

## APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

### MAKING YOUR DECISION

The first step is clarifying your interests. Grad school is not a way to avoid making a career decision. You need a clear picture of the type of grad school (and specialty area) you wish to pursue and why.

### ONCE YOU IDENTIFIED YOUR CAREER DIRECTION, DECIDE:

- Do I need to attend a very competitive school? Research focused or application oriented?
- Should I go full-time or will a part-time program address my needs?
- Where geographically do I want to go?
- How will I finance my education? Will I need to apply for a fellowship? Be a grad assistant? Will my employer be funding (only appropriate for part-time programs)?

Talk to faculty and individuals employed in the career field for recommendations of schools. You will want to apply to multiple schools. The number of schools you apply to depends on the competitiveness of the school and subject area. Check out some helpful resources<sup>1</sup> like:

- Peterson's Guides to Graduate Programs
- U.S. News and World Report Guides
- The Gourman Report
- Professional Association listings
- [www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com)
- [www.allaboutgradschool.com](http://www.allaboutgradschool.com)

### GRADUATE TESTS AND APPLICATIONS

#### Take a practice test. If you do not do well, you can brush up on weak areas

- Even if you are not certain you want to attend graduate school, take the test while you are still in school or soon after graduation. You will be in the test-taking mode and information is still fresh in your mind.
- Test results are good for 5 years.
- We offer practice tests in the Fall or you can take many of them online.
- An ideal time to take a practice test would be during your Junior year; you then have time to pursue test prep classes or study assistance if needed.

#### Take the correct grad school test

- GRE (school may require discipline specific test), [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org)
- MCAT – used by med schools, [www.aamc.org](http://www.aamc.org)
- GMAT- used by business schools, [www.gmat.org](http://www.gmat.org)
- LSAT- used by law schools, [www.lsat.org](http://www.lsat.org)
- MAT – this stands for the Miller's Analogies Test. While some schools accept this test for entrance, most look for the general GRE.

#### Prior to your Senior year, research graduate schools, contact them for application materials, and compile the information needed.

- Ask faculty for letters of reference as requested in the application. Begin to write rough drafts of applications and essays.
- In the Fall, take your grad school test
- Have application materials reviewed and make sure information is sent out several weeks before due dates.

- Follow up with schools to ensure all documents have been received. This will allow you ample time to send out duplicate information if materials are lost.

**Read, read, and reread the application.** Follow directions carefully and answer all questions thoroughly. Don't send an autobiography if they are seeking a personal statement. Don't send a resume if the school asks for a curriculum vitae. Read your drafts several times, use spell check and grammar check. Have someone proof read your materials before mailing them. **MAINTAIN COPIES OF ALL INFORMATION SUBMITTED.**

#### PREPARE FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

- Clarify where you should go and whom you will be meeting with.
- **Make a test run** to the location. You will want to clarify where you should park.
- **Arrive early**, even though they have visitor's spaces you do not know if parking will be available. The goal is to arrive at least ten minutes early to the office where your interview will be held (plan on getting to the school about an hour early).
- **Dress professionally.** Invest in a good suit, preferably in a dark color. Bring extra copies of your application materials in a portfolio, along with a pen, pencil, and paper.
- **Review your research.** Know the focus of the program and research areas of the faculty. Each school organizes interviews differently. Some schools arrange brief appointments with faculty; other schools may have a full day of interviews that include admissions committees, students, and faculty.
- **Think about responses to interview questions.** Expect questions related to your goals, strengths, weaknesses, academic performance, co-curricular activities, knowledge of current events and trends in your field.

#### Some sample questions include<sup>2</sup>:

- Why are you interested in attending our school?
- How did you make the decision to apply to our program? What other programs did you consider?
- What courses have you enjoyed the most? Been the most difficult?
- Do you feel your grades reflect your capabilities?
- Can you tell us more about your research project(s) with Professor \_\_\_\_\_ (or in a particular course)?
- What would a professor tell me are your greatest strengths?
- Tell me a time you had difficulty with a professor and how you handled the situation?
- How could you contribute to our program?
- What will you do if you are not accepted to graduate school?
- What activities do you enjoy outside of the classroom?
- In what leadership and volunteer activities have you participated?
- How do you see this program fitting with your career goals?
- Tell me about a major accomplishment and how you completed it?
- If you could have dinner with someone living or dead, who would it be and why?
- What is the most significant development in this field over the last 20 years and why?

\*Drop Down Menu

#### Prepare questions to ask the interviewers.

Do not ask questions that are easily found through basic research. Instead, address issues that will aid in your decision and clarify distinctive aspects of the program.

#### Examples include<sup>3</sup>:

- What characteristics distinguish this program from others in the same field?

- Where are recent alumni employed? What do most students do after graduation?
- What criteria are used for choosing recipients?
- Are there teaching opportunities, such as teaching assistantships and adjunct positions available for current students?
- Do most students publish an article or present a paper before graduation?
- What planned practical experiences are included in the program (e.g., internships)? Ask for examples of internship placements.

#### **FOLLOWING THE INTERVIEW**

- Send a thank you letter to the admissions committee members (or to those with whom you interviewed). The letter should express your appreciation for their time and consideration. Make sure that you state your continued interest in the school.
1. *Graduate Admissions Essays*, by Donald Asher, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley CA, 2000, pp. 19 – 23, 304.
  2. Modified from *Interviewing: Professional and Graduate School*, University of Wisconsin – Green Bay web page, [www.uwgb.edu/careers/interview\\_questions\\_Grad.htm](http://www.uwgb.edu/careers/interview_questions_Grad.htm)
  3. From about.com, a part of The New York Times Company, <http://gradschool.about.com/od/interviews/a/intquest.htm>, written by Tara Kuther, PhD