

SELECTING & APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL GUIDE

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Graduate school opportunities throughout the world today are diverse. If you have interests in a specific field of study or career field, exploring the options of attending graduate school will be valuable to you.

Your interest and success with a particular academic major at UW-Green Bay may lead you to personal satisfaction from the chance to broaden your experience and expertise in graduate school. In addition, many careers today require advanced degrees: medicine, social work, law, higher education, specialized research, etc.

However, graduate school is not the avenue for you to pursue in order to delay or postpone the job search process. You should have clearly defined interests in a particular field before conducting the application process. Remember, an advanced degree may not necessarily increase your chances of initial job search success.

Assessing Your Interests and Goals

Deciding to attend graduate school is not a decision to be made hastily or with a limited information base. Making an informed decision about pursuing a graduate degree requires in-depth self-assessment combined with long-term goal setting. Before applying for further study, you need to be aware of the working conditions, employment prospects and physical and mental requirements of the field you plan to pursue. Secondly, the more immediate demands of the components of a graduate school experience, research, course work, papers, teaching, etc., must be considered. When giving consideration to these issues, you must look for a match between these demands and your interests, needs, skills and career goals.

Two of the reasons frequently given by students who have withdrawn from graduate programs are a dislike of concentrated academic work and a realization that they had not defined their career goals adequately and clearly. By answering the following questions and assessing your needs, interests, values, skills and goals, you can hopefully avoid similar problems and therefore, make an informed decision about pursuing a graduate degree.

- What do I want to accomplish in my lifetime?
- What are my long-range and short-range career goals?
- Is graduate study necessary for me to achieve these goals?
- Do I have the interest and abilities to be successful in a graduate program?
- What type of value, if any, do I place on attaining a graduate degree?
- Am I mentally and physically prepared to undertake such a long-term academic commitment?
- At the present time, do I have other needs that conflict with pursuing a graduate degree?
- Do I have enough information about this career field to determine if I want to make a long term commitment of pursuing a graduate degree?
- Can I realistically invest the time and money required to pursue another academic degree?

Selecting the Right Program

Individuals considering graduate education are often concerned that they need to attend the best program of study. National rankings are available for review from a number of resources, and most often, each ranking is based on different criteria. No single, reliable ranking of graduate schools and programs exists. Is the national recognition that a school or program has received the most important factor to consider when selecting a program? As discussed earlier, a program should meet your individual needs, interests and goals. In order to identify these programs, information about various schools and programs are available for review and comparison. Information about each program to consider include:

- Departmental courses and offerings
- Theoretical or pragmatic approach to the subject matter
- Philosophical and professional attitudes of the faculty members and the department
- Specific specialties and interest of the faculty
- Current research, publications and professional involvement of the faculty
- Flexibility of the curriculum and length of the program
- Prominence and/or accreditation of the program
- Availability of placement services and placement outlook
- Size, geographic location, type and availability of housing, and community environment
- Application requirements (test scores, essays, interview, etc.) and required background and credentials of students
- Financial Aid opportunities, cost and residency requirements
- Ability to gain practical experience during the program (assistantships, research, etc.)

The Application Process

Applying to graduate school can become complex, time consuming and difficult if you are not well organized and prepared. In some cases, you may complete two applications for an institution: one application for the specific academic program and one application to the Graduate School at the institution in question. Always keep in mind the following requirements associated with the application process.

Application Forms

- Follow instructions carefully and accurately while completing all requested information.
- Tailor your communication to the specific aspects of the graduate program.
- Complete the 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, etc. It is recommended to mail all application materials by registered or return receipt requested mail for documentation purposes.
- Always make copies for your records before sending.

Reference Letters

- Select individuals who know you well enough to write detailed letters on your behalf. When requesting a letter of recommendation or reference, be specific of your goals and purpose. It would be helpful and desirable to meet with the reference writer to discuss your goals and submit a resume and/or transcript for their review.
- Use institutional forms if provided by the graduate school and provide the recommender with a self-addressed stamped envelope.

- Allow the recommender ample time to complete your letter and always follow up to insure completion.
- Confidential vs non-confidential letters: you will have to make this decision.
- Many schools require the confidential format, and these letters tend to carry more "weight".

Transcripts

- Allow adequate time for the Registrar's Office to process your transcript. View your college/university website to view options, timing and costs prior to submitting a request.

Essay or Personal Statement

- Many times underestimated, this portion of the application is extremely important. Create and develop your statement in relation to the question(s): What does the reader want to know?
- Organize the statement to be clear, specific, detailed and concise. Think of your response in terms of how your background, skills, abilities, goals, etc. match the characteristics and opportunities of the graduate program/school.
- Demonstrate your written communication skills, motivation, energy level, creativity, commitment and depth of response.
- Invite critiques by faculty and Career Services staff members for review.
- Career Services has literature about writing personal statements in our Career Resource Library and on our website.

Interviews

- Some programs may require an interview as part of the admissions selection process. This can be helpful, especially if you feel your GPA, application or written statement might not best represent your capabilities.
- As with any interview, you will want to be prepared and focused. Be able to express your goals, why you are seeking admission to this particular program and what you can contribute to the program.
- If you have concerns about interviewing, you may want to participate in a mock interview with Career Services.

Additional Credentials

- Insure proper provisions for test score reporting, personal interviews, and other requested material.

Graduate Admissions Deadlines

Preparation and planning will be a key to your success in effectively meeting graduate admissions deadlines. Research and discover the specific time requirements for submitting applications, test scores, financial aid information and other related material. Develop a checklist of requirements noting all pertinent deadlines (refer to the "Application Checklist" at the conclusion of the handout).

Tests (e.g. GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT, MAT, DAT, etc.)

