Applying to Graduate School Timeline

This document contains a sample *suggested* timeline checklist of action items to support the graduate school application process. While following this timeline may be helpful in organizing a timely and effective application experience, students may complete activities according to their needs and the requirements of their desired schools/programs. If intending to go to graduate school for a professional program (Medical School, Law School, Nursing, Business School) there may be other types of activities to consider in preparation for these applications. Additional resources related to applying to professional programs can be found at the end of this document. **The Career Center has a variety of services and materials available to assist you in planning your graduate or professional school applications. For more information about the Career Center, visit www.career.fsu.edu**

ITEMS COMMONLY USED TO EVALUATE GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICANTS

Graduate schools may consider a variety of materials when evaluating your applications. Below is a list of the most commonly requested items used for evaluation of a candidate's application for graduate school. Keep in mind that each graduate program is different and may require materials or actions not included in this list. **Always check with the schools to which you are applying to make sure you have submitted all necessary materials by established deadlines.**

☐ **General Application** - You will be asked to fill out a general application form that includes identifying information and asks you to indicate the program to which you are applying. These are often done online and will have functions that allow you to attach additional application materials prior to submitting.

☐ **Transcripts** – Graduate schools almost always require candidates to submit transcripts from all colleges attended, regardless of whether or not a degree was obtained. Some will want "official transcripts" which must be requested from the registrar and submitted in sealed envelopes. Some schools will allow candidates to submit unofficial transcripts (which may still have to be requested from the registrar) at the time of application which can be scanned and attached as an electronic document to your online application. If you are allowed to submit unofficial transcripts with the original application, you may need to provide official transcripts upon acceptance. Make sure you pay attention whether a school requires official or unofficial transcripts at the time of application!

☐ **Grade Point Average (GPA)** - Most graduate schools will look at your undergraduate GPA as part of the application process. They may be concerned with your cumulative GPA, subject-specific GPA, or both. Most graduate programs will publish GPA ranges of successful applicants on their websites or in printed information materials.

☐ **Graduate Examination Scores** - Many graduate programs require applicants to take specific admissions tests and submit scores for their review. The most common graduate exam is the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) which has both a general test consisting of quantitative, verbal, and analytical writing sections as well as subject-specific tests that may be required for graduate admissions. It is very important to know which graduate exam(s) are required by your program of interest. Some acronyms for other graduate admissions exams include GMAT (often used for business school applications), MCAT (medical school), LSAT (law school), DAT (dental school), etc.

☐ **Personal Statement** - Personal statements are essays submitted with the general application. It is usually between 500 and 1000 words, but schools vary on word and page limits. Personal statements may include a specific prompt to discuss, information related to why applicants are interested in graduate school, their reasons for choosing a particular program/occupation, personal goals/passions related to their desire to pursue graduate education, accomplishments and awards, descriptions of research/work experience, applicant career goals, etc. Have your personal statement reviewed by multiple individuals prior to submitting your application. The Career Center provides free drop-in advising where you can have your personal statement critiqued.

☐ **Recommendations** - Graduate applications often require recommendation letters and/or rating forms. Generally, 2-3 recommendations are expected by individuals who can vouch for your ability to succeed in graduate school. Graduate programs prefer your recommenders be faculty members you have worked with/learned from academically or managers/supervisors who have overseen your professional work. Mentors and colleagues can serve as references if they can speak to your relevant abilities. Avoid using personal relations as recommenders, such as family members and friends.

☐ **Resume or Curriculum Vitae** - You may be asked to submit a resume or curriculum vitae (longer academic resume) so that admissions committees can evaluate your relevant experience (i.e., work, experiential learning, and/or research experiences). For help writing resumes and curriculum vitas, drop into the *Career Center* and speak with a Career Advisor and/or visit the *Career Center* website at www.career.fsu.edu.

☐ **Writing/Work Sample** - Some graduate programs will ask you to submit a sample of your writing or portfolio items as part of your application. Follow directions for what kinds of samples to submit. If you are unsure, call the admissions office or department to which you are applying to clarify.

☐ **Related Coursework** - Sometimes admissions committees will look favorably on applicants who have taken coursework related to the subject they wish to study in graduate school. For example, many graduate programs like to see coursework in research methods and/or statistics in preparation for graduate research.

