

Maryville University's Guide to Exploring Graduate Study

Preparing for graduate school can be a daunting task. Understanding the process in selecting a program that best fits your passion, your budget and your timeframe begins by considering the graduate school selection and application process. The key is to start early, plan thoroughly, and to make the most of this important advanced learning process.

First Steps Towards Graduate School

The first steps to consider graduate school begins by asking yourself the following:

- How does a graduate program fit into my personal and professional growth?
- What are the trends, developments, and characteristics in my field of interest?
- Which individuals, programs, and centers are teaching in my interest area?
- What personal time consideration, finances, and support, as well as necessity to work impact my performance in graduate school?
- Am I open to travel and/or relocate in order to attend graduate school?

Preparing for Graduate Study

■ PROGRAM OF STUDY

- Degrees offered
- Majors or areas of concentration
- Field work or research options
- Percentage of students attending full-time/part-time

■ ADMISSIONS PREFERENCES

- Preferences for recent graduates or work experience
- Degree in subject or course prerequisites
- Relative importance of test scores, grades, recommendations, statements, experience
- State residence

■ FOLLOW UP OF GRADUATES

- Positions taken by graduates
- Department and/or campus assistance in job search

■ FACILITIES

- Libraries, research, laboratories, equipment

■ FACULTY

- Size of department; depth of faculty
- Diversity and type of research and teaching interests
- Publications and affiliations
- Availability for class and office hours

■ FELLOWSHIPS AND FINANCIAL AID

- Type and amount of awards available
- Criteria used for choosing recipients

■ INTERNSHIPS AND FIELD EXPERIENCE

- Availability and type of practical experience

■ ACCREDITATION

- Accredited and by whom

Application Process

ADMISSION CRITERIA

The specific criteria and their relative weights vary, depending on the academic discipline, the particular institution, and number of applicants. The most important criteria generally include:

- DEGREE AND GRADE POINT AVERAGE

G.P.A., either overall or in upper division or major courses
Bachelors Degree in the field or completion of specified courses
Conditional acceptance or nonmatriculated basis if deficiencies exist?

- APPLICATION, STATEMENT, AND LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Application and clear statement of purpose

Note: There may be school and department forms.
The application process is centralized for some types of professional schools.

Two to four references standard (may be required form or format).
Official transcripts (2+) from all colleges attended.

- QUALIFYING EXAMINATIONS

Examinations which may be required:

Graduate Record Exam (GRE) -
general & specific subject exams

Miller Analogies Test (MAT)

Law Schools Admissions Test (LSAT)

Graduate Management Admissions
Test (GMAT)

Medical College Admissions Test
(MCAT)

Pharmacy College Admissions Test
(PCAT)

Dental Aptitude Test (DAT)

Veterinary Aptitude Test (VAT)

Optometry Admissions Test (OAT)

- PERSONAL INTERVIEW, PORTFOLIOS, AUDITIONS

Screening may address objectives, finances, choice of program

- RELEVANT WORK, RESEARCH OR OTHER EXPERIENCES & PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT

APPROXIMATE DEADLINE DATES

October - January: deadlines for fellowships outside of the school

January 15 - March 1: deadlines for applications and fellowships for fall entry

Financial Aid & Support

Much of the financial aid at the graduate level is merit based, often in the form of a fellowship that may or may not have a service-related component (such as an assistantship). Most of the awards are given by the academic department, and many are for Ph.D. students. Types of financial aid available include:

Merit based monetary awards, including grants, fellowships and scholarships

- Tuition scholarships or waivers - reduce or fully cover tuition
- Fellowships - support for college costs, typically with no payback, provided by the institution
- External grants & funding - private foundation or federal agency

Loans (through banks, the government or the educational institution)

- Federal loans are typically the most common funding source for graduate students

Federal Work Study - need based

Assistantships

- Graduate Assistantships - 10-20 hours work/week; typically pay full or partial tuition and stipend
- Teaching Assistantships - teaching, recitation courses and/or assisting a professor with office hours, ½ time
- Research Assistantships - assisting ongoing research; can lead to own research project
- Residence Assistantships - room and board and a stipend in a college residence hall

Choosing to Work or Attend Graduate School?

Most programs expect you to have clearly defined interests and an area of specialization. Some graduate programs, such as MBA schools, emphasize the importance of work before graduate school. For professions entering law, medicine or university teaching, going directly to graduate school may be your next step. If your undergraduate GPA was not within most graduate school requirements, work may help decide your area of interest, demonstrate your level of maturity and competency, and support your financial commitment to graduate studies.

How Many Schools Should I Apply to?

Apply to as many as you can afford, considering the number of letters you must ask your references to write. Understand that leading graduate programs are very competitive so weigh your options regarding the time you are committing to apply, the cost of submitting your application, and program fit with your individual goals.

