

ITHACA COLLEGE OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES
Graduate School Decisions

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Should You Go to Graduate School?..... p. 2

Choosing a Specialization and Researching Programs..... p. 3

Timetable..... p. 4

Additional Application Considerations..... p. 5

Graduate Entrance Exams..... p. 6

Letters of Recommendation..... p. 7

Application Essays..... p. 8

Financing Your Graduate Education..... p. 9

Websites for the Graduate Admissions Process..... p. 10

Graduate School Application Record..... p. 12

SHOULD YOU GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL?

**Should I go to graduate school right away or wait awhile and then apply?
How do I decide which school is best for me?**

These are probably two of the most frequently asked questions people present to us. The answer is a personal one for each of you. Some students pursue graduate education when they discover, as undergraduates, a subject matter so compelling, interesting, and important that they simply have to stick with it. Other students are compelled by more concrete and specific considerations. Graduate education can increase earning potential as well as provide the specialized training required to enter numerous professional areas.

Before deciding on a graduate program self-assessment is essential. Clear goals and objectives are imperative. Consider these factors when deciding whether or when to attend graduate school:

GOALS How defined are your goals? Have you talked with people in your field to explore what you might be doing after graduate school?

EXPERIENCE Have you done some "hands-on" reality testing? Have you completed an internship or worked in your chosen field? Related work is recommended prior to graduate school to enable you to gain maturity and to perhaps offset mediocre grades or test scores.

EMPLOYABILITY What is the probability of finding employment in the field with and without an advanced degree? Is the additional schooling essential to your entry into the field?

OPPORTUNITY Do you truly understand what you will gain by pursuing an advanced degree? Have you compared your expectations of what graduate school will do for you with what it has done for alumni of the graduate program?

HOMEWORK Are you excited by the idea of studying the particular field you have in mind? Do you like intensive study?

MOTIVATION Are you simply looking for a way to put off career decisions and avoid the job search - avoid adult responsibilities?

PREPARATION You generally need a solid grade point average (B or 3.00) or a series of prerequisite classes before entering graduate school. Are you prepared? What graduate entrance exams are needed? Are your scores competitive?

COST Calculate the academic and personal expenses of another degree. Can you afford this? Have you identified ways to finance such a decision? Also, consider the cost of deferred income for this period. How much potential income will you lose now and in the future by delaying your entry to the workforce?

Adapted from The Bagley Center, Plymouth State College <http://www.plymouth.edu/career/gradindex.html>

CHOOSING A SPECIALIZATION AND RESEARCHING PROGRAMS

Will the graduate program have what you are looking for? Does a particular program provide you the professional development opportunities you want? How will a specific program enhance your future career possibilities? Use this list of questions to assist you in that evaluation process.

PROGRAM FEATURES

- How flexible is the program? Are there opportunities to take elective courses?
- Can you minor in an area of key importance to you?
- Does the program offer opportunities for practical experience?
- What is the emphasis of the program? Is it on practice or research?
- Is the program in a geographic area you find interesting (urban/ rural/ size/ etc.)
- What is the average time to complete the (1) class work, (2) research, and (3) dissertation?

FACULTY

- What is the student-faculty ratio?
- What is the background/reputation of the faculty who teach in the program?
- Are there faculty members with research areas similar to your interests?
- Is the faculty diverse both socially and academically?
- How accessible and available are the faculty to students?
- How are advisors assigned?
- What is the faculty turnover rate?

FINANCIAL AID

- What are the criteria and process for selecting Teaching Assistants (TAs), Graduate Assistants (GAs), Resident Assistants (RAs), Research Assistants (REs), and Fellows?
- How reliable is your financial support from year to year?
- Is this process coordinated by the program or the graduate admissions office?

STUDENTS

- Will you have a good sized cohort?
- Is the student body diverse socially, geographically, economically?
- What is the ratio of full-time and part-time students in the program?
- Is the retention rate good? Do most students who begin the program finish completely?
- Are there organizations for students and opportunities to socialize outside of class?
- May I meet some currently enrolled students (either in person or via e-mail)?

FACILITIES

- How comprehensive are the labs and other learning facilities?
- How current, diverse, and expansive are library holdings in your program and research area?
- Are there specialized research facilities available for graduate student use?

PLACEMENT

- What types of positions do graduates of the program secure after graduation?
- Where are these positions typically geographically?
- What is the placement rate for new graduates within the first year after graduation?
- How helpful is the program in helping you to secure employment? What services are available?

