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Considering Graduate School?

If you are apprehensive about venturing into the job market, you might view graduate school as a way to temporarily delay making tough career decisions. While an advanced degree may make you more marketable, it is not the only way to find a satisfactory job. Additional work experience may be more relevant to your needs and/or field. Consulting with a Career Center staff member may be helpful in clarifying your decision. When applying to graduate school, it is best to have a specific field you want to focus in. A full-time Master's program usually takes one to two years, while Ph.D.'s and some professional degrees require a minimum of three years.

Reasons for enrolling in a graduate program include:

- 1) The passion for a particular subject and thus the desire to study it in depth, and/or
- 2) The need for an advanced degree to enter the profession of your choice.

Where to Apply

In choosing graduate schools, and ultimately a particular graduate program to enter, many factors can play significant roles. You'll need to think about which factor or factors are most important to you:

- **Reputation** - To determine the reputation and ranking of programs, be sure to read several reports and ask professors about the reputation of schools and programs. A graduate school's reputation is often based on the reputation of its faculty. Do not rely on a single source as there is no single rating for graduate or professional schools that is universally accepted.
- **Program of study** - What is the specific focus of the program: theory, research, case study, fieldwork? How many students are enrolled in the program? What is the student mix and attrition rate?
- **Geographic Location** - Is this an area where you would be willing to spend two or more years? Could the ties that you develop here lead to employment?
- **Post-Graduate School Employment** - Where do graduates of the program typically find work? How much help is provided by the institution to find employment?
- **Faculty** - Are the faculty conducting research in areas of your interest? Are professors seen on the cutting edge of their field? What have they published? What is the student-faculty ratio? Have you visited the campus to meet with any faculty to discuss their program?
- **Facilities** - What type of housing is available? Do they have state of the art labs and facilities? How comprehensive is the library?
- **Cost** - How will I pay for school? What are the average starting salaries of graduates in my field? Will I be able to support my loan payments? Are there graduate assistantships available?

Financial Support

Graduate schools often have fellowships and teaching fellows opportunities that might equip you with resources to finance your graduate degree. Institution-based aid most frequently takes the form of a graduate assistantship. Graduate, teaching, or research assistants work part-time in exchange for a stipend and tuition reimbursement. Loans are the primary source of government assistance. Outside organizations provide scholarships and fellowships to students pursuing graduate degrees in various disciplines. You could consider working full-time while taking classes. There are many employers who offer tuition reimbursement as part of their benefits package.

After considering these factors you can identify three categories of schools to which you might apply:

1. **Reach** - Schools whose requirements you might meet; it's always worth the try!
2. **Target** - Schools whose requirements your qualifications meet.
3. **Safety** - Schools to which your qualifications certainly meet, "ensuring" you would gain acceptance.

The Application Procedure

It is a good idea to start considering graduate school one and a half years before applying. All graduate programs require the following items:

Application Form - Application deadlines vary but usually fall between December and March. Some schools have rolling admissions. Most colleges and universities have their application form online. Therefore, you can apply online or print out the forms. In order to apply online, you simply create your own account and fill out the application and update it each time. You can even ask your professors to submit the letters of recommendation online. When the application is complete, you can submit everything together electronically.



Essay - The essay or statement of purpose varies from school to school, but in general all the schools ask you to write about yourself and why you are interested in their program. This requires extensive research on the particular program, faculty members and institution you are applying to as well as self exploration. It is important to include your interests and experiences that make this program a perfect match for you. Additionally, it is a good idea to write your essays two months before the application due date.

Points to remember while writing essay:



- Remember to stick to the topic and try to consider what the reader might be thinking.
- The essay is your chance to show why you chose this particular school and program.
- The personal essay/statement should represent your best writing abilities.
- Allot time to get feedback from the Career Center, Office of Writing Programs and your faculty advisor.

Transcript - Graduate schools require official transcripts as part of your application. Requests for official copies from the Registrar's Office usually take 3-5 days to process. Although GPA is important, it is not examined in isolation; the rigor of the courses you have taken and the reputation of the college you have attended are also considered.

Standardized Tests - Standardized tests are offered periodically throughout the year; many are now computer based tests. Most commonly taken tests are the GRE for Master's and Doctoral level studies; GMAT for business; Miller Analogies Test (MAT) for psychology and education, LSAT for law school, MCAT for medical school, etc. Make sure you take the test that you are required to take well ahead of the application deadline (often at least three months before deadline), allowing yourself enough time to possibly re-take the test and still submit your new scores within the deadline.



Letters of Recommendation - Start this process early, allowing enough time for the authors of each letter to construct and write the letter (often at least three months before the deadline). You should choose faculty members or professionals who know you very well and are recent references. Most graduate schools are interested in letters from faculty members. Professional schools may consider non-academic letters from professionals in the field as well. Prepare your references by giving them your resume and ensuring they know your deadlines.

Application Fee - Most graduate schools require an application fee. Some fees may be waived for US citizens if you meet certain financial criteria.

Interview - Some graduate schools, especially medical or business schools, require you to participate in an interview. This can be a good opportunity for you to persuade an admission's officer of your candidacy.



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