

GRADUATE STUDENT:

To Be Or Not To Be -That Is The Question

There are many decisions you must make on the road to a professional career. Choosing an undergraduate school and a major are two important decisions you have already made. But there are other decisions you will face before graduation. Should I enter the working world or attend graduate school? The answer to that question will determine many other choices and activities. For many students, it is a good idea to not only engage in graduate school related activities, but to also take part in eRecruiting, Resume Referral, the Campus Interview Program and other job search activities through Career Services. Keeping your options open and viable increases the likelihood of achieving successful post graduation plans.

I. DECIDING TO ATTEND GRADUATE SCHOOL

There are two excellent reasons to attend graduate school:

1. A graduate degree is a prerequisite to entering certain careers, such as law, medicine, and university teaching. Therefore, to pursue such a position, an advanced degree is required.
2. Another motivation for attending graduate school is to receive further in-depth training and study in a subject that particularly interests you either for purposes of career advancement or for personal satisfaction.

Analyze your motives for considering advanced study. Will attending graduate school help you develop your abilities and achieve your goals? Exploring the following questions may help you with this analysis.

What kind of position am I interested in pursuing after graduation? Does it require a graduate degree?

Attending graduate school should not be a way to postpone making a career decision. In fact, it should be the logical result of making a career decision. It is important that you explore and understand the careers in which you are interested and develop a clear idea of the position you want to pursue prior to choosing a graduate school. If you are uncertain how to get started with career exploration, visit the Center for Counseling and Student Development and the Career Services Center for assistance.

Are my interests compatible with the activities I will be involved in during advanced training? Am I motivated to explore the detail of a specialty area?

Your undergraduate school major has provided you with a broad and basic knowledge of the discipline and most likely you have discovered certain aspects that are more interesting to you than others. If you have the desire to further explore these aspects beyond what your undergraduate education can provide, then graduate school could be an option.

Am I familiar with the variety of positions held by individuals with advanced degrees in my area of interest?

Talk to several graduate programs about that interest you in order to question them about their placement statistics. In addition, discover what specific positions are held by alumni of these programs and ask if you may contact these alumni to learn more about which career opportunities will be open to you.

Do my achievements and academic background reflect the ability to successfully complete a graduate program?

The one most important aspect of your application will be your undergraduate transcript. You should have a realistic assessment of your abilities, based on past academic performance. Discover what the minimal requirements are for acceptance into specific graduate programs. Talk with your faculty advisor to gain his/her perspective on your chances of being accepted into a graduate program.

II. SELECTING A GRADUATE SCHOOL

Once you have decided to attend graduate school, you are faced with choosing between the several hundred graduate school programs available at various universities throughout the United States. Several factors should be considered as you narrow down your choices.

Quality of Program

Quality of Faculty. A graduate department's reputation rests heavily on the reputation of its faculty. In some disciplines it is more important to study under someone well known than it is to study at a college or university with a prestigious name. Familiarize yourself with publications describing current research in your discipline. Find articles in professional journals and discover where the authors teach. Review several published graduate program ratings such as the one published by the Conference Board of Associated Research Councils.

Quality of Students. What type of students enroll in the program? What are their average undergraduate G.P.A. and test scores? What are their academic abilities, achievements, skills, geographical representation, and level of professional success upon completion of the program?

Available Resources. Is the institution financially stable? What kind of financial support does the program itself have? How complete are the library collections, computer resources, and other facilities?

Program Curriculum and Services. What is the purpose of the program? What are job placement and student advisement services like? What is the student/faculty ratio? Are there internships, assistantships and other experiential education opportunities available?

University Environment

The size or the setting of the academic institution may be important to you. You can choose between a small, medium, or large institution in a rural or urban environment. Climate, scenic beauty, recreational possibilities and opportunities to work may also be important considerations.

Financial Considerations

If you are seriously interested in graduate study, do not be discouraged by a lack of finances. You should investigate and apply for all types of aid for which you may be eligible. Don't reject a school because it is expensive until you have learned what financial aid it can offer.

(Every institution has its own application process, as well as its own system for allotting aid. Therefore you should communicate directly with each school that interests you.) Many schools use a needs analysis document such as the Graduate and Professional School Financial Aid Service (GAPSFAS) or the Financial Aid Form (FAF). Other schools use different needs analysis systems. Be sure you complete the correct forms. In addition, every school has a different deadline date for financial aid application. File the correct forms by the specified deadlines. Funds are widely available, but they are not unlimited.

Some sources of aid that graduate students should be aware of:

Grants and Fellowships. These are outright awards that require no service in return. Grants are usually provided to those with financial need. Fellowships are prestigious awards given selectively. Financial need is not taken into consideration.

Teaching & Research Assistantships. These awards are given to recipients in exchange for a service to the university. Appointments to Teaching Assistantships are based on academic qualification and are made by department heads. Research Assistantships are rarely offered to first-year graduate students.