Adapted from Career Services and Leadership Education office, St. Lawrence University, 2003.

TIMETABLE

It is important to start gathering information early in order to be able to complete your applications on time. The timetable that appears below represents the ideal for most students.

Junior Year, Fall and Spring:

- Research interest areas, institutions, and programs
- Get to know your professors and consult their expertise
- Talk to advisors about application requirements
- Register and prepare for appropriate graduate admission test. (You may choose to take exams during the spring or summer of your Junior year or during the fall of your Senior year.)
- Investigate national scholarships

Junior Year, Summer:

- Take required graduate admission test
- Write for application and financial aid materials
- Visit institutions of interest if possible
- Write application essay
- Check application deadlines and rolling admission policies
- For medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry, or law school, you may need to register for the national application, or data assembly service most programs use

Senior Year, Fall:

- Obtain letters of recommendation
- Take graduate admission test (*if you have not already done so*)
- Send in completed application

- Apply for assistantships, fellowships, grants, etc.
- Register for Graduate and Professional School Financial Aid Service (GPSFAS) if required
- Have transcripts and letters of recommendation mailed
- Confirm that graduate programs have received all transcripts, letters and materials mailed
- Consider visiting select institutions during winter break

Senior Year, Spring:

- Check with all institutions before the deadline to make sure your file is complete
- Visit institutions that accept you (if you haven't already!)
- Evaluate all offers of admissions and financial aid before making final decision
- Send deposit to institution of your choice
- Notify other institutions that accepted you of your decision so that they may admit students on their waiting list
- Send thank-you notes to people who wrote your recommendation letters, informing them of your success
- Upon graduation, forward an updated transcript to the institution you will attend in the fall

You may not be able to adhere to this timetable if your application deadlines are very early, as is the case with medical schools, or if you decide to attend graduate school at the last minute. In any case, keep in mind the various application requirements and be sure to meet all deadlines.

ADDITIONAL APPLICATION CONSIDERATIONS

OBTAINING APPLICATION FORMS AND INFORMATION

- To obtain the materials you need, the internet can be an extremely useful tool. Many applications are now available on-line or with through a simple e-mail request.
- A neatly typed or handwritten postcard requesting an application, a bulletin, and financial aid information is all that is necessary.
- Follow instructions carefully and accurately while completing all requested information.
- Tailor your communications to the specific aspects of the graduate program.
- Complete forms using a typewriter or pen keeping in mind that a neat and attractive appearance is important
- Include all requested documents and materials: resume, fees, autobiographies, writing sample, etc.
- Always make copies for your records before sending.

MEETING APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Requirements vary from one field to another and from one institution to another. Read each program's requirements carefully; the importance of this cannot be overemphasized!

TRANSCRIPTS

Grade point averages are important but are not examined in isolation; the rigor of the courses you have taken, your course load, and the reputation of the undergraduate institution you have attended are also scrutinized.

To obtain an official copy of your transcript, see the Registrar's office at (607) 274-3127 or at <http://www.ithaca.edu/registrar>. Allow the registrar's office at least **four** working days to process your transcripts for graduate school referral. If you are a transfer student, be sure to check with each graduate program to determine if you must also obtain transcripts directly from your previous institution(s) of study. Each program may have a different answer.

RESUMES

A resume is an important summary of the experiences and education that have prepared you for graduate school. It is also a statement of your professional interests and commitments to date. Be sure to include this with your application materials.

If you need assistance developing your resume, be sure to visit the Career Services office. Our staff of Peer Career Advisors (PCAs) are available 10:00am to 5:00pm each day classes are in session to assist with resume development and review.

GRADUATE ENTRANCE EXAMS

GRADUATE RECORD EXAM (GRE) is the most common entrance exam and provides admissions committees with a common evaluation criteria for all applicants. As a computer-adaptive test, the GRE is offered at designated test centers across the country, including here in Ithaca.

Each test includes the following: (1) Verbal section – 30 minutes; includes analogies, sentence completions, antonyms, and reading comprehension; (2) Quantitative section – 45 minutes; includes problem solving, quantitative comparisons and graph problems; and (3) Analytical Writing – one 45 minute “Present Your Perspective” essay and one 30 minute “Analyze an Argument” essay. Some graduate programs may also request that you complete a Subject Test of the GRE. Topics may include: Biochemistry, Cell Biology, Molecular Biology and Genetics, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Literature in English, Mathematics, Physics, Psychology. Subject tests are still given on designated test Saturdays at colleges across the country.

