

Pointers for Preparing for Graduate School

1. Consider your career goals as you decide on what type of graduate program you are interested in. (You should be excited about the program and you should find the skills you are learning useful)
 - a. Masters
 - b. PhD
 - c. Professional Masters, Doctoral – generally more technical and theoretical
 - d. Time to degree (PhD ~6, MS 2-3 yr)
 - e. What do different credentials mean in a field
2. Ask what type of mentor you want (and need)
 - a. Your mentor needs to be interested in your career (not just theirs)
 - b. Bigger programs are not always better if you need lots of one on one
 - c. But, for some disciplines one of the top 20 programs in your discipline can be key to future success (this is discipline specific and may be more important for Business, Journalism, English)
3. Keep your options open
 - a. Your knowledge of the field may be limited, be open to options a program and mentor can offer in terms of a focus for your graduate work
 - b. Make sure your ideas are supported when you do choose – i.e. a good match is important
4. Find out all you can about the programs you are applying to.
 - a. Look at websites
 - b. Contact mentors and graduate students (use websites for this)
 - i. Where are former graduate students
 - ii. What type of publications does mentor have
 - c. Visit institutions
 - d. Meet with current graduate students
 - e. Ask about tuition waivers
 - f. Ask about funding sources (see below)
 - i. Teaching assistantships
 - ii. Research assistantships
5. Prepare early
 - a. Be aware of program entrance requirements (work with your academic advisor and Career Services)
 - b. Follow all application instructions (or you may not even be reviewed)
 - c. Letters of recommendation
 - i. Ask for letters from people you know and have worked with personally – they will help you stand out.
 - ii. Remind writer of your achievements (include resume, courses, personal statement to help them)
 - iii. If some one says they would recommend someone else write the letter – take the recommendation

- d. Keep your GPA up – this often not only determines entry but also fellowship availability (i.e. funding)
 - e. Prepare for graduate exams (GRE, MACAT, LSAT, etc. - see below)
 - f. Prepare your personal statement carefully
 - i. Let the admissions committee know you
 - ii. Tailor to institution and mentor
 - iii. Illustrate why you want to attend THAT institution
 - g. Type everything offline, have your mentor or others proofread before entering and submitting.
 - h. Consider taking graduate level courses as an undergraduate
 - i. Consider external (NSF REU) and internal (UCUR) undergraduate experiences
6. Look for funding opportunities
- a. Fellowships
 - b. Stipends
 - c. “Don’t take no for an answer”, keep looking
7. Make use of Career Services (2100 Meisler Hall, (251) 460-6188) (not a placement service)
- a. Consider career options before you graduate
 - i. How can you apply your degree
 - ii. What career skills are needed
 - iii. What are +/- of different positions
 - b. Assistance with resumes
 - i. Tailor to program
 - ii. Highlight features
 - c. Interview preparation and mock interviews
 - d. Career and Graduate School Expos
 - e. Register with Career Services
8. Gain Experience (experiential learning is key)
- a. UCUR, class, other research opportunities
 - b. Co-ops
 - c. Internships (clinical, corporate, industry, government)
 - d. Volunteer
 - e. Shadowing
 - f. Toastmasters
 - g. Seminars
 - h. Student-Instructor, tutoring
 - i. Study abroad
 - i. Second language
9. Learn to communicate effectively – practice (class, student newspaper, meetings)
- a. Oral
 - i. Be aware of repeat words you use (so, like, um)
 - b. Written
10. Network

- a. Faculty/Mentor links
- b. Alumni
- c. Members of professional associations related to field
- d. Members of campus organizations related to field
- e. Friends and family
- f. Meetings

REMINDERS:

- 1. Ask for help (mentors, career services, associates)
 - 2. Be professional (don't be late, miss meetings, accept responsibility, follow directions)
 - 3. READ, READ, READ (will help you in the long run and with graduate exams)
 - a. Wall Street Journal
 - b. Newspaper
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Graduate School – 10 Key Points

1. Purpose of graduate school? Learn how to think critically, explore a field in depth, gain research skills, gain professional credentials, work towards a higher paying job, take the next step in building your career...
Examine your purpose!
2. Type of graduate degree? Traditional master's
Professional master's
Doctoral degree
3. Where to apply? Consider your career goals!
Match your interests and the program offerings
Quality of the faculty
Reputation of the department and/or program
Time to degree, other outcomes
Resources for training and research
4. Requirements? Program dependent
5. The application process? Application, including transcripts (GPA)
Entrance exams – GRE
References
Personal statement
The interview - perhaps
6. Financial support? Loans
Teaching or research assistantships
Fellowships
Stipends
Tuition waivers
7. Retention rates? 50-70% nationwide, depending on the program
8. Time to degree? Master's – 2 years
Ph.D. – 6.1 years
9. Sources of information? Advisors, mentors, faculty
Rankings
Peterson's Guide (libraries)
Regional grad school fairs (GRE sponsors)
Advisors
Professional society web sites
General web resources
10. The bottom line? Do your homework, find the best program match(es) for you, apply early, work hard....

Resources:

- GradSchools.com (a comprehensive on-line source of information) - <http://gradschools.com>
- Peterson's planner – <http://www.petersons.com>
- Educational Testing Service (resources for the GRE) – <http://www.ets.org>
- 2000 National Doctoral Program Survey - <http://survey.nagps.org/>
- The Chronicle of Higher Education – <http://chronicle.com/>
- National Science Foundation (Specialized Information for Graduate Students) – <http://nsf.gov>
- National Institutes of Health (training funds at NIH institutes) – <http://grants1.nih.gov/training/trainingfunds.htm>