



APPLYING TO GRADUATE & PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

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SO YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT GRADUATE SCHOOL...

Graduate school is not just another year (or two or three) of college. It can be as different from your undergraduate work as high school was from college. Before making any quick decisions, ask yourself some serious questions.

Should I go to graduate school or not?

Does your ultimate career goal require an advanced degree? Sometimes the answer is clearly "YES." For example, lawyers, physicians, and counseling psychologists MUST have advanced degrees to even begin their careers. For other careers, a graduate degree is necessary to advance in the field. For example, an MBA can be very helpful (often necessary) for a businessperson who wants to climb up the corporate ladder.



How can I tell if I need an advanced degree to reach my career goal?

Do some research. Schedule an informational interview with a professional in the field. Talk to people who actually are in your career of interest. The Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook (www.bls.gov/oco) is a great resource that gives the educational requirements for thousands of careers. The Career Development Center can also assist in your research and planning through career coaching and info sessions.

Will I be successful (can I handle it)?

Based on your past academic performance, you should have a realistic assessment of your abilities. Undergraduate transcripts often accurately reflect students' future academic performance...but also keep in mind that motivation and interest weigh heavily on future success in a graduate program. Discover what the minimal requirements are for acceptance into specific graduate programs and talk with your faculty advisor to gain his/her perspective on your chances of being accepted into a graduate program.

If I decide to go, is it better for me to study something new or should I learn more about the subject in which I am already majoring?

That's up to you. Base your decision on the major you have as an undergraduate. Do you need to learn more about it? Will in-depth knowledge let you reach your career goal or will you be more marketable to an employer if you have graduate experience in a different field? Remember that many career fields allow you to mix and match. For example, certain businesses prefer to hire MBAs with technical or liberal arts undergraduate degrees.

If I decide that graduate school really is for me, is it better to go right after graduation or should I get some work experience first?

- Choice #1 – Go right away
 - If an advanced degree is REQUIRED for you to meet your career goal, you will gain nothing career-wise by delaying graduate school.
 - After 4 years of college, you have "academic momentum." Even though you may not realize it, your classroom skills are polished now. The longer you go without using them, the duller they may become.
 - Once you start to earn a regular paycheck, it may be hard for you to give up all or part of your salary to become a student again.
- Choice #2 – Go after a few months/years
 - Employers sometimes prefer people with professional work experience AND an advanced degree. For example, new hires with an MBA + experience start with higher salaries than those who have an MBA without experience. Some graduate programs require applicants to have work experience in a particular field before they are admitted.
 - Your economic situation may require you to work after graduation. Working can pay off undergraduate bills and help you save for graduate school.
 - If you need help to finance your graduate degree, you may want to work for an organization that will pay for all or part of your education.

What if I combine the two and get work experience while I go to school part-time?

This plan works for many people, especially if an employer has a tuition remission program. Keep two things in mind:

- Going part-time will take longer than full-time. Will that affect your career goals?
- Some people's lifestyles are not compatible with working during the day and going to school at night. Other people thrive on it.

How do I pick a school?

Research to find out 1) what programs are available, and 2) which would be best for you. You should consider several areas when you make this decision:

- **Curriculum:** This is key. Go to a school that offers the kind of program that will get you the degree you want in order to get you the career you want.
- **Reputation:** Talk with professors who teach related undergraduate courses. Ask where they went to school, what programs they recommend, and why. If possible, visit campuses; talk to graduate students currently enrolled.
- **Accreditation:** Ensure that the university is accredited as whole (not a diploma mill). Also, understand the role that specialized accreditation plays in your field as this varies considerably from one discipline to another. In certain professional fields, it is a requirement to have graduated from a specialized accredited program in order to be eligible for a license to practice.
- **Faculty:** Are the professors well known in their disciplines? Where did they earn their degrees? Do they concentrate on research and publishing? Are they concerned about and accessible to students? Is there diversity? During your campus visit, arrange to speak with a faculty member.

- **Resources:** Find out what resources are available on campus, particularly in the library, labs, and computer center. Are resources current, complete, and available to students?
- **Students:** Who enrolls in the program? Learn what undergrad schools they came from and what alums do once they complete the program. Look at the dropout rate.
- **Atmosphere:** Consider size, location (urban/rural, section of the country), class size, housing, facilities, cost of living, proximity to career environment (for example, not all graduate programs in oceanography are located on the coasts).
- **Cost:** Ask about tuition and financial aid. Do out-of-state students pay more? If so, how long does it take to establish residency and qualify for lower costs? Ask about grants, loans, scholarships, assistantships, and availability of off-campus jobs. Remember: high cost does not necessarily mean the best education.
- **Information:** You can find data on all of these topics (and more) by contacting the graduate admissions office, visiting a campus, reviewing guidebooks and of course, the program websites.