- Determine test requirements of each graduate school application. Some programs may require the general and subject GRE tests and/or multiple testing.
- Plan on registering for the test at least six weeks before the actual test date to insure proper preparation, minimal costs, and applicant availability.

- Study and prepare to take the test(s). Utilize test preparation study books and resource guides to improve test scoring potential.
- Take these tests early, thereby allowing time to re-take them if necessary and providing adequate time for score reporting.

Admissions

- Note the specific deadline and due-date of the comprehensive application package (all admissions requirements).
- Early application will pay off, especially when programs are offering rolling admissions and awarding financial aid packages.

Financial Aid

- Be aware that financial aid deadlines are usually earlier than the comprehensive application materials. Many programs will not communicate these deadlines without your assertive inquiry.

Financing Your Graduate Degree

A major concern and obstacle in pursuing an advanced degree is the monetary obligations involved with graduate education. If you are willing to pursue a variety of financial aid avenues, most students can completely finance the costs of graduate school. Financial aid information can be found in most graduate/professional school catalogs and/or specific departmental brochures. The key in obtaining maximum financial aid: "do not leave any stone unturned". The following sources will offer you a variety of financial resources to explore.

Graduate Assistantships

- Teaching and/or research assistantships are common opportunities for financing your advanced degree. These awards usually carry full or partial tuition remuneration plus a stipend.
- Your commitment normally involves a 10-20 hour per week work load dealing with teaching, tutoring, proctoring exams, developing lesson plans, and/or performing a variety of research activities.
- Assistantships are typically available through the specific department you are applying to, however, many related areas of study may also have opportunities available.
- Competition for these awards can be intense. Apply early and always submit a resume with your inquiry. If possible, visit the department and arrange a personal interview.

Fellowships and Grants

- Consist of outright awards usually requiring no service to the institution in return. Awarded on a competitive basis, grants vary in terms of monetary amount and length of funding.
- Explore institutional, private and governmental fellowship opportunities.
- Do not limit your application to one type of grant because it may take several combined awards to fund your entire graduate degree.
- Consult with faculty and the resources available in Career Services for information about fellowships and grants.

Resident Assistantships

- Graduate programs also may offer financial assistance in the form of resident assignments involving room, board and stipend by working as managers in undergraduate residence halls.
- These comprehensive opportunities are many times the most lucrative because some schools will also include tuition remuneration with the assignment.
- Competitively based, resident assistantships will involve utilizing your job search skills. Always include your resume and cover letter, requesting an interview for available jobs.
- Inquire about these opportunities at the institution's residence life or student affairs office.

Loans (Long-term, governmental, private, etc.)

- Remember that any undergraduate loan can be deferred while you are a full-time graduate student.
- Most institutions have loan programs for graduate students including private, state and federally-sponsored Guaranteed Student Loan opportunities.
- Explore FAFSA - the Free Application for Federal Student Aid , offering low interest loans and financial assistance to graduate students.
- Ask for more information in Financial Aid.

College Work-Study Programs

- Eligible students are provided part-time jobs on campus. These federally funded programs are usually administered by the institution's financial aid office.

Additional Employment

- Many college communities offer a wide variety of employment opportunities and welcome graduate students for potential employees. Local business and industry may have agreements with the institution for part-time placement programs.
- Explore temporary employment agencies such as the Kelly Services or Manpower for local part-time jobs.

Resources for Research, Information and Assistance

In order to find the information you need about each program or for general assistance in applying to graduate schools, there are numerous resources for you to use. The Career Library in Career Services and Cofrin Library offer many varied and useful resources to consider. In addition to written material, it is suggested that you also receive information from certain selected individuals. Resources to consider include:

Individuals to Contact

- UW-Green Bay faculty members, administrative staff members, advisors and alumni
- Utilize networking resources such as LinkedIn to connect with individuals regarding programs and schools represented by faculty, staff and alumni
- Associations, professionals and graduate students in the field
- Students and faculty and the institutions of interest

Graduate School Application Timeline

Researching and applying to graduate schools can be a very time consuming process, especially as you prepare for application and test deadlines while still completing your undergraduate education, In order to facilitate this process, a timeline has been provided to give you a quick overview of necessary steps and an appropriate time frame for

completion. This timeline assumes that you are applying for fall admission upon graduation from college. This timeline is generalized. Check with individual institutions to obtain their specific deadlines for admission.

Junior Year, Fall & Spring

- Research areas of interests, institutions and programs.
- Get to know your professors and consult their expertise.
- Talk to advisers about application requirements.
- Receive information about appropriate graduate admission tests. Register and prepare if appropriate (You may choose to take exams during the spring or summer of your Junior year or during the fall of your Senior year.)

Junior Year, Summer

- Search for or request application materials, school catalogues and financial aid information from selected schools.
- Visit institutions of interest, if possible
- Check application deadlines with institutions.
- 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.
- Register for fall graduate admission tests.
- Take graduate admission test(s) if you have not already.
- Apply for assistantships, fellowships, grants, etc.
- Submit completed applications.
- Register for the FAFSA - the Free Application for Federal Student Aid - if required.
- Have transcripts and letters of recommendation mailed.
- Check to see that all transcripts, letters and materials mailed have been received by institutions.
- Make plans to visit select institutions during winter break.

Senior Year, Spring

- Check with institutions before the deadline to insure your file is complete.
- Evaluate offers of admission and make your decision.
- Send a deposit to the institution of your choice.
- Notify other institutions of your acceptance at another school.
- Send thank you letters and follow-up letters 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 early, as is the case with medical schools, or if you decide to attend graduate school later in your college career or during your senior year. Keep in mind the application requirements and be sure to meet all deadlines. If deadlines are impossible to meet, call the institution to see if a late application will be considered.