

Graduate School

Reasons to Pursue Graduate School

Generally, there are three good reasons to pursue a graduate degree:

- Your career goal requires an advanced degree
- You are passionate about a subject and simply want to further your education
- In your field of work, an advanced degree will open the door to additional career opportunities and may entitle you to a salary increase

If you are pursuing graduate school for any of the reasons listed below, it is recommended that you consider other options; at least for now...

- To avoid getting a job
- Because you don't know what else to do
- Because someone is telling you to go

Deciding When to Go to Graduate School

Immediately after Graduation

- If an advanced degree is REQUIRED for you to meet your career goals, it will be difficult for you to pursue them without it.
- After 4 years of college, you are in the "academic groove." It may be easier for you to continue with that mindset.
- Some people think that once you start to earn a paycheck, it may be difficult to give up all or part of your salary to be a student again.

Delay Graduate School for a Year or More

- In some cases, employers actually prefer employees with experience and an advanced degree.
- Your financial situation may dictate that you to enter the workforce after graduation.
- If you need additional help to finance your graduate degree, you may want to work for an employer that will pay for all or part of your education.

Part-time While Working

Full-time work and part-time school is a good option for many people. There are a few points to keep in mind:

- Going to grad school part-time will take much longer than going full-time. Consider how this might affect your career goals.
- Some lifestyles are not compatible with working during the day and going to school at night. You will need to decide if this will work for you.

Make a List of 'Schools of Interest'

Finding the right graduate program and school is an important task, and one that takes time. There are many variables to consider and resources to browse. Take a look at the list below for our suggestions for places to look for schools.

Faculty & Staff: Make a point to develop a relationship with people at Gettysburg College who work in your area of interest. If you are thinking about Student Affairs graduate programs, get to know people who work in Residence Life, Student Activities, Career Development, and other offices within College Life. Similarly, if you are a physics student and want to pursue a program in that area; spend time with your faculty and find out about their graduate programs.

Your Mentors/Role Models: Pay close attention to where the people you consider to be career role models went to school. As you read articles, books, watch interviews, etc., find out where the people whose work you admire went to school. These 'backdoor' resources can be quite helpful!

GradSchools.com, Petersons.com: These websites, and others, are great tools to find programs that you might not be aware of otherwise. You can search by type of program and geographic area. From there you can access the university website and get more information about the program.

Gettysburg College Alumni: If you want to see where alumni from your major have gone to graduate school, Career Development can help you get this information. Your department may be able to assist with this request as well.

Blogs: The internet is a resource for blogs with information about graduate school. Some bloggers write specifically about their school/program and others are more general. If you are interested in reading about one person's opinion, then blogs might be a good resource for you. However, keep in mind that blogs can be very biased and opinionated. Be cautious about forming your own opinion solely on what you read in a blog.

Geographic Location: If you know where you want to live when it is time to start your career, it can be advantageous to go to graduate school in that geographic area as well. Ties that you develop here could lead to jobs in the area. Do some research and see if there are any schools that match your criteria.

Narrow Your List

It is likely that you have a pretty lengthy list of schools that look interesting. Here are some suggestions for how to narrow the list down to 6-12 target schools. You may want to rank them: 1. Reach Schools, 2. Likely Schools, 3. Safe Schools. Here are some components to consider.

Faculty: Does the faculty conduct research in areas that interest you? Are they well known in their disciplines? Are they concerned about and accessible to students? What is the student-faculty ratio? Have they published lately? **Make sure that you visit the campus and meet with faculty members in your department.**

Reputation: Is the program/institution nationally recognized and/or accredited? Talk to professors who teach similar undergraduate courses and ask them for any insight into the schools that interest you.

Program of Study: What emphasis does the program use? Theory? Research? Case Study? How many students are enrolled in the program? What is the student mix and attrition rate?