To how many graduate schools should I apply?

Generally, five or six. These should include a school that you will certainly be admitted to, a school you will probably be admitted to, and a school that you might be admitted to. Keep in mind that there is a fee required with most applications.

Before I apply, can I know if a graduate program will admit me or not?

No --- but you can make an educated guess. Most schools require a B undergraduate average. Sometimes, departments have their own requirements. Find out before applying!

When should I do all this?

Begin research in your junior year. That will give you enough time to do a careful and complete search. Submit financial aid requests as soon as possible. Check with individual grad schools to find out when they start to accept applications.

What test do I need to take?

The sooner you begin selecting schools, the more time you will have to study for any required standardized test. If necessary, you can take it more than once to get the necessary admission score. Most schools will not accept scores more than three to five years old. Find out which test you will be required to take. Some examples of tests are:

- GRE - Graduate Record Exam
- MAT - Miller Analogy Test
- GMAT - Graduate Management Admissions Test
- LSAT - Law School Admission Test
- MCAT - Medical College Admission Test
- DAT – Dental Aptitude Test

How do I apply to grad school?

Contact your schools of interest to request application information. Have more than one copy in case you make any mistakes. Complete EXACTLY as instructed.

You may also be required to send additional information including:

- **Official undergraduate transcript** (obtained through the Registrar's office).
- **Letters of recommendation.** You will need two or three. Think carefully before you decide on references. If possible, choose people who not only know you well, but who are also familiar with the graduate school you want to attend. Depending on the program, you may want to use faculty members AND professionals in your field. (This is one of the reasons why you did an internship or had related job experience.)
 - Give them plenty of time to write a reference for you. Bring them the recommendation form and a self-addressed envelope. Supply your references with a copy of your resume or relevant class work to assist them when writing your recommendation letter and/or evaluation form.
- **Personal essay:** You will probably be asked to write a personal statement about why you want to attend graduate school in general or a specific program in particular. Requirements about length, topic, and format vary widely. There are sample books in the Career Development Center.
 - Begin by thinking carefully about the topic. Write a brief outline. It can be just a list of five or six words you want to discuss. Put them in order: beginning-middle-end. Think about the list. Write your first rough draft and send it to the CDC Review Service. The best essay will be clear, concise, and passionate. Show the graduate school faculty that you are articulate, realistic, and a competent writer. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling DO count, so be sure that your essay is perfect before you submit it with your application.



Do I just mail in my application and wait for an answer?

Some programs, especially those in medical and business schools, often require an interview. Follow the same procedure as you would for a job interview. The Career Development Center can assist you with that, too.

Graduate programs in art, writing, or related fields often ask for a portfolio as part of the application to display your skills and ability. Follow the requirements exactly as to when/where the portfolio should be sent and how the pieces should be labeled with your personal information.

Is that all I need to know about getting into graduate school?

Not at all. You should also think about:

- Part-time, online, hybrid, weekend, and accelerated programs
- Financial planning
- Graduate programs for non-traditional students
- Auditions for performing arts programs
- Foreign student applications
- And, probably, much, much more!

Final thoughts...

We see you may be speechless and/or overwhelmed. Do not worry. The Career Development Center has general information about graduate education as well as guides to graduate and professional programs in the Career Library.

The Career Development Center also hosts a graduate school fair each year. Similar to a job fair, grad school fairs are special events where representatives from graduate schools meet in one central location to provide information and answer questions. Find out which schools are registered to attend and make your list of questions.



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF...

- What are the goals and values that mean the most to me in my career? In my life?
- Is grad school necessary? Can I reach my goals another way?
- Is a graduate degree necessary for advancement in my field?
- Will the expense of grad school pay off in a better salary?
- Am I motivated? Willing to learn and work hard? Excited to continue my professional development?

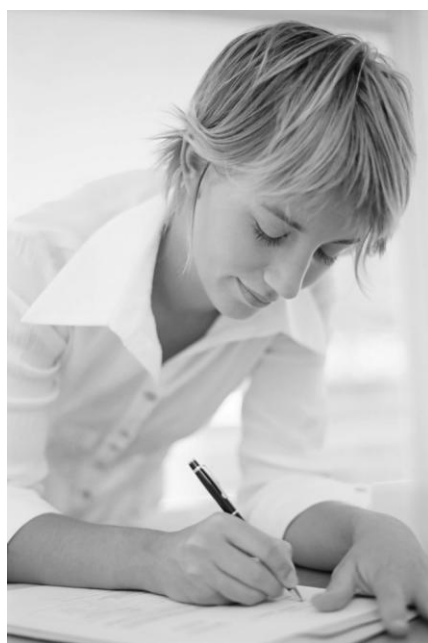
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION

