Applying to Graduate or Professional School

Is Graduate or Professional School Right for You?
Before you start compiling your applications, ask yourself these questions to determine if graduate or professional school is right for you at this time of your life.

Do I have a career goal in mind that requires additional education?
Graduate education is a form of specialization. You want to embark on this process with an end goal or interest in mind. No one is going to hold you to your current “ten year goal” as your aspirations are expected to grow and change as you grow and change, but having a purpose and direction can impact your graduate education success. Ideally, graduate education is not the end goal in and of itself, but rather the next step to accomplishing your career vision.

Am I applying to graduate school to delay the job search process?
If you are simply continuing your education to avoid the job search process, schedule an appointment with Career Services. Sometimes, students lean towards continuing their education because academia is familiar and the job search process can be intimidating. The Office of Career Services can help demystify the job search process.

Selecting Schools
There are several factors that may contribute to your selection of graduate or professional schools. Give some thought to the following considerations:

Competitiveness
Finances permitting, try to stratify your target schools to include a “safety” school, several “possible” programs, and at least one “dream” (AKA “reach”) school. (You don’t want to forever wonder “Could I have gotten into ____?”) You can access your competitiveness by reviewing the average GPA and GRE scores of both those admitted in various programs.

Financial Considerations
The exact number of schools you apply to may be impacted by financial considerations. The application process can be expensive and time consuming. Be sure to explore the application and test fees to determine what you can comfortably manage.

Geographical Preference/Restrictions
Give some thought to your geographical preferences or restrictions. If you are geographically bound, that may dictate the programs you explore. If not, climate, locale, culture, etc. may influence where you determine is a good fit for you both in and out of the classroom/laboratory.

Faculty/Research Match
By all means, faculty/research match is the primary aspect of selecting doctoral programs and to a lesser degree, masters programs. If pursuing doctoral work, you need to identify a faculty mentor you would like to work with, familiarize yourself with her/his research, and align yourself accordingly.

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## Preparing for the Graduate/Professional School Interview:

Keep in mind, most doctoral and professional programs (and some masters programs) require an interview as part of the selection process. Work with Career Services to help develop and hone your interviewing skills.

## Developing a Plan B:

Even if you feel confident that graduate or professional school is in your immediate future, take the time to develop a “Plan B.” Your goals may shift during your last year of undergraduate education, you may not be admitted to your school of choice, or funding may be an unexpected issue.

Give some thought to your alternative plan and keep your options open. You may need to conduct a job search or consider other types of educational programs. Talk with Career Services, faculty, and advisors to help identify your options.

### Managing Your Applications

Managing the application process for several schools simultaneously can be cumbersome. Develop a system early to help you stay organized and mindful of deadlines. Below is a list of commonly required application materials:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CV</th>
<th>Most applications require an academic CV as part of the application process. Check out our CV writing resources and be sure to have your CV reviewed by both Career Services and faculty within your academic area.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Statement / Statement of Purpose</td>
<td>This is a key component of the application and serves a couple of purposes. First, it is a writing sample that demonstrates your written communication skills. Second, it provides the reader with your “story.” You need to be able to clearly articulate your interest in the field, your experiences to date that helped shape your goals, what you will bring to a graduate program, how a graduate degree will help you accomplish your career goals, and why THIS program at THIS university is the best fit for you to be successful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department-specific requirements</td>
<td>Many departments require supplemental essays or applications. Be sure to address the questions that are asked and have your materials reviewed by others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>GRE Scores</td>
<td>Many programs require GRE scores as part of the application process. The GRE (Graduate Record Examination) is a standardized test administered by Educational Testing Services (ETS). Most programs require the General GRE and many may also require the Subject GRE. Taking the GRE is an investment of both time and money. Be sure to prepare for the GRE by using print and electronic resources. ETS offers a free PowerPrep series that provides you with two sample GRE tests. Take the first one to establish a baseline and identify your weakest areas to help you focus your time and energy. When you take the GRE, you can input four schools to have your scores sent to automatically as part of your testing fee. After receiving your scores, supplemental score reports can be sent to additional schools for a per-school fee.</td>
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<td>Recommendation Letters</td>
<td>Most graduate programs will require three letters of recommendation. This is an important component of the application process. Be sure to select your recommenders wisely. They need to be able to attest to your skills and abilities to be successful in pursuing graduate education and accomplishing your career goals. Ideally, your recommenders will be faculty members who know you well and can share more about you than that you come to class and do well on exams. Also, be mindful of the deadline and time considerations. Give your recommenders adequate time to compose a strong recommendation letter and provide them with a deadline prior to the final application deadline to allow for time to follow up if necessary.</td>
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