Researching Relevant Graduate Programs

Free graduate program information pamphlets are available in Maryville's Career Education Center. Other professional guides, available at most bookstores or online, that may be individually purchased include:

- PETERSON'S ANNUAL GUIDES TO GRADUATE STUDY (6 volumes)
 - Overview of Graduate and Professional Programs
 - Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences
 - Biological Sciences
 - Physical Sciences, Mathematics, and Agricultural Sciences, Environment & Natural Resources
 - Engineering and Applied Sciences
 - Business, Education, Health, Information Studies, Law, and Social Work
- The College Blue Book: Degrees Offered and Narrative Descriptions
- The College Handbook and Index of Majors
- Architectural Schools in North America
- Graduate Study in Psychology and Associated Fields
- Admission Requirements of U.S. and Canadian Dental Schools
- Medical School Admission Requirements
- Pharmacy School Admission Requirements
- The Official Guide of U.S. Law Schools
- Peterson's MBA Programs

Timetable in Applying to Graduate School

Realistically, researching graduate schools should begin in the summer before your senior year of college. Be familiar with deadlines for specific programs since they may vary by each institution to which you apply. Financial aid deadlines may be earlier than admissions.

Summer/Early	Write draft statement of purpose
Fall	Start browsing through guides to graduate programs and college catalogs Meet with faculty members to discuss statement and possible programs Sign up for required standardized tests Visit schools; meet with faculty and graduate students in programs
Fall	Take standardized tests Request application materials from programs Ask for letters of recommendation (i.e. faculty, advisors, supervisors, mentors) Order transcripts Research financial aid; complete applications for with early deadlines Finalize statement of purpose
Early Winter	Complete application and financial aid forms Give recommenders forms to fill out or addresses to send letters Mail applications; watch deadlines for admissions and financial aid Contact programs to set up possible interviews Follow up by phone to verify all materials have been received

Application Checklist

■ *Statement of Purpose*

A statement of purpose is approximately 300-500 words concerning your purpose for undertaking or continuing graduate study, your reasons for attending graduate school, and your professional plans, career goals, and research interests. You also may explain any irregularities or special circumstances applicable to your background and elaborate on your special abilities, awards, achievements, scholarly publications, and/or professional history.

■ *Letters of Recommendation*

Letters of recommendation are extremely important. Choose your recommenders carefully. Think of the letters as an integral part of a package that will present an accurate and complete picture of you and your qualifications.

■ *Transcripts*

Transcripts provide graduate schools information about the classes you've taken as well as the grade received for each course. Transcripts are sent from your university's registrar's office. Be sure to start the process early so that the registrar's office has plenty of time to get your transcript to the graduate school(s) you are applying to in a timely fashion.

■ *Standardized Tests*

Standardized tests are generally required for pre-admission to any graduate program. Such tests include the GRE, LSAT, MCAT, and GMAT, depending on the type of program you are selecting. Be sure to take the designated standardized test early, typically the Spring or Summer before applying for graduate school—take note of admission deadlines.

■ *Applications for Admission*

Review department web sites and/or contact the department to which you plan to apply for specific details about admission requirements, department standards, test scores, supplemental materials, and deadlines. Understand the guidelines when submitting electronically versus a paper application. All international applicants should be aware of the documentation requirements for their intended study.

■ *Applications for Financial Aid*

To apply for student financial aid from the federal government, including the Pell Grant, Perkins Loan, Stafford Loan and work-study, you will need to submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). There is no charge for submitting this form. The FAFSA is also required by all state and many school student assistance programs. Some private colleges and universities will require one or more supplemental forms to obtain information not included on the FAFSA. They may have their own forms or they may ask you to complete the College Board's CSS PROFILE form.

■ *Applications for Fellowships*

Most fellowship and grant awards are for a set academic period (three terms or two semesters). Departmental fellowships and grants are awarded in varying amounts and may include fees and nonresident tuition. Awards are competitive and open to all graduate students. Recipients of fellowships, traineeships and grants must maintain satisfactory progress throughout their tenure. You must be registered for a minimum course schedule and expected to devote a percent of time to study and research.

■ *Income Tax Return (if necessary for financial aid applications)*

Income tax returns may be required of you and/or your parents, depending on the source of income that will be supporting your graduate studies. Be prepared to provide details indicating your economic level of eligibility or qualification for financial assistance.

■ *Scheduled Visits or Interviews*

When applying to graduate school, it is essential to plan to visit the campus to get a sense for what the academic institution has to offer. Make a list of questions you feel are important to ask about the graduate program, campus services, and other relevant lifestyle requirements while attending school. Additionally, make a list of general questions you will be prepared to answer regarding your strengths and capabilities that make you a worthy candidate in their graduate program. Research and rehearsal prior to the campus interview will help you deliver a winning interview and minimize the potential for an unexpected situation.

■ *Graduate School Resources*

www.usnews.com/articles/education/best-graduate-schools/2008

www.gradschools.com

www.edvisors.comwww.petersons.com/graduate

www.mygretutor.com

www.princetonreview.com

www.kaptest.com

www.finaid.org

For more information contact your faculty advisor

or the Career Education Office, Mouton Hall, 314.529.9375.



