Useful Websites

- GRE
  http://www.ets.org/gre
- Grad Program Rankings
  http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools
- Graduate School director
  http://www.gradschools.com/

EOP

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Senior Year – Fall Semester

  ☐ Finalize any requirements for the application
  ☐ Send graduate school application
  ☐ Check to make sure application materials are complete

Senior Year – Spring Semester

  ☐ Breathe
  ☐ Negotiate financial aid packages
  ☐ Decide where you want to go
  ☐ Let schools you have chosen not to attend know
  ☐ Look into housing options

Last Words…

Deciding whether or not graduate school is for you is not a choice you should make lightly. Moreover, choosing the graduate school and program that is best suited for you can be a lengthy process. I have touched on only a few of the most common elements to consider but there is much more to grad school and the decisions you will have to make than what is covered in this packet. There are graduate programs overseas and online to consider. Programs can be heavily based on research as opposed to those which offer apprenticeships. By starting your search early you will ensure that you do not miss out on a great graduate school experience.
Junior Year – Fall Semester

☐ Take coursework to strengthen your application
☐ Research information about programs
☐ Participate/get involved with faculty research
☐ Determine admissions requirements
  ☐ Contact faculty for letters of rec.
  ☐ Think about career/ed. Goals
  ☐ Begin preparing for standardized tests

Junior Year – Spring Semester

☐ Continue preparing for standardized tests
☐ Take practice tests
☐ Get experience
☐ Start visiting colleges/universities

Summer

☐ Continue visiting colleges/universities
☐ Narrow down your choices
☐ Take standardized tests
☐ Write your personal statement
☐ Fill out application forms
☐ Get transcripts
☐ Send thank you letters to faculty for letters of rec.

Is Graduate School Right For You?

Many students consider graduate school after earning a Bachelor’s degree. For some, this is a logical step that is required to obtain a job in their field. However, many jobs do not require you to have a Master’s degree for entry level work. Before you begin the process of finding, preparing, applying and attending a graduate program, ask yourself these four questions: Why do I want to go to graduate school? What will I give up by attending? What will I gain by attending? Is this the right time for me to apply?

Getting Started: Finding the Right Program

The earlier you decide that graduate school is in your future the better. Finding the right graduate program for you is a task that shouldn’t be taken lightly and can be time consuming. Just as every undergrad program is different, so is each graduate program. Some of the elements you will want to look at are location, application requirements, courses offered, graduation requirements, length of the program, faculty interests and research, campus environment and financial aid.

Location

Just as in undergrad, the location of your graduate program can significantly impact your educational experience. A rural community may provide the peaceful, calm atmosphere you need to focus on your studies; however, a more urban environment provides access to a plethora of social activities as well as more opportunities for practical application of the skills you are learning. Urban environments also prove to be more distracting and more expensive.

Something else to consider is the geographic location of the college or university. There are significant differences between living in the North, South, East or West or even the Midwest. The geographic environment can impact the type of people who attend the school
and live in the community, the teaching philosophy of the faculty, as well as your social life. Attending a school in California may seem like a vacation – beaches, sunshine, and a laid-back attitude – but being thousands of miles away from family, friends, and everything familiar may cause you to experience culture shock and negatively impact your educational experience.

Application Requirements

Not all graduate schools share the same requirements. However, there are several items you will need to provide outside of the standard application. Many schools require graduate standardized test scores (see the section entitled Standardized Tests for more information). Letters of recommendation are also fairly common. Most schools require you to submit a statement of purpose/personal statement; this statement provides you the opportunity to tell the graduate school who you are, what you want, and why you want it from the school you are applying to. You will need to provide your undergraduate transcripts (these typically cost a small fee $3-6 and may take several weeks to arrive). Some graduate programs may also require you to interview either in person or over the phone.

Courses Offered

Unlike undergrad where you had to take courses to fulfill a general education requirement, graduate school coursework is geared to your area of interest. Most graduate programs will have some sort of research component – this may be a generalized research course or more specialized courses such as quantitative or qualitative research methods. A full time course load consists of three classes per

The Difference Between Bachelor and Master Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACHELORS</th>
<th>MASTERS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direction Given</strong></td>
<td>Self-Directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Broad Education</strong></td>
<td>Specific Coursework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typically 4-Years</strong></td>
<td>2-3 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lecture-Based Classes</strong></td>
<td>Discussion-Based Classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20-100+ Per Class</strong></td>
<td>7-20 Per Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impersonal Relationships W/ Professors</strong></td>
<td>Close Working Relationships W/ Professors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Most Students are 18-22</strong></td>
<td>Students are 22+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Little/No Professional Experience</strong></td>
<td>Students May Have Years of Professional Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>On-Campus Housing</strong></td>
<td>Off-Campus Apartments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Devote Significant Time to Campus Activities</strong></td>
<td>Little Time To Devote to Campus Activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Timeline

The following timeline is geared toward students who are thinking of entering into a graduate program the Fall semester after graduation. However, students who are choosing to enter at a later time can still use the timeline as a guideline.

