



GRADUATE SCHOOL: TO GO or NOT TO GO?

→ Determine why you would consider grad school:

- Do you have a real interest in a particular academic area?
- Do you want to enter a field that requires an advanced degree? Have you determined that this degree will enhance your career advancement options?
- Are you continuing your education simply because you are afraid of the alternatives?
- Are you satisfying others' expectations?

→ Other questions to consider:

Is graduate/professional school a possibility?

- Can you make the necessary commitment in time and effort?
- How will you finance it?
- How will attending graduate school affect your family or relationships?
- Are you burnt out academically?

Will this advanced degree lead you to where you want to be professionally or personally?

- What types of programs would interest or benefit you?
- Do the programs you are considering require or recommend related experience prior to entry?
- Are you qualified for the program you are considering?
- Do you love the field you want to go into?
- Will getting an internship or working for a year help you get into schools you would like to attend?

If your reasons are to postpone getting a job or to satisfy others' expectations, you may want to reconsider going to grad school. You may want to get more work or volunteer experience, build networking skills, travel, or gain insight from other professionals before attending grad school.

When to pursue graduate studies...

Here's the case for working a couple of years before grad school:

- Many students want (and deserve) a break after being a student for the last 16 or so years. It's healthy to experience life outside of the ivory tower for a while.
- Life experience often leads to better informed decisions about graduate school. People with a couple years of life experience under their belts are often more self-aware, focused and mature than they were as undergraduates.
- Leading business and law schools often prefer to admit students who have worked for a couple of years first. The rationale is applicants with more life experience have more to offer in the seminar style format that many graduate programs employ. *(That said, many students are accepted to leading law/business schools right after undergraduate school since **internships** and organizational involvement sometimes count as 'experience')

Here's the case for going directly into graduate school:

- You've defined your career goals, know what you want and know that graduate school is the best way to get there.
- Students wishing to enter specialized professions that require advanced degrees such as university teaching, law, medicine, engineering, architecture, social science research, clinical psychology, etc. often elect to go straight into graduate school.
- You have a passion for a particular subject and would love nothing better than to devote most of your waking hours to learning about it.
- You know your financial situation and how you will be able to afford the cost of graduate school.
- You are ready to work hard academically while balancing your work, school and personal life.

GRAD SCHOOL APPLICATION TIMELINE

Sophomore Year:

- Select a major.
- Focus on doing well in your classes to build a strong academic base.
- Develop and demonstrate your writing, research and analytical skills.
- Begin building relationships with faculty members in your academic department.

Junior Year:

- Work toward completing the core requirements for your major.
- Complete an internship during the semester or over the summer to explore your career interests, gain practical experience, and develop professional contacts.
- Talk to your advisor or faculty members in your department about graduate programs.
- Consider faculty members who can serve as references to support your admission to graduate school. Discuss with them your goals and ask them to recommend specific institutions and/or programs to which you might apply.
- Obtain information on graduate programs by requesting catalogues and application materials.

Summer before Senior Year:

- Gather information on graduate program admission tests and register for appropriate dates.
- It is recommended that LSATs (Law School Admissions Tests) be taken during the summer after your junior year.
- If applying to medical schools, you are encouraged to take the MCAT (Medical College Admissions Test) in the spring of your junior year.

Senior Year:

- Take the appropriate graduate admissions tests (Graduate Record Exam (GRE), Miller Analogies Test (MAT); Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) if you did not take them in the summer.
- Carefully select faculty and/or professionals who can write positive, persuasive and personalized letters of recommendation for you.
- Begin working with application materials early. Plan to complete your graduate school admission file by December. Law school applications should be made in the fall of the senior year. Medical school applications are generally due in the summer, no earlier than the first of June. In general, if you are applying for the FALL after graduation, you need to submit your materials by Jan/Feb of your senior year.
****IMPORTANT- Consult the application deadline and application requirements for your specific graduate program.**
- For assistance in writing your personal statement, consult your faculty advisor or make an appointment with Career Services.
- Talk to graduate students at the institutions to which you are applying. Ask both about the rigor of the program and environment.
- Investigate financial aid and employment opportunities at prospective institutions.
- If your graduate program requires an interview for admission, consider doing a mock interview with Career Services to prepare.
- Make your selection and prepare to enter the program of your choice. (Most graduate programs announce their decisions March through May for Fall admissions.)

