

PLANNING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

Preliminary things to think about

PERHAPS GRADUATE SCHOOL has been something you have always wanted to do, or you need a graduate degree for your chosen field (dentistry, counseling, etc.), or maybe you have recently been thinking about it for the first time. Graduate school is a big decision and a significant investment of time, energy, and financial resources. It is imperative to do some preliminary reflecting and researching before you decide to apply.

Consider:

- > Purpose(s) for going
- > Values and goals
- > Program specifics (opportunities, costs, alumni connections, etc.)
- > Application timelines and requirements

Additional questions to think about:

- > What do you want to know about yourself, a program, or a career path, etc. before you start graduate school?
- > What do you want to learn while in graduate school?
- > What do you want to accomplish with a graduate degree? How have others accomplished this?
- > What can you do now to prepare for graduate school later?

By reflecting on your goals and plans you'll have a solid foundation to begin the graduate school application process.

Researching and selecting graduate programs

DEVELOP A LIST of criteria to analyze possible graduate programs. Some possible questions to use as you conduct research:

- > What kinds of support does the program provide for professional development, including assistance finding a job after I graduate?
- > Where do alumni of the program go? Could I talk to a graduate of the program?
- > What kinds of financial or academic support is offered during the program? Will I be able to work or have an internship during the program?
- > What is the overall structure of the program (duration, class schedule, research opportunities, etc.)? Will this structure work for me?
- > What is the culture of the school and the program? What are the program's values—how do they relate to my own values?
- > Does the program's curriculum meet requirements needed for licensure or certification?
- > How much financial aid will I need? What is my expected starting salary in a first job after graduate school?



Waiting to apply? Some tips

IF YOU ARE PLANNING to apply in a few years there are many ways to start preparing now.

- > **Maintain relationships with faculty members.** Let them know you are considering graduate school.
- > **Get involved in your field of interest.** Attend lectures, volunteer, do research, travel or other related pursuits.
- > **Practice writing.** Most grad programs require a lot of writing! Draft out some paragraphs of a personal statement.
- > **Conduct informational interviews with alumni.** Learn about career paths associated with graduate programs.
- > **Read scholarly articles in your field.** Journal articles and books are available at most public libraries for free to members.
- > **Take standardized tests.** Many scores are good for multiple years, so plan ahead and get studying!

MANY PEOPLE take a gap year or years between finishing their bachelor's degree and starting graduate school. In some fields it is even advantageous to work for a while before going back!

MOST GRADUATE APPLICATIONS have several components. Applications may be due as far out as twelve months before a program begins. Familiarize yourself with what is common for your target field of study. Develop a system for tracking and completing specific parts of the application process to ensure timely and accurate completion of your materials. Be sure to check for:

- > Standardized Tests or Exams (GRE, MCAT, LSAT, DAT, GMAT, etc.)
- > Letters of Recommendation (one or multiple recommenders)
- > Personal Statement (one or multiple essays)
- > Official or unofficial academic transcripts
- > Resume or Curriculum Vitae
- > Other information, depending on program and field

Some programs also require an interview after an initial review of applications. Interviews are common in health fields, doctoral programs in life sciences, law school, and business school.

Letters of recommendation

START BY DEVELOPING professional relationships with work supervisors, faculty members and others well in advance of when applications are due. Specific ways to demonstrate your interest include working hard, attending office hours, asking questions, and working well on group projects. Plan to have at least three recommenders. Select recommenders based on how well they know you and feel comfortable speaking to your ability to succeed in a graduate program. When you ask recommenders, provide supporting materials and information to assist the letter writing process (resume, samples of work, personal statement, etc.). Be sure to outline how many letters will be needed and their respective due dates. Send a sincere thank you note to each recommender at the end of the process.

Personal statements

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE PERSONAL STATEMENT means knowing yourself, telling your story, and showing how you match specific programs and areas of faculty research. Many places on campus offer assistance for current UW students with crafting a strong statement including:

- > The Office of Merit Scholarships, Fellowships & Awards for personal statement writing workshops.
- > The Odegaard Writing and Research Center for personal statement reviews
- > The Career & Internship Center for personal statement reviews