Sophomore Year

- [ ] Build a strong GPA
- [ ] Established relationships with faculty
- [ ] Get involved in volunteer/coursework
Standardized Tests

First, the good news – not all graduate programs require you to take a standardized test. The bad news is many of them still do ask for them as part of the application process. The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is the most commonly asked for test. The GRE consists of three sections: verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning and analytical writing. However, there are subject tests required for specialized graduate programs. Medical school applicants will need to submit MCAT scores; law school applicants will have to take the LSATs; and those interested in business school may be required to take the GMAT. The MAT, DAT (Dental), PCAT (Pharmacy) and OAT (Optometry) are also standardized tests available. Doing well on these standardized tests will help applicants with a low GPA show that they have the ability to do well in graduate school. You can obtain preparatory resources such as books, practice tests, flashcards, etc. from any bookstore and online. Some colleges even offer practice exams on campus for little to no money. Many test prep companies, such as Kaplan, also offer classes and tutoring for a considerable fee. Each time you register and take one of the standardized tests, you will have to pay a fee, typically around $100. "Many students have to take the tests several times before they earn an acceptable score.

Graduation Requirements

Most graduate programs offer a choice to students about what final task they would like to complete in order to graduate. The most well known choice is the thesis. If you choose to do the thesis you will need to pick a thesis committee (generally consisting of a thesis chair and two committee members) and pick a research area that interests you. You will conduct research over the period of approximately a year, and present a final thesis defense to your committee. Once your thesis has been accepted you are eligible for graduation. Typically students choose to do a thesis if they are interested in attending a PhD program in the future.

Other options for graduation requirements include taking more credits or a capstone project. For instance, a program may require 32 credits if you choose to do a thesis, or 39 credits if you do not wish to complete a thesis. Capstone projects are undertaken as a method for showing your ability to utilize the skills you have learned in your graduate program in a practical manner.

Length of Program

Masters programs typically take two to three years to complete. However, there are some one year programs as well as some five year master/PhD programs available. It is important to think about how much time you want to spend working on this degree. Length is not just equal to time spent in class but time spent in that environment (geographic and social). Your decision to be a full-time or part-time student will also affect the length of your program as well as your experience level when you graduate. Some full-time programs will make it extremely difficult to hold down full-time jobs
outside of school. This also means that a full-time student may graduate with less “real-world” experience than a student who attends part-time or chose to wait several years after graduating undergrad to attend graduate school.

**Faculty Interests/Research**

Would you want to enter a graduate program that doesn’t have anyone teaching who is interested in the same specialized area as you? Probably not. This is why researching faculty (interests, published works, and presentations) is important to finding the right graduate program for you. Oftentimes schools will list faculty interests on their website; however, if the information is not made available online you can search program catalogs, email the head of the department for more information, or ask someone when taking a college tour. You can also do a search online (journal database or even google) to find more information on faculty in the department. I would also suggest that once you find a program that includes faculty who share your area of interest, that you ask to meet with the faculty member(s) when you visit the campus.

**Campus Environment**

Every college/university campus has a culture (values, norms, beliefs, etc.). By now you should be well versed in the difference between larger universities and smaller colleges thanks to your undergrad college search. Your geographic location will also affect the campus environment which is why I strongly suggest visiting the campuses you are interested in. While there you can witness first-hand the type of students who go to the school, meet with faculty and understand what the school offers both academically and socially. However, if you cannot visit the college before you make a decision there are other ways of gathering information regarding the campus environment. For starters, many faculty go to conferences, both local and national, and use these conferences to meet potential graduate students – many undergrads also use these conferences to schmooze and shop for graduate schools. You can also gain a lot buy looking at the entire college/university website (academic degrees offered, student clubs and organizations, campus events, etc.). Searching for students who attend the college, using social media websites, will also help give you a picture of who attends this school and what their interests may be.

**Financial Aid**

Graduate students will have access to federal subsidized and unsubsidized loans. Other financial aid options, such as the Pell Grant, are not offered to graduate students. However, many colleges do offer assistantships to help aid in the cost of school. It is very important that you look at the types of assistantships are available as well as the compensation offered. Some assistantships will cover no tuition costs and pay a small stipend while others cover partial tuition costs. The most highly sought after assistantships are those that cover full tuition as well as pay a stipend. Typically assistantships that offer little aid also require less hours and are available at smaller school where tuition may be less. Assistantships that offer full tuition coverage as well as pay a stipend require at least 20 hours of work and are typically found at larger universities. Assistantships should be located on the school financial aid website and usually the graduate application will include a section where students can let the school know they are interested in being considered for assistantships. Unfortunately, there are some schools that do not offer the assistantships during the application process. In this case, students will have to search out assistantships and apply for them separately.