☐ **Interview** - Some graduate programs require applicants to interview as part of the application process. Usually, this happens after applications are submitted and the faculty have identified their top candidates. Interviews can be conducted via phone, live video call, or in person. If you need help preparing for an interview, drop into the *Career Center* and speak with a Career Advisor.

☐ **Deadlines** – Perhaps one of the most important items of the graduate application is the deadline! It is imperative that all required materials be submitted by the program's deadline, which is usually publicly posted on their website. Keep in mind that some schools require two applications, one to a general graduate school, and one to your desired graduate program. It is recommended you keep track of all required application deadlines.

APPLICATION TIMELINE

FIRST YEAR

☐ **Become familiar with campus resources and services** to help you acclimate to college life.
- The *FSU Division of Student Affairs* has excellent resources to support your transition to college. Visit their website at: studentaffairs.fsu.edu to find ways to access services, become involved on campus, make friends, and find support.

☐ **Visit an academic advisor** to discuss the FSU Mapping system, potential academic pathways, and options for coursework enrollment.
- For help identifying your academic advisor, visit *Advising First*: advisingfirst.fsu.edu

☐ **Drop-in at the *Career Center*** for assistance in exploring your values, interests, and skills and how these may relate to your choice of a potential major/occupation.
- You can access several resources online at career.fsu.edu and/or drop-in to speak with a career advisor Monday through Friday, 9:00 AM – 4:30 PM.

☐ **Begin a practice of attending faculty office hours** to gain strategies for maintaining a high GPA and strengthen relationships with faculty and begin cultivating potential graduate school references.

☐ **Consider joining the *Garnet and Gold Scholar Society*:** garnetandgoldscholar.fsu.edu

☐ **Explore options to participate in research** related to your field of interest.
- The *Center for Undergraduate Research* provides support and guidance for undergraduates seeking research opportunities. Visit their website for more information and resources: cre.fsu.edu

SOPHOMORE YEAR

☐ **Get involved in activities** (on or off campus) that relate to your values, interests, skills, or potential fields of interest.
- *NoleCentral* is a helpful FSU website that has listings for FSU student groups and organizations and information regarding on-campus events: nolecentral.dsa.fsu.edu

☐ **Choose a major** and check-in with your academic advisor to stay on-track to with your program MAP. Both the *Career Center* and *Advising First* can assist you with choosing a major.

☐ **Visit the *Career Center* and/or your designated college Career Liaison to explore graduate school/occupational options related to your interests and career goals.**
- Drop-in hours for career advising at the *Career Center* are 9:00 AM – 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday. To identify your Career Liaison, visit: career.fsu.edu/About-Us/Contact-Us/Career-Center-Liaisons

- Use links on the *Career Center* Library's website under "Section III: Education" to research programs and schools: career.fsu.edu/Resources/Career-Center-Library
- Review the "Going to Graduate School" Career Guide on the *Career Center* website: career.fsu.edu/Resources/Career-Guides
- To view resources related to FSU graduate programs, visit The Graduate School website at: gradschool.fsu.edu

☐ **Explore options for participating in experiential learning opportunities** related to your field(s) of interest, such as internships, co-ops, and job shadowing.
- Visit the *Career Center*'s drop-in advising hours or your college Career Liaison for assistance in locating and preparing for experiential learning opportunities
- Use *Career Center* online resources to aid your search for experiential learning opportunities:
  - *Career Center* Experiential Learning information page: career.fsu.edu/Students/Gain-Experience
  - Career Guide ("Making the Most of Experiential Learning Opportunities" and "Job Shadowing and Information Interviews") : career.fsu.edu/Resources/Career-Guides
  - *Career Center* Library links: career.fsu.edu/Resources/Career-Center-Library

JUNIOR YEAR

1st Semester

☐ **Attend the *Career Center*'s Graduate and Professional School Fair** to learn about graduate programs and connect with college/university personnel from a variety of higher education institutions.

☐ **Research and identify graduate programs/schools** you might be interested in attending. Consider length of program, cost, location, size of program, cultural fit, faculty research fit, alumni employment data, etc. Become familiar with the application requirements and deadlines for these schools. Most department webpages for graduate programs have data and information about these topics. You might also consider contacting department admissions representatives with specific questions.