If you are hoping to enroll in graduate school the fall after you graduate, you should take the GRE before the end of November of your senior year. Information booklets for the GRE General and Subject Tests are available at Career Services. **To register:** Students should call 1-800-GRE-CALL to schedule a test date; be sure to take the test well in advance of any application deadlines.

GRADUATE MANAGEMENT ADMISSIONS TEST (GMAT) is the entrance exam required by most business schools across the country. Also a computer adaptive test, the GMAT is offered at test centers across the country, including here in Ithaca. **To register:** Students should call 1-800-GMAT-NOW to schedule a test date; be sure to take the test well in advance of any application deadlines.

The three sections of the GMAT include: (1) Verbal – 75 minutes; includes reading comprehension, sentence correction and critical reasoning; (2) Quantitative – 75 minutes; includes data sufficiency and problem solving; (3) Analytical Writing – 60 minutes; “Analysis of an Argument” essay – 30 minutes and “Analysis of an Issue” essay – 30 minutes.

LAW SCHOOL ADMISSIONS TEST (LSAT) is the entrance exam required by every law school across the country. Candidates are evaluated in four areas: Logic Games, Logical Reasoning, Reading Comprehension, and an Analytical Writing Sample and the exam is scored on a scale of 120 – 180. The multiple-choice sections may be given in any order, but the writing sample is always administered last. While applicants may take the exam in June, October, December or February of each year, it is recommended that you take the LSAT by December of your senior year. **To register:** Registration for this exam is available online at: www.lsac.org

MEDICAL COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TEST (MCAT) is required by nearly all US medical schools. This full-day paper and pencil exam is offered each April and August and it is recommended that you take the exam in April of your junior year if you plan to attend medical school immediately following your Ithaca graduation. Applicants will be tested in four areas: (1) Physical Sciences – 100 minutes; (2) Verbal Reasoning – 85 minutes; (3) Writing Sample – 30 minutes; (4) Biological Sciences – 100 minutes. Scores for each section range from 1 – 15 with the exception of the Writing Sample which is given a letter score. **To register:** Registration is available online at: www.aamc.org

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Choosing people to write recommendations can be difficult, and most graduate schools require two or three letters. To begin the process of choosing references, identify likely candidates from among those you know through your classes, extracurricular activities, and jobs.

A good reference will meet several of the following criteria: he/she has a high opinion of you, knows institutions to which you are applying as well as the kind of study you are pursuing, has taught or worked with a large number of students and can make a favorable comparison of you with peers, is known by the admissions committee and is regarded as someone whose judgment should be given weight, and has good written communication skills.

A note about confidential vs. non-confidential letters. Whether a letter is confidential or not is a decision made by you, the student. Confidential means you have waived your right to review what is written in that letter. Even in 20 years, if you ask to see this confidential letter, that request will be denied. Even if a prospective reference has a preference for the kind of letter s/he will write, this is ultimately your decision. Note: many schools require the confidential format and these letters tend to carry more "weight."

Give the writer:

- A statement of your career goals, why you are interested in them, and how this graduate program will help you attain these goals.
- A list of activities that have supported this career/program choice (e.g. summer experience, research experience).
- Academic credentials-approximate grade point average, GRE scores, relevant course work and grades.
- Refresh the writer's memory about your experience with him/her (courses, etc.).
- Mention any facts that may support your case (you had mono when you got a "D" in Organic).
- A copy of your personal statement for graduate study
- Extracurricular activities not directly relevant to your application.
- An envelope stamped and addressed for each program. If a recommendation form is provided, enclose it in the envelope. If not, enclose a piece of bond paper with your name and the program to which you are applying. Often letters of recommendation from your Credential File in the Career Development Center can be submitted with the graduate school recommendation forms.
- A list of all programs to which she/he is to write, AND THE DEADLINES FOR EACH. Plan ahead and ask for your recommendations well before the deadlines. In addition, you may need to follow up to insure that your recommendation letters have been sent.
- A copy of your transcript.

