

Graduate School Planning Guide

Two to Three 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, including informational interviews and other networking opportunities, job shadowing, internships 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.

One 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. Consider organizing your information in a spreadsheet that includes the factors most important to you. See page 2 of this document for an example comparison chart.
- Develop a plan for studying for and taking any required entrance examinations, such as the GRE.
- Consider whether taking a gap year or gaining additional experience after college is right for you.
- Create an application timeline. Some graduate programs accept applications during fall semester, others have spring deadlines and some operate on a rolling admissions. Certain professional programs, such as medical school, can start the application process more than a year in advance of your desired start date.

Summer Before You Apply

- Write rough drafts of your personal statement and resume / curriculum vita (CV).
- Narrow your list of schools and make a calendar to keep track of application and funding deadlines.
- If prospective programs require you to identify an 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.

Semester You Apply

- Revise and polish your application essay and resume / CV with help from faculty, Career & Professional Development, the Writing Center and other mentors.
- 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 to 4 weeks before you need the letter.
- Take required admission exams, 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 additional funding, including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

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.

Graduate School Comparison Chart (EXAMPLE ONLY)

Factor	School A	School B	School C
Location			
Rural / Urban Setting			
Other			
Environment			
Enrollment / Size			
Public / Private			
Other			
Program			
Major / Degree			
Specialties / Focus			
Learning Environment			
Time to Complete			
Accreditation			
Reputation / Rank			
Career Prospects			
Other			
Academics			
Faculty / Student Ratio			
Resources / Facilities			
Research Opportunities			
Other			
Cost			
Tuition			
Resident			
Non-Resident			
Fees			
Housing			
Other			
Financial Support			
Scholarships			
Deadline			
Requirements			
Assistantships			
Deadline			
Requirements			
Loans			
Other			
Activities			
Student Organizations			
Local Community			
Other			
Application Process			
Deadline			
Fees			
Test Scores			
Minimum / Average GPA			
Transcripts			
Personal Statement			
Recommendation Letters			
Interview			
Other			
Other Factors			