Geographic Location: Is this an area in which you want to spend two or more years? Attending a school far from home can greatly increase your costs. Ties that you develop here could lead to jobs in the area.

Internships/Assistantships: Does the department incorporate internships and/or field work into the academic program? Is there financial remuneration for projects requiring substantial time and effort?

Facilities: What type of housing is available? How extensive and available are labs and facilities? How comprehensive is the library?

Cost: How will you pay for school? Does your department or the university in general have assistantships available? What are the average starting salaries of graduates in your field? Will you be able to support your loan payments? Is financial aid available?

Students: What do current students in the program have to say about it? The graduate admissions office or the department can put you in touch with current students.

Entrance Exams

You will need to research the required test for the program and institution in which you are applying for admission. Some examples of standardized tests that may be required are:

- **Graduate Program:** GRE– Graduate Record Exam (www.gre.org)
- **MBA:** GMAT– Graduate Management Admissions Test (www.gmat.org)
- **Law School:** LSAT– Law School Admission Test ([www.lsac.com](http://www.lsac.org))
- **Medical School:** MCAT– Medical College Admission Test (www.mcat.com)
- **Vet School:** VCAT– Veterinary Medicine College Admission Test

Test information booklets and practice tests are available in the Center for Career Development.

Submit and Complete Your Application

Application: Call, email or write directly to the graduate admissions office for an application. Request an application, catalog, and any specific information they may have on the particular program in which you are interested. It is suggested that you type all paper applications. You may also submit your application online. It might be helpful to prepare copies for practice versions prior to completing the original. Answer all questions.

Transcripts: Request your official transcript from the Registrar's Office. It can take up to a week to process this request. Grade point averages are important, but are not examined in isolation. In addition, the rigor of the courses you have taken, your course load, and the reputation of the college you have attended are also considered. **You will need official transcripts from all colleges attended and study abroad programs.** Contact each school individually for these requests. Submit these requests well in advance of the application deadline.

Standardized Tests: Standardized tests are offered throughout the year, either by computer or paper and pencil. Most common tests taken are the GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT. Tests scores for the paper/pencil version take 4-6 weeks to process. Computerized versions are available immediately. Check the Center for Career Development for test application and study materials.

Letters of Recommendation: Obtaining letters of recommendation is an often mandatory step in completing your application. Start this process early; you don't want to have to wait for letters and miss a deadline. You should choose faculty and professionals who know you well. Give them 4 weeks or more to prepare a recommendation letter. Coach and prepare your references. Provide them with a resume, personal statement, and copies of work that you have completed for them. Make sure they know your deadlines. Pick one extra person in case you fall short. If planning on taking a year or two off prior to grad school, it is important to ask your faculty members while you are still in school if they will be a reference for you when you apply at a later date. Provide them with the same information now as you would if you were applying at this time and find out how you can contact them when you need the reference. Stay in touch with them!

Application Fee: Most graduate schools require an application fee. Some fees may be waived if you meet certain financial criteria, but you will need to complete paperwork to receive this waiver.

Essay: Refer to the back of this page for this in depth information on essays.

Interview: Some graduate schools require you to appear for an interview. It can be a very important opportunity for you to persuade a department that you are an excellent candidate for their program. Keep in mind, as the interviewer is asking you questions, they are more interested in how you think than what you think. You should prepare for the graduate school interview, just as you would a job interview. See the back of this page for sample interview questions or schedule a mock interview with the Center for Career Development.

Portfolio: Fields that involve creativity usually require you to submit a portfolio as part of the application process. It should show your skills and ability to do further work in a particular field, and it should reflect the scope of your cumulative training and experience. You may want to prepare an electronic portfolio as well. A website or CD are examples.

Personal Statements & Essays

When completing your application for graduate school, you will probably need to write a personal statement or an admission essay. Of course, the essay will be about you, but the topic may vary. Some graduate programs may ask for a personal statement. Other schools might ask you to be more specific and they may want to know why you chose a certain field, what you intend to do when you graduate and why you are applying to their school.