APPLICATION ESSAYS

An essay or personal statement for an application should be essentially a statement of your ideas and goals. Usually it includes a certain amount of personal history, but, unless an institution specifically requests autobiographical information, you do not have to supply any. Your aim should be a clear, succinct statement showing that you have a definite sense of what you want to do and enthusiasm for the field of study you have chosen. The Career Services staff can assist you by critiquing your essay.

Don't underestimate the time needed to prepare an effective statement! Before writing anything, stop and consider what your reader might be looking for; the general directions or other parts of the application may give you an indication of this. Admissions committees may be trying to evaluate a number of things from your statement, including the following:

- Motivation and commitment to a field of study
- Expectations with regard to the program and career opportunities
- Writing ability
- Major areas of interest
- Research and/or work experience
- Educational background
- Immediate and long term goals
- Reasons for deciding to pursue graduate education in a particular field and at a particular institution
- Maturity
- Personal uniqueness-what you would add to the diversity of the entering class

There are two main approaches to organizing an essay. You can outline the points you want to cover and then expand on them, or you can put your ideas down on paper as they come to you, going over them, eliminating certain sentences, and moving others around until you achieve a logical sequence. Use the approach you feel most comfortable with. Either way, you want organize your essay to be clear, specific, detailed yet concise.

Think of your responses in terms of how your background, skills, abilities, goals, etc match the characteristics and opportunities of the graduate program. Additionally, recognize that this statement is an opportunity to demonstrate your written communication skills, motivation, energy level, creativity, commitment, and depth of response to the application questions. Most important, take the time to have others review your statement. The Career Services staff and our faculty are more than willing to assist in this critical review process.

Essay Resources on the Internet

About Grad Schools [<http://gradschool.about.com/msubessay.htm>] – An excellent and comprehensive list of web sites related to developing an effective personal statement or essay for graduate admissions in a variety of fields.

Admissions Essays [<http://www.admissionsessays.com/>] – Admissions Essays is the premier personal statement development service on the Web. We provide all the necessary guidance to help our clients produce memorable, striking, and effective personal statements and admissions essays to help them get into the schools of their choice.

University of Wisconsin – Madison: Tips on Writing Application Essays

[<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/apessay.html>] – Let these tips help you get started writing this all important aspect of your graduate school application.

FINANCING YOUR GRADUATE EDUCATION

It can be as complicated when applying for financial aid as it is when you apply for admission to the graduate program. Deadline dates may not be the same so read this information very carefully and plan ahead. Additionally, most graduate students find it is necessary to draw upon several sources of financial assistance during their studies. Be as thorough as possible in your search process.

There are three basic types: grants and fellowships, work programs, and loans. There are also various funding sources to explore: the federal government, state governments, educational institutions, foundations, corporations, etc. Unlike financial assistance awarded to undergraduate students, graduate students face a more selective and more competitive scholarship process. The more common awards include the following:

- 1. Fellowships and Grants** This is the most desirable type of financial assistance and therefore, the most competitive. Fellowships may be supported by the Federal Government, special interest groups, or within a given school. Check the graduate catalog for a complete listing of these programs. There are also a number of directories that can assist you with this search process.
- 2. Research Assistantship** Typically these are coordinated directly by the graduate program and are extremely competitive; there is often a separate application process. In exchange for your work on someone's research project, you may be awarded tuition assistance or a living stipend. There is also potential that this work may count toward or help complete your thesis.
- 3. Teaching Assistantship** Also coordinated by the graduate program, this assistantship requires that you must teach something, usually a laboratory or first-year level course, in exchange for tuition assistance, living stipend or other award. Work expectations vary among departments, but 15 hours per week is usually required.
- 4. Resident Assistantship** If you have experience as a Resident Assistant, then this may be a viable strategy for you. Institutions may hire you as a resident assistant or residence director and in exchange for your service to the department, you are typically compensated with room,
- 5. Odd jobs around the department** Sometimes you can get hourly work, but this, of course, does not include tuition as do more traditional assistantships.
- 6. College Work Study** Just as undergraduate students can be awarded funding for an on-campus job, this program is also available to graduate students. The Financial Aid office will ultimately make this decision for you.
- 7. Loans** Borrowing money for further study is always an important decision. Make sure you have checked with your undergraduate financial aid office to determine what your borrowing eligibility may be.

If money is not available when you first enroll, it may be available later. Some schools will not accept a student they cannot support. Don't enroll in an inferior program simply because it gives you more money than a good program.

