

Planning for Graduate School



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MAJOR AND CAREER ADVISING

- Individual advising by scheduled appointment or during Walk-In Hours (9:00 - 11:30 a.m., Monday - Thursday, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m., Monday - Friday)
- Self-assessment exercises
- Computerized career guidance programs: CareerBeam® and FOCUS
- Seminars on a wide range of career topics including Résumé Writing, Interviewing, Career Search Strategies, Business Etiquette & Professional Dress, etc.

JOB SEARCH ASSISTANCE

- Personal advising on job search strategies
- Résumé and cover letter critiques
- Résumé and Interviewing Techniques seminars
- Mock Interview Program
- On-campus interviewing for winter break and summer jobs
- Monthly Online Summer Jobs and Internships Bulletin (January - May)
- Career fairs and networking events (see schedule below)
- CareerBeam® (Over 18 million employer leads)
- VAULT® Online Career Library

CAREER RESOURCE CENTER

- Career guides
- College and graduate school information
- Graduate admissions tests registration materials
- Computer lab

BOBCAT ONLINE JOB SEARCH PROGRAM

For Current Year Graduates and Alumni

(You must register for these services - ask for more information.)

- Résumé Referrals
- Online Job Postings
- On-Campus Interviewing for Career Positions

CAREER FAIRS, 2007 - 2008

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| • Ohio University Fall Career Fair | October 3 |
| • Ohio University Winter Career Fair | February 5 |
| • Teacher Recruitment Consortium | April 11 |

CAREER SERVICES WEB SITE

- <http://www.ohio.edu/careers>

PLANNING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

Many people consider attending graduate school but are unsure whether they should or how to begin the application process. Attending graduate school is a major decision and should not be made lightly. You need to consider your professional and personal goals, research different programs, and submit your materials in a timely fashion. This handout will address many of the common questions individuals encounter when considering graduate study.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE APPLYING

Should I Attend Graduate School?

If you are considering graduate study, you need to perform a self-assessment before proceeding with application materials. Some areas you might want to consider:

1. **Professional goals**

- Do your goals require a graduate degree?
- How will you use the degree once you've acquired it?

2. **Motivation for attending**

- Are you considering graduate school because it feels "safe" as you are wary about entering the job market?
- Are you considering graduate school due to the wishes of a friend or family member?

What type of program should I select and how long will it take?

1. **Academic**--focuses on original research or creative activity, teaching at a college/university, working in a research facility.
 - Master's degrees take 1-3 years.
 - Ph.D. programs take approximately 3-7 years after obtaining the Master's degree.
3. **Professional**--law, medicine, architecture, business, theology, social work are a few examples; stresses practical application of knowledge
 - Professional degrees take approximately 2-5 years depending on the area of study.
 - Medical programs vary based on whether a person specializes after finishing medical school. Medical school—usually 4 years after undergraduate, then 1-3 years of residency/intern, and could involve 2-6 more years based on the area of specialization.

Should I Work before Attending Graduate School or Go Right Away?

Pros/Cons of Working First

Pros—gain experience, help determine area for graduate study, clarify career goals, assess likes/dislikes/abilities, may allow you to find out if an advanced degree is required based on career goals, organization/company may offer tuition reimbursement if you return to graduate school, gives time to mature/learn/gain a perspective on the world outside academe, can enhance application credentials if you have borderline test scores/grades.

Cons—may not return to graduate school, lose study skills, financial considerations, trying to balance work/family/school.

Pros/Cons of Going to Graduate School Immediately after Undergraduate Degree

Pros—may be required in some professions to obtain career goal, still “in school” mindset, probably haven't developed too many financial responsibilities, desire to study more in your chosen area, true passion to continue learning, you do not want a gap in your educational experiences, fewer personal obligations such as a family.

Cons—burnout, existing school loans,* no significant work experience, being labeled an "academic" when you try to enter job market, some graduate programs may prefer/require you to work first.

*Existing school loans can be deferred while you are in graduate school.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL?

