career goals in any way?
- Is the school conveniently located? If not, will it be necessary to move in order to attend?

Resist the temptation to base your decision to attend a particular institution solely on its reputation. The

prestige and reputation of a particular graduate school will not mean anything if the school, program and faculty do not accommodate your career-related goals. It would be wise to research the faculty who will be teaching and supporting you in your graduate studies. Find out the types of research they have completed, on which topics they have written articles or books, and the direction they would like your graduate program to take. Make sure that your interests coincide with their interests, or you may find yourself devoting hours to projects that are of no interest to you. Remember that the faculty in your graduate program will be your mentors; therefore, it certainly works to your advantage if you can get along with them.

The Application Process

Applying to graduate schools and programs is more involved than applying to undergraduate institutions. The process is more complicated and procedures more in-depth, depending on the schools and programs to which you apply. Unlike undergraduate institutions, graduate schools often require you to apply to both the graduate school and to the particular graduate program of interest to you. Therefore, you will want to contact both the Graduate School Admissions Office and the department of your chosen graduate program. Consult the *Peterson's Guide to Graduate and Professional Programs* or catalogs from specific colleges and universities in the Career Resource Center (308 Student Union) for phone numbers, addresses and additional information on graduate schools and programs.

The timetable below has been adapted from *Peterson's Guide to Graduate and Professional Programs*. The overview suggests an ideal timetable for most applicants.

Approximately 15 months before beginning graduate school:

- Research areas of interest, graduate schools and graduate programs.
- Obtain information and application materials from graduate schools and programs.
- Register and prepare for required graduate school admissions tests.

- Investigate national scholarships and graduate school assistantships, if desired.
- Request letters of recommendation, if required.

Approximately three months before application deadline:

- Take required graduate school admissions tests.
- Confirm application deadlines and rolling admissions policies.
- Visit potential graduate schools and programs, if possible.
- Write application essays or compile portfolio, if required.
- Request required transcripts from your undergraduate institution.
- Register for national applications or data assembly service if applying to medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry or law school programs where it is required and used.

Immediately prior to application deadline:

- Forward completed application packet to desired graduate schools and programs.
- Consult desired graduate schools and programs to ensure your application file is complete.

Upon learning that you have been accepted by your chosen graduate school and program:

- Inform other graduate schools and programs of your decision to attend another institution.
- Contact those people who wrote letters of recommendation for you to both thank them for their letters and to inform them of your acceptance into a particular graduate school and program.