Source: Peterson's Guide to Graduate and Professional Programs

WEBSITES FOR THE GRADUATE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

General Research

All About Grad School [www.allaboutgradschool.com] - Provides a comprehensive geographic directory of graduate schools in the United States along with test preparation information & recommended books.

College Source Online [www.collegesource.org] - This website will give you access to complete graduate catalogs for institutions across the country. Very useful to search for programs by topic.

Eurograduate [www.eurograduate.com] - a site for identifying graduate program opportunities across Europe

Grad Profiles [www.gradprofiles.com] - Features in-depth graduate and professional school profiles with information about programs of study, degree requirements, facilities, expenses, financial aid, faculty research and much more.

GradSchools [www.gradschools.com]- The most comprehensive online source of graduate school information.

Petersons Guide [www.petersons.com] - Just like their Guide to Four Year Colleges, this site will let you search for graduate programs in nearly every discipline imaginable. Hard copy companions can be found in the Career Library in Career Services and Leadership Education

Study Abroad [www.studyabroad.com] - Studyabroad.com is the #1 online resource for study abroad information. You will find information here on graduate programs in foreign countries.

US News & World Reports [www.usnews.com/edu/grad/rankings/rankindex_brief.php] - Provides career outlook information, admission tips, and graduate test information; also provides information on graduate programs in Business, Law, Medicine, Engineering, Education, Health, Library Science, Ph.D.'s, The Arts, and Public Affairs

Law School

Law School Admissions Council [www.lsac.org] - THE site to visit if you are considering law school; valuable information about the LSAT, selecting a school, law school admissions process, and much more.

LawSchool [www.lawschool.com] - A site jam packed with news and events in law school today. Definitely check this site out to see what's happening at the schools to which you are thinking about applying. You will also find law school rankings on this site.

Boston College Online Law School Locator [www.bc.edu/offices/careers/gradschool/law/lawlocator] - The Locator can help you identify schools where your scores and grades are most competitive for admission and help you gauge your chances of admission at a particular school.

Princeton Review Law School Information [www.princetonreview.com/law] - Get the latest information on selecting and applying to law school, the LSATs, financial aid, making a successful transition to law school and other related resources.

Business Programs

MBA.com [www.mba.com] - THE site to visit if you are considering business school; valuable information on the GMAT exam, selecting MBA programs, and financing your graduate studies. From the Graduate Management Admissions Council.

US and Foreign Business Schools [www.dartmouth.edu/tuck/bschools/index.html] - A comprehensive list of business school web pages to browse; maintained by the Amos Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College

Princeton Review Business School Information [www.princetonreview.com/business] - Get the latest information on selecting and applying to business school, the GMATs, financial aid, making a successful transition to law school and other related resources.

Medical Programs

Princeton Review Medical School Information [www.princetonreview.com/medical] - Get the latest information on selecting and applying to medical school, the MCATs, financial aid, making a successful transition to medical school and other related resources.

Financial Aid Websites for Graduate Students

FinAid: The Smart Guide to Financial Aid [www.finaid.org] - This award-winning site has grown into the most comprehensive annotated collection of information about student financial aid on the web. Access to FinAid is free for all users and there is no charge to link to the site.

Student Loan [www.estudentloan.com] - eStudentLoan provides a comparison marketplace where students can match their specific needs with lender programs. Students are on the web looking for an easy way to shop for loans. eStudentLoan brings those students to your door.

FastWeb [www.fastweb.com] - FastWeb lets students create a personalized profile that can be matched against our expansive databases of colleges and scholarships. As the oldest and most popular free online scholarship matching service, our database has over 600,000 scholarships totaling more than \$1 billion. FastWeb also notifies students when new scholarships are added and application deadlines are approaching.

GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION RECORD

	PROGRAM 1	PROGRAM 2	PROGRAM 3
SCHOOL			
APPLICATION			
Deadline / Fee			
School Visit/Interview Date			
Application Sent Date			
TRANSCRIPTS			
Date Requested			
Date School Received			
TEST SCORES			
Date Exam is Scheduled			
Date Requested			
Date Received by School			
RECOMMENDATION 1			
Name			
Date Requested			
Date Completed and Sent to School or Credential File			
Date Received by School			
RECOMMENDATION 2			
Name			
Date Requested			
Date Completed and Sent to School or Credential File			
Date Received by School			
RECOMMENDATION 3			
Name			
Date Requested			
Date Completed and Sent to School or Credential File			
Date Received by School			