☐ **Create an application action plan** to assemble materials necessary for graduate school applications in accordance with application deadlines associated with your specific schools of interest. For assistance creating your plan, visit the *Career Center.*

☐ **Cultivate references for use in applications** by creating and maintaining meaningful relationships with professors, mentors, faculty advisors, and supervisors.

☐ **Explore opportunities for taking leadership positions** in organizations with which you are involved.

☐ **Apply for/participate in research opportunities** related to your field of interest. You may consider developing your own research independently or participating in a faculty-led research initiative on-campus.

2nd Semester

☐ **Continue to apply for/participate in experiential learning opportunities** related to your field(s) of interest.

☐ **Prepare for/take graduate school admissions examinations** according to requirements for your programs of interest (GRE, LSAT, MCAT, GMAT, etc.). Keep in mind that each examination has different timelines for reporting results. You will want to make sure you give yourself enough time to prepare for the exam and for results to be reported to your desired schools by the application deadline.
- The *Career Center* Library's Section III: Education has selected graduate school application and entrance examination resources available for your review.
- The *Testing and Education Resource Center (TERC)* at FSU has resources regarding preparation for graduate school entrance examinations: www.lib.fsu.edu/eresource/testing-and-education-resource-center-terc

☐ **Review faculty information at desired programs to identify research fit.** It may be helpful to reach out to faculty you are interested in working with to inquire about specific projects and areas of interest for future research. Also consider contacting desired programs to speak with current graduate students about their experiences in the program. These contacts may also be on program websites.

☐ **Explore graduate school funding options** including scholarships, financial aid, assistantships, tuition waivers, and external funding options. Schools and individual programs may have varied types of funding, so it is important to clarify what is available with the specific program/school to which you are applying. Below are some general funding resources:
- *FSU Office of Financial Aid*: financialaid.fsu.edu
- *FSU Office of Graduate Fellowships and Awards*: ogfa.fsu.edu
- F*SU Office of National Fellowships*: http://onf.fsu.edu/Fellowships/By-Purpose-of-Study/Graduate-School
- US News "Paying for Graduate School" resource page: www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/top-graduate-schools/paying

- Graduate/Professional School Student Aid information from the Federal Government: studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/graduate-professional-funding-info.pdf

☐ **Begin crafting your personal statements** and assembling other application materials required by your programs of interest. You can have these reviewed by Career Advisors at the *Career Center*.
- Review the *Career Center*'s "Writing Personal Statements" Guide at: career.fsu.edu/Resources/Career-Guides

SENIOR YEAR

☐ **Attend the Career Center's Graduate and Professional School Fair** to obtain additional graduate school information and network with college/university personnel from your desired institutions.

☐ **Reach out to potential reference contacts** to ask if they will be willing to serve as your reference. Be sure to give references several weeks to craft and submit their references (do not wait until the last minute before the application deadline!); give them a copy of your résumé /CV and let them know the deadline by which the reference is needed.

☐ **If you have not already, take your graduate entrance examinations** and have test scores sent to desired institutions. Finish assembling application materials (test scores, personal statement, references, writing sample, résumé/CV, transcripts, etc.) and complete applications by the deadline

☐ **Continue to participate in extracurricular and experiential learning activities** related to your field of interest.

☐ **Complete interviews or applications/interviews for financial support** (e.g. assistantships, fellowships, scholarships), if necessary according to the deadlines required by your programs of interest.

☐ **Review admission decisions and decide which program to attend.** For help organizing your decision-making process, visit the *Career Center* for drop-in career advising. For general help related to decision making, review the *Career Center*'s info on career decision making at career.fsu.edu/Students/Plan-Your-Career/Career-Decision-Making

AFTER RECEIVING YOUR DECISIONS…

If you were not admitted this time…
If you were not admitted, consider ways to improve your application for the next round. You may ask for feedback from admissions representatives or faculty within your desired programs. Consider steps you might take between now and your future applications to improve your chances of acceptance next time.

If you were admitted without funding…
If you were admitted without funding, consider alternate options for funding your graduate school experience. There may be external funding sources with available funds or other on-campus experiences that can offer you financial support. Speak with department representatives from your desired programs and the campus financial aid office to determine what options/resources might be available to help you.

ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES FOR APPLYING TO GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

General Graduate School Resources
- www.GradSchools.com
- www.Petersons.com
- National Center for Education Statistics College Navigator information tool: nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/

Professional School
- Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) – www.lsac.org
- FSU