Accreditation

As an applicant to graduate school, you should understand the role that specialized accreditation plays in your field as this varies considerably from one discipline to another. In certain professional fields it is a requirement to have graduated from an accredited program in order to be eligible for a license to practice. In some fields the federal government also makes this a hiring requirement. In other fields accreditation is not as important and there may be some excellent programs that are not accredited.

Information to help you understand the role of accreditation in your field of interest is available in Peterson's Graduate and Professional Programs: An Overview, available in the Career Services Center's Career Resource Center.

III. APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

Once you have narrowed your choice of graduate programs to a reasonable number, you are ready to begin the application process. Initiate this process as early as possible. A full year-and-a-half before your anticipated starting date is not too early to take the necessary steps to gain acceptance into a program.

Application deadlines may range from August (before your senior year) to late spring or summer of your senior year. Medical schools in particular have very early deadlines. But most graduate schools have deadlines between January and March. Applying early can be an advantage in cases where schools have rolling admissions.

Timetable

It is recommended that you follow the timetable that appears below to maximize your chances for acceptance.

Junior Year, Fall and Spring

- Attend Career Services Graduate School Day, held in October to talk with a variety of graduate school representatives.
- Research careers, areas of interest, institutions and programs.
- Register and prepare for appropriate graduate admission tests.
- Investigate financial aid opportunities.

Junior Year, Summer

- Take required graduate admission test.
- Send postcards (or email) requesting an application, bulletin and financial aid information.
- Visit institutions to talk with admissions staff and faculty of program.
- Write application essay.
- Develop calendar of deadline dates.

Senior Year, Fall

- Obtain letters of recommendation from appropriate faculty or professionals in your field of interest who can assess your academic and/or work performance.
- Send in completed applications.
- Register for Graduate and Professional Schools Financial Aid Service (GAPSFAS) or other needs analysis service, if required.

Senior Year, Spring

- Call all institutions to ensure they have your complete application materials.
- Send deposit to the institution of your choice.
- Notify other colleges and universities that accepted you of your decision so they may admit students on waiting list.
- Send thank you notes to reference writers informing them of your plans.

Application Requirements

Graduation Admission Tests

Many graduate programs require you to submit your scores from a graduate admission test, often the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) or the Miller Analogies Test (MAT). Professional schools have their own specific test, such as the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) for business school, the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) and the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). Test registration materials can be found in the Career Resource Center at 401 Academy Street or in the University Testing Center, 011 Hulihan Hall.

Transcripts

Admissions committees always require official transcripts (available at Student Services Building) of your grades as part of the selection process. Your grade point is only one of many criteria evaluated. The content of your courses, your course load and major and the reputation of your undergraduate institution are also important.

Application Essays

Almost all applications to graduate school require that you write an essay or a personal statement. Put time and thought into its development and reflect clearly defined goals. Communicate why you wish to attend graduate school, what you hope to gain from the experience and what your future plans are. Read sample essays.

Interviews

Some graduate programs will require an interview. Interviews can often be the opportunity for borderline candidates to convince an institution of their potential success. The interview is also a chance for the institution to see how you react to stress and handle pressure. You also may be asked to address such topics as your motivation for graduate study personal philosophy, career goals, related research, work experience, and areas of interest. Prepare and dress for a graduate school interview as you would a job interview. Ask for the opportunity to attend classes and meet with current students in your program of choice.

IV. UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE RESOURCES TO HELP YOU

Career Services Center – 831-2392 – 401 Academy Street

Provides individual assistance

Books in the career library:

- ❑ GRE and other test bulletins
- ❑ Graduate School Information – GS books
- ❑ Peterson's Graduate Programs – GS 15-40
- ❑ Index of Majors and Graduate Degrees – GS 50
- ❑ Best Graduate Schools from U.S. News and World Report – GS 55
- ❑ Directory of Graduate Programs in Applied Sports Psychology – GS 77
- ❑ MCAT Success – GS 79
- ❑ Physician Assistant Programs Directory – GS 80
- ❑ Medical School Admissions Adviser – GS 81
- ❑ The Ph.D. Process – GS 83
- ❑ Insider's Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical and Counseling Psychology – GS 84
- ❑ Graduate Study in Psychology – GS 85
- ❑ Getting In: Step-By-Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology – GS 86
- ❑ How to Get into the Right Business School – GS 87
- ❑ Business School Admissions Adviser – GS 88
- ❑ Essays the Worked for Law Schools – GS 102
- ❑ GMAT CAT Success – GS 115
- ❑ GRE CAT Success – GS 120
- ❑ GRE Exam – GS 122
- ❑ Graduate Admissions Essays – GS 124
- ❑ Perfect Personal Statements – GS 125
- ❑ Graduate School – GS 127

Computer Resources

- ❑ Go to the Career Services s home page – www.udel.edu/CSC/ and click on “Graduate Schools” for a listing of pertinent web sites to help you with many aspects of the graduate school decision-making process.
- ❑ Go to the specific web site of graduate schools for specific information and on line applications.