



# The Graduate School Decision

CBU Career Services

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## **Is it for me?**

In determining whether or not graduate school is right for you, you need to evaluate the reasons for applying. There are several good reasons to go to graduate school. Some of which include:

- Your career goal requires an advanced degree, such as a professor, lawyer, or doctor.
- You want to specialize in a subject you feel is of great importance to you personally and professionally.
- You want to advance in your career or change career directions.

However, there are also several reasons that you should be wary of. For example, applying to graduate school because you don't want to work full-time, or because you're not sure of what you really want to do are not solid reasons. Thus, self-evaluation of your interests and goals for attending graduate school is extremely important.

## **What should I be asking myself?**

Is an advanced degree required to enter the particular profession I'm interested in or in order to obtain a certain level within the field?

- Do I really love the field enough to obtain an advanced degree?
- Do I have the financial resources to cover the cost of graduate school?
- Am I burned out academically, and do I need to take time off?
- Do I want to go to school full-time or part-time?
- Do I have the personal qualities and skills that are needed to be successful in graduate school?
- What are the different programs that are available in my area of interest?

## **How do I research the different schools and programs?**

On-line resources:

[www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com)  
[www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)

[www.gradsource.com](http://www.gradsource.com)  
<http://gradschool.about.com>

- Graduate school directories, such as Peterson's Guides to Graduate Schools, are available at the Career Services Library.
- Faculty - Consult with professors that specialize in your area of interest, seeking advice and suggestions.
- Professionals - Network with individuals in the field you're interested in, gaining a professional perspective on which schools to attend.
- School publications and materials can provide you with valuable information about the campus and the program.
- U.S. News and World Report provides you with up-to-date rankings of specific programs and schools.

## **What are the steps in applying to graduate school?**

- After identifying a target list of programs, you will want to request a course catalogue, application materials, and financial aid information from each school. You can usually retrieve this information from each school's website.
- As you begin to collect the information about each school, you will want to evaluate the programs, giving special consideration to your individual interests and goals. Use the Graduate School Decision Making Chart to help you organize this information.
- Remember, apply to enough schools in order to better assure acceptance. Try out the simple "rule of thirds:" A third of the schools you apply to should be your dream schools; the second third need to be the schools that realistically fit your qualifications; the last third are those schools where your qualifications are above the requirements.
- Be sure to utilize the Graduate School Timeline in order to stay on track.

# Graduate School Timeline

## Summer/Early Fall:

- Research various departments and schools via web sites or contact them for more information.
- Request application and program materials from schools of interest.
- Complete the Graduate School Decision Making Chart, making note of each school's application criteria.
- Prepare or revise your resume to be used throughout the application process.
- Begin studying for graduate admission tests.

GRE – [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org)

LSAT – <http://www.lsac.org/>

GMAT – [www.mba.com](http://www.mba.com)

MCAT – [www.aamc.org/students/mcat/start.html](http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat/start.html)

- Take appropriate graduate school entrance exams.
- Schedule a time to meet with faculty/professionals in order to request letters of recommendations. Be sure to consider those who have seen you perform in an academic or professional role.
- Attend the Graduate School Expo, held in late September.

## October:

- Prepare a personal statement that highlights your motivation and commitment to the field of study. Check out the resources available in the Career Services library.

## November:

- Order transcripts from the Registrar's Office. Remember to request transcripts from any other schools you have attended.
- Provide your references with the necessary forms to complete their recommendations. Be sure to provide them with a resume, an unofficial copy of your transcript, and mailing instructions. You might also want to include a cover sheet that reiterates your rationale for deciding to attend graduate school, elaborates on your major qualifications, and states your reasons for choosing the particular graduate schools. This information will be invaluable to your references while writing your recommendations.

## December/January:

- Mail applications, even if the deadlines are later.

## February-April:

- Follow-up with schools as you receive notice of acceptance or decline.
- Conduct graduate school interviews/make campus visits.
- Evaluate the programs you've been accepted to, identifying those that are the "best match" with your interests and needs.
- Apply for financial aid/assistantships at the school you decide to attend. Keep in mind that some fellowships/scholarships may necessitate earlier application.
- Send your references a "thank you" letter.

# Graduate School Decision-Making Chart

Use the following chart to help you determine the best “match” between your interests and needs with various programs. Make copies to accommodate all schools that you research.

My overall GPA: \_\_\_\_\_ My Graduate Admission Test Score (GRE, GMAT, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Criteria	Program A	Program B	Program C
Name Of University			
Name Of Department			
Degree Awarded (MA, MS, PhD, etc.)			
Average time required to complete degree			
Acceptance rate (if known)			
Average GPA of most recent entering class			
Admission tests required			
Average admission test score of recent class			
Number of full-time & part-time students			
Average age of students in program			
Faculty-student ratio			
Is faculty research of interest to me			
Tuition costs			
Are assistantships, fellowships/grants available?			
Have I been offered financial assistance?			
Ranking of university/program			
What are the placement rates of graduates?			
Desirable geographical location?			
Other factors important to me:			
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