Researching Programs

Careful research will help you make an informed decision about existing graduate programs at a variety of excellent institutions. Research sources include the Internet, Career Resource Center in the Office of Career Services, talking to professors, Alden Library, campus visits, meeting with faculty and current graduate students at programs you're considering, and looking through professional research journals in your chosen academic discipline to see what universities are represented. It is vital that you find programs suited to your professional goals. Careful research should allow you to identify programs that are a good fit!

Career Resource Center has all the Peterson's Guides for Graduate Programs, Peterson's Guide to 4-Year Colleges, The College Board's Index of Majors and Graduate Degrees, the Ohio University Graduate Catalog, and a free "Graduate School Guide" (web site: www.graduateguide.com). If you would like to obtain your own copy of Ohio University's Graduate Catalog, contact the Graduate School Office, Wilson Hall, 3rd Floor or check their web site: (www.ohiou.edu/gcatalog/index.html). Additional websites to consider are www.gradschools.com or www.petersons.com.

Evaluating Programs

There are many issues to consider when evaluating graduate programs. Some of the issues include:

- Quality of Faculty, faculty specialization
- Reputation of program in that particular discipline
- Prestige of the college/university
- Accreditation of program
- Size of college/university
- Program offers classes in your area of interest/specialization (check this carefully)
- Facilities
- Student Services
- Educational cost
- Housing—cost, quality, location relative to campus

- Opportunity for financial aid, loans, teaching/graduate assistant positions, scholarships
- Geographic location—weather, proximity to family/friends
- Community itself
- Other issues of importance to you—diversity, health care, rural/city, transportation issues, recreational opportunities, religious organizations, cultural opportunities.

Obtaining Application Materials

Each institution you are considering will have their own process for applying to graduate school. The application process can vary greatly from one institution to the next, so it is important to follow application procedures carefully. Some graduate programs and universities have application forms online which will accelerate the application process. You will want to obtain the following types of materials during the application process:

- Graduate catalog—information on all programs and application requirements (many are online).
- Departmental information about a specific graduate program.
- Some colleges/universities will require you to apply to The Graduate School and your chosen program of study—often you will have to be admitted to both The Graduate School and your department/discipline to be accepted for graduate study.
- Admissions applications (many are online).
- Financial aid forms—Federal, college/university, scholarship applications.

Registering for, Studying for, and Taking Admissions Exams

Almost all graduate programs will require you to take some type of standardized exam. There are different exams based on different areas of study. Make sure you check on dates and locations for these exams because you may need to register up to eight weeks prior to taking the exam.

Exam registration packets are available in the Career Resource Center for the GMAT, GRE, and LSAT. The Graduate School Office, Wilson 3rd Floor, also has some application booklets. However, most graduate school exam applications are completed online. The MCAT (Medical College Admission Test) registration is online at <http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat>. Information regarding the medical school application process is available at <http://www.aamc.org/students>. The Preprofessional Advising Coordinator in the Dept. of Biological Sciences, Irvine Hall, can provide additional information regarding: OAT (Optometry Assessment Test), DAT (Dental Admission Test), and PCAT (Pharmacy College Admission Test). For information regarding the MAT (Miller Analogies Test), click on the following web site: <http://harcourtassessment.com/haiweb/Cultures/en-US/dotCom/milleranalogies.com.htm>

Studying for the exam(s) you are required to take is crucial. Consider taking an exam review class, purchasing a CD-ROM which has sample tests, or study guides. The Career Resource Center has study guides for these exams, and most of the application packets have sample test questions. Ohio University's Community and Professional Programs office has preparation courses for various graduate exams; check their web site <http://www.ohiou.edu/noncredit/explore.htm> for more information and a schedule.

Ohio University's Educational Testing Center, located in the Computer Services Center (CSC Building), offers the following tests on computer: GRE General, GRE Writing Assessment, and GMAT. **For more information on the Testing Center**, brochures are available in the Career Resource Center, ETC in 101A CSC, or on their web site at: www.ohiou.edu/etc/. Unofficial test results are generally available the same

day for individuals taking a graduate exam on computer. If you are required to take an exam not offered at Ohio University, you will need to locate a testing center at another college or university.

