GRADUATE SCHOOL PLANNING GUIDE

This is intended as a tool to guide students in planning. Exact timings may vary depending on the developmental career needs, chosen field of study, and/or individual circumstances of each student.

EXPLORATION: IDEALLY 2–3 YEARS BEFORE APPLYING

- Identify and introduce yourself to relevant advisors, mentors, and resources. Ask professors about how best to prepare for graduate study, especially if they are in the field you are considering.
- Work with faculty and academic advisors to identify and develop a plan for completing any necessary pre-requisite coursework.
- Gain professional exposure within your chosen area of study. This may include informational interviews and other networking, job shadow, internship, and research experiences.
- Continue to build and maintain relationships with faculty and other mentors; you may eventually ask some of these individuals for letters of recommendation when you apply to graduate school.
- Pursue work, volunteer or leadership opportunities that allow you to develop skills outside the classroom such as communication, time management, teamwork, and problem solving.

PREPARATION: IDEALLY 1 YEAR BEFORE APPLYING

- Solidify which area of study you wish to pursue.
- Start researching prospective schools. Search online, in person, and at graduate school fairs. Organize your research in a document that includes admission info and factors important to you.
- Develop a plan for studying for and taking any required entrance examinations.
- Consider whether taking a gap year or gaining additional experience after college is right for you.
- Create an application timeline and understand deadlines. Some programs operate on rolling admissions, which means they review applications as they are received and may cap enrollment.

APPLICATION PHASE 1: SUMMER BEFORE APPLYING

- Write rough drafts of your personal statement and resume or curriculum vita (CV).
- Narrow your list of schools and make a calendar to keep track of application deadlines.
- If prospective programs require you to identify a faculty advisor before admission, contact potential advisors and make sure they will be taking on new students in the year you plan to enroll.
- Consider contacting admissions representatives at prospective programs if you have questions about admission policies. Be sure to do your research first and be professional in all interactions.

APPLICATION PHASE 2: SEMESTER YOU APPLY

- Revise and polish your application essay(s) and resume or CV.
- Request your letters of recommendation from faculty far enough in advance for them to write thoughtfully without undue stress. Strive to give your writers 3-4 weeks before you need the letter.
- Take required admission exam(s) if you have not already.
- Order official transcripts from the Registrar well in advance of any deadlines.
- Complete and submit all application materials.
- Apply for any funding opportunities, including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

APPLICATION PHASE 3: AFTER APPLYING

- Follow up with schools to make sure your application file is complete.
- Visit campuses, if possible, and talk to faculty and/or students to help make your final decision.
- After receiving acceptance from your best option, send in the deposit and decline any other offers.
- Send thank you notes to those who helped you along the journey to graduate school.

SAMPLE GRADUATE APPLICATION TOOLS

Application requirements vary by degree, program and/or individual school. Below are some comment elements that may be part of your application checklist.

- ☐ Resume or Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- ☐ Personal Statement or Essay
- ☐ Standardized Exam
- ☐ Transcript

- ☐ Letters of Recommendation
- ☐ Application Form or Website
- ☐ Application Fee

Consider organizing your school research and/or application information using a spreadsheet to keep track of requirements, deadlines, and other important details. Below are some examples.

Factor Categories	Selection Factor	XYZ University	ABC State University	State College
Location	Distance from home			
	Type of setting			
Program	Program Size			
	Specialties / Focus			
	Learning Environment			
	Length of Program			
	Reputation / Rank			
Academics	Faculty / Student Ratio			
	Resources / Facilities			
	Research			
Cost	Tuition			
	Rent / Cost of Living			
	Scholarships			
Lifestyle	Student Organizations			
	Local Community			
Admission Factors	Average GPA			
	Average Test Score			

XYZ University - Due 11/1

Application Component	Details	Completed Date
Resume or CV	Required	10/1
Personal Statement	1000 words	10/21
Exam	GRE	9/30
Transcript	Required	10/15
Letters of Rec	3	Requested 9/1
Application Website	www....	N/A
Application Fee	$50	10/25

ABC State University - Due 11/15

Application Component	Details	Completed Date
Resume or CV	Required	10/1
Personal Statement	800 words	11/1
Exam	GRE	9/30
Transcript	Required	10/15
Letters of Rec	2	Requested 9/1
Application Website	www....	N/A
Application Fee	$75	11/10