While grades and standardized tests may influence an applicant's acceptance to a graduate school, failure to follow the established application process/instructions can have devastating consequences. Luckily, this problem can be avoided if you follow a few simple rules:

1. **Contact** the Admissions Office/Graduate Program for an application.
2. **Find out the application deadline.** If a school has "rolling admissions," do not wait to send in your application. Rolling admissions considers applications in the order in which they arrive. If you wait until just before the deadline to submit your application, the reviewers may have already read – and accepted – numerous applications. Your chances of being accepted are greater the earlier you apply.
3. **Ensure your application is complete & correct.** Different schools have different policies about filing applications so read instructions carefully. Sometimes you will mail everything in one envelope--references included. Other times you will need to ask your references to mail them directly to the program.

Some schools have a 2-part process. If your preliminary application is accepted, you send a second application. **Check your application carefully and ask someone else to review it so you do not make any spelling errors, grammar mistakes or typos.** Try looking at the words backwards--from the end to the beginning. That way, you will not be reading for content and you will be less likely to pass over an error.

4. **Know (and pay) the application fees.** Some programs will waive application fees if you attend an open house or other recruiting event, so do your research. Remember: it can be expensive to apply to graduate school; plan carefully when sending applications.



GRADUATE SCHOOL ESSAYS

When completing your application for graduate or professional school, you will likely write an admissions essay/personal statement.

Of course, the essay will be about you, but the topics may vary. For example, one may ask for a general personal statement while others may be more specific and ask why you chose a certain field, what you intend to do when you graduate, and why you are applying to their program. No matter what the essay question, keep in mind that admission committees want to know:

1. **Are you realistic about the field in general?** The applicant who wants to get a Master's in Social Work to "help rid the world of poverty" and the education student who wants to "mold the minds of youth for the next century" are simply not realistic. Someone who does not have a clear view of his or her field of study is probably not very realistic about the demands and rigors of a graduate program either. Most graduate schools look for students who know what they are getting into.
2. **Are you articulate?** Can you write a decent paragraph? Graduate schools want students who can express themselves in an intelligent way, using proper logic, form, grammar and punctuation. The essay is important not only for what you write, but also for how you write it. If the directions indicate to write your essay in a specific place on the application, use that area and that area only. Don't forget to submit your draft to the CDC Review Service for a general critique and suggestions!



LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Most graduate schools require letters of recommendation. These will be sent either by you (usually as part of your application) or directly by those who write them.

Think carefully about whom you will ask to be your references. Choose people who know you and your work, not simple social acquaintances (i.e. friends of your parents or your friend's parents, no matter how influential they might be).

In general, references should:

- Know what kind of student you are and how you work in an academic setting.
- Be familiar with graduate schools in general and perhaps the one you are applying to.
- Work with many students and be able to compare you favorably to them.
- Be articulate and have excellent written communication skills.
- Think highly of you and be willing to put that opinion on paper.

Choose professionals who can attest to the kind of student you are. If you are returning to school after having worked, you may not be able to contact any professors who can address your performance as a student. In that case, graduate schools may accept the recommendation of your employer(s).

Ask your chosen professionals if they are willing to give you a good, meaningful reference. If they are not exactly sure what to say about you, give suggestions; remind them of a special project you did, a problem you solved, a good grade you received in their course--anything that indicates you will be a successful graduate student. You should also give them your transcript and resume to assist them in writing the reference.

In general, references should address your: academic skills, communication skills, maturity, intellect, and motivation. Ask for reference letters early, before many other students have thought of it. If those who write your letters are to mail them directly to the program, be sure to provide addressed, stamped envelopes.



RESOURCES

GREAT WEBSITES:

<http://careers.kutztown.edu>
www.petersons.com
www.gradschools.com

www.princetonreview.com
www.collegesearch.com
www.graduateguide.com

PRESENTATIONS, TEST PREP, FAIRS, LIBRARY:

Each semester we offer a “Thinking About Graduate School” presentation and a practice test through Kaplan Test Prep...check out our website for the date & time. Also, review the CDC website for listings of local graduate school fairs (including our own on-campus fair in the Spring). Stop by the office to peruse our many resources related to graduate and professional school.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS!

Congratulations! You’ve been accepted and have made the decision to attend graduate school. Now it’s time to begin your graduate student adventure! Some points to consider:

- Relocate
- Make friends in the program
- Select a mentor
- Establish a research agenda
- Make contacts with the support staff in the department/program
- Study! Study! Study!
- Quickly become familiar with the university library and its website
- Network – increase your network and maintain yours at Kutztown; stay in touch with Attend lectures and special events
- Join relevant professional associations as a student member
- Attend professional seminars and conferences
- Read newsletters and journal articles from professional affiliations



BEST OF LUCK!