***If you have financial need**, it is possible to take graduate entrance exams once at no cost. Check with the Office of Financial Aid for more information.

General guidelines for the different tests include:

- May take 3-10 weeks to receive scores, depending on which exam you take
- Will need to take in photo ID's, pencils; cannot leave during exam
- GRE—Graduate Record Exam, 4.5 hr. general test given almost exclusively on computer, measures verbal, quantitative and analytical skills; some disciplines have "Subject Tests" which involve two additional hours of testing; other areas require a recently-implemented Writing Test.
- LSAT—Law School Admission Test
- GMAT—Graduate Management Admission Test
- MCAT—Medical College Admission Test
- MAT—Miller Analogies Test

Official Transcripts

Most institutions require an "official transcript" from Ohio University which includes a list of classes taken, grades, GPA, class rank, graduation date, and an embossed University seal. Transcripts can be requested from the Registrar's Office in Chubb Hall; you can request transcripts online, by fax, or in person. Please refer to the Transcript Office's website: www.ohiou.edu/registrar/transcri.htm which explains these options in detail. Students and alumni can call the Transcript Office at (740) 593-4206 for a recorded message with information or (740) 593-4216 to speak with a Transcript Office staff member. If you are applying for graduate study at Ohio University, the Graduate College usually requests a copy of your transcript and there is no fee associated with this request. **If you attended several colleges or universities prior to completing your degree at Ohio University, you may need to submit a transcript from each college/university attended.** Remember to allow processing time for your transcript requests!

Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are generally written by faculty or other professionals within the University who can speak for your ability to do well in graduate school (academic advisors who know you well, advisors for student organizations, etc.). Most programs require three to four letters. You must consider carefully who will write letters for you; always ask the person if they are willing to write a letter of recommendation and do not assume she/he will write. If you ask the person directly, then they can tell you if they feel comfortable writing a recommendation. There are potential legal issues regarding "waiving" your rights to view letters of recommendation based on FERPA, Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act, so educate yourself about the option of waiving or not waiving the right to access your letters.

You should provide your references with a copy of your current résumé and personal statement as to why you want to attend graduate school. Some colleges/universities may have a form that your references must fill out and return. These forms involve rank ordering the candidate in a variety of categories and a blank area for the person to include other information (or a separate letter may be attached). Recommendations can be used to your advantage if GPA or exam scores are borderline.

Portfolio, Audition Pieces, or Interview

Some disciplines require a portfolio of your work (i.e. architecture, art, graphic design, photography, visual communication, journalism, teaching, etc.). Other disciplines require a performance or audition piece(s) performed live or submitted on tape, CD, or DVD (i.e. dance, music, film, theatre, broadcast journalism, telecommunications, etc.). You are encouraged to speak with professors in your area to learn more about preparing these items correctly and professionally. A graduate program may require you to travel for an interview, portfolio review, or a live audition. Since you will want to prepare for an interview, you are encouraged to participate in a Mock Interview through Career Services. Interviewing handouts may be obtained from Career Services in Lindley, on our web site under "Resources and Handouts," or by attending an interviewing seminar.

Personal Statement

A graduate program may provide a list of questions to address or explain the type of information you need to include in a personal statement. Statements are generally two to three pages typed, but each program may specify a word or page limit. The personal statement serves as a writing sample, is used to determine if you are a good "fit" for the program, and oftentimes is used to assess how well you argue a point in writing. It is helpful to have other people read over your personal statement paying close attention to writing style, grammar, argumentation, and thought development.