TIPS on Preparing for Graduate School:

RESEARCHING:

- It is always best to visit the school you are thinking about attending. Attend an open house or schedule a meeting with the program director. Prepare questions ahead of time and ask to meet current students in the program.
- Most graduate programs have information online. Read about the program and print out information about requirements and deadlines. Keep a separate folder for each program you are considering.
- Get recommendations from faculty or a trusted advisor. Your faculty can recommend programs/schools.

TESTING:

- Consider test preparation books, electronic guides, and courses. Test preparation has been proven to make a difference. Consider www.kaplan.com and/or www.princetonreview.com. The J. Eugene Smith Library also has several test preparation books.
- Make certain that your scores are forwarded to schools(s)/program(s).
- Try to take your test the summer before your senior year.

APPLYING:

- Follow directions! Read what the requirements are for applying and pay attention to application deadlines!
- Applying EARLY can make a difference. Do not wait until the last possible moment to apply to graduate school. Preparing your application materials early can help you avoid the possibility of mistakes. Also, give your references time to write recommendation letters.
- A "Rolling Admissions Deadline" means that programs have a quota and will not close the deadline until the quota is met by the program.

FINANCING:

- Seek out the availability of graduate assistantships (G.A. positions), fellowships and scholarships from the school and/or program you are applying. If you are unsure about financial aid options, call or stop by the Financial Aid office at the school you are interested in applying to.

HELPFUL RESOURCES:

Choosing a program:

- www.gradschools.com
- www.petersons.com
- www.princetonreview.com
- www.usnews.com **includes ratings of schools and programs
- www.gradview.com
- www.graduateguide.com

Test Preparation:

- Keep a lookout for visiting Test Prep companies such as:
 - Princeton Review www.princetonreview.com
 - Kaplan www.kaplan.com/testpreparation
- J. Eugene Smith Library has several test preparation books
- <http://www.testprepreview.com/> -free practice tests
- www.ets.org/gre includes practice tests

Preparing for Graduate School: Questions to Ask Yourself and Grad School

Questions for Yourself:

- 1.) Will a graduate degree help me reach my career goals?
- 2.) What program would best suit the career path I want?
- 3.) Do I want to travel out-of-state or remain in-state?
- 4.) Do I want to work while going to school?
- 5.) Can I afford Graduate School? What are options for financial aid? How do I plan to pay for Graduate School?
- 6.) Do I want to live on campus? Can I live on campus?
- 7.) How long do I want to be in Graduate School?
- 8.) Can I make the necessary commitment in time and effort?
- 9.) Do I meet the admissions standards/requirements?
- 10.) What programs/schools have been recommended?

IMPORTANT: Before asking a Recruiter or Graduate School Program Representative questions, please do your research!

Research topics such as:

- *Fields of study offered*
- *Reputation of the school and the program*
- *Geographic location*
- *Size*
- *Cost and financial assistance*
- *Time required to complete degree*
- *Surrounding community and college environment*
- *Internship Opportunities/Career Assistance*
- *Admission standards/requirements*
- *Research/Academic Focus*
- *Accreditation*

Questions to Ask the Recruiter:

- 1.) What qualities are you looking for in an applicant? Can you describe a “strong candidate” for your program?
- 2.) What types of financial aid are offered to individuals in my program?
- 3.) Are Graduate Assistantships (GA positions) offered that will help offset tuition? How do I apply?
- 4.) What are the general requirements for entrance into the school?
- 5.) What is the faculty to staff ratio?
- 6.) Is on-campus housing available?
- 7.) What is your acceptance rate?
- 8.) What kinds of jobs have graduates pursued after attending your program?
- 9.) Is there a required internship/practicum experience? If so, is there assistance provided in finding one?
- 10.) What is the attrition rate? How long does it take to complete the program?