No matter what the topic of the essay is, keep in mind that the admissions committee members want to know two things when they read your essay:

Are you realistic about the field in general? The applicant who wants to get a Master's in Social Work to "help rid the world of poverty," the education student who wants to "mold the minds of youth for the 21st century" are simply not realistic. In addition, someone who does not have a clear view of his or her field of study is probably not very realistic about the demands and rigors of a graduate program either. Most graduate schools look for students who know what they are getting into and why.

Are you articulate? Can you write a decent paragraph? Graduate schools want students who can express themselves in an intelligent way, using proper logic, form, grammar and punctuation. The essay is important not only for WHAT you write, but also for HOW you write it. It should also be well organized, succinct, specific, customized, and proofread.

The essay is your chance to show why you want to go to graduate school, your strengths and achievements, and why you are interested in a particular department or program. To help you achieve the results that you want, it is very important to talk about your essay with someone else to get a different view. The Center for Career Development has many samples of essays, as well as staff members to assist you in critiquing your personal statement. Consult your faculty for additional guidance.

Sample Interview Questions

Graduate School:

What do you do in your spare time?

What do you intend to gain from your degree?

What schools have you applied to and why?

Pretend you are me, and I am you: What would you look for in an applicant?

How much money do you expect to earn?

What are your positive qualities and what are your negative qualities?

Of what value can you be to our school?

What do you see yourself doing 10 years from now?

What aspects of your life experiences do you think makes you a good candidate for this graduate program?

Medical/Dental School:

Why do you want to be a doctor/dentist?

What are your specific goals in medicine?

How do you plan to finance your medical education?

There are 1,000 applicants as qualified as you. Why should we choose you?

What steps have you taken to acquaint yourself with what a physician/dentist does?

What do you think the most pressing issue in medicine is today?

What would you like to do if you were not accepted into medical school?

What do you think about euthanasia?

What do you think about the managed care?

Ideal Timeline...

This timeline outlines, in general terms, what you should be doing in preparation for graduate school. The timeframe refers to what needs to happen in advance of the semester you begin your program, (for example, 2 years in Advance of Fall 2010 or Fall 2011).

2.5 Years in Advance:

- Discuss your interests for post BA/BS work with your advisor and faculty members
- Begin to define or inquire about specialties in your chosen field.

2 Years in Advance:

- Meet with the Center for Career Development staff, academic advisors, and faculty to discuss your interests, learning style needs, etc.
- Become knowledgeable of the resources available to you and develop a list of schools of interest.

1.5 Years in Advance:

- Get more intense with your research and become even more familiar with the programs that look like a good fit for you. Ask faculty members for their input and advice.
- Investigate fellowships, scholarships and financial aid. Fellowship assistance can be obtained in the Academic Advising Office and the Provost Office.

1 Year in Advance:

- Register and prepare for appropriate graduate admission tests.
- Have a list of 6-12 target schools. Visit as many of these campuses as possible.
- Begin to acquire letters of recommendation.
- If necessary, request application material. Get started on your application essay. Set a timeline for yourself on application deadlines.

9 Months in Advance:

- Confirm and collect recommendation letters (3-5).
- Take necessary admission tests if you haven't already.
- Make copies of all application material and mail completed applications.
- Request transcripts from the registrar and send additional transcripts as necessary.

6 Months in Advance:

- Call all schools to which you have applied and confirm that your file is complete – do this prior to the application deadline.
- Keep faculty members informed of your application status.
- Visit all programs of acceptance and evaluate offers. Notify all accepted and rejected schools. Consider deferring admittance if that is available.

3 Months in Advance:

- Make up any and all academic deficiencies or get a head start and enroll in a graduate class.
- Thank all recommenders for their support, assistance, and encouragement. Keep in touch with faculty.

Visit www.gettysburg.edu/career for additional information and resources about graduate school!