Applying for Financial Aid

Unfortunately, many gifted students do not apply for graduate study as an undergraduate because they have financial concerns. Some students do not want to incur more debt, while for others, their family may not be able to finance their education beyond the bachelor's degree. However, there are many financial aid packages available for graduate students. Financial aid opportunities include:

- Loans and Grants
- Tuition Waivers
- Scholarships
- Teaching Assistantships
- Graduate Assistant/Associate
- Fellowships

You will probably need to fill out a Federal Financial Aid form as well as submit an application for financial aid to the graduate program. If you need to obtain a loan, many loan agencies do not require that you start repaying your debt until six months after graduation. The Office of Financial Aid should be able to answer questions on financing graduate school whether you continue at Ohio University or attend another institution.

WHAT IS THE TIMELINE FOR THE APPLICATION PROCESS?

Timing is crucial when applying for graduate study! The following timeline may help you plan the application process.

Junior Year

Research programs, determine type(s) of exam(s) you need to take, visit programs and speak with current graduate students and faculty, begin studying for exams, send for catalogs, gather application materials, assess programs you're considering, research financial aid at each institution and federal aid programs.

Summer between Junior/Senior Year

Study for exams, possibly take exams, work on personal statement, determine who will write letters of recommendation, work on portfolio/audition pieces.

Senior Year

Fall—take entrance exam(s), complete personal statement, have others read over personal statement, complete applications, develop flow chart of what each school requires for the application process and check off each item as it is completed, request official transcripts, give forms and supplemental information to your references for their ease in writing letters of recommendation, finish portfolio/audition pieces, submit any necessary financial aid forms/applications.

**Make sure your file is complete! After a reasonable length of time, check in with each graduate school to make sure they received all required materials!

Winter—be patient. Wait to hear from the schools.

Spring—make decision as to where you will attend, finalize financial aid, find a place to live!

*****Have ALL materials submitted and ALL exams completed prior to Jan. 1*****

WHAT CRITERIA DO GRADUATE PROGRAMS USE TO ADMIT STUDENTS?

Grade Point Average (GPA)

The requirements for grade point averages vary from program to program. Most graduate programs prefer at least a 3.0-3.2 cumulative GPA. If you continue on in graduate school and apply to Ph.D. programs, they usually require approximately a 3.5 GPA in a Master's program. Exam scores and letters of recommendation also play a role in determining whether you are accepted into graduate school. The GPAs listed here are only guidelines; **extremely competitive programs will expect outstanding GPAs.**

Entrance Exam Score

Many programs will list guidelines for the minimum acceptable score on the required entrance exam in your area (GRE, MCAT, LSAT, etc.). You need to plan ahead so you can take the exam(s) again if you

are not satisfied with your score the first time. LSAT scores are averaged and you have a limited number of times you can take the LSAT exam, so read your registration materials carefully.

Not every person performs well on standardized exams. Therefore, graduate committees usually take into consideration all facets of an application—exam scores, GPA, letters of recommendation, and the personal statement.

Letters of Recommendation

Recommendations can influence graduate committees especially if your exam score is borderline (see previous discussion in this handout).

Personal Statement

This topic was addressed previously.

Portfolio, Audition Pieces, or Interview

Portfolios or audition pieces are used to determine if your work shows potential. The graduate selection committee must have an idea about your creative work to make a subjective decision regarding your admission. In some creative fields, standardized exam scores are either not required as a basis for admission or the scores are not relied upon heavily when making an admissions decision. Your work is used to see if you have gained necessary basic skills or knowledge that can be nurtured and developed during graduate study. As mentioned earlier, you are encouraged to seek assistance from professors in your area so your work looks/sounds professional and makes a strong impression on a graduate committee. Interviews are used for similar reasons—to see if you are a strong candidate for graduate school and possible graduate assistant or teaching assistant positions.

ADDITIONAL ADVICE

Check to make sure you do not have inappropriate information accessible in Facebook, My Space, other online blogs, or Google. Employers and graduate committees are researching candidates' online accounts and/or “Googling” their names. You are advised to edit the content in these accounts or change your privacy settings.

*****If you have more questions regarding graduate study, please schedule an appointment with a counselor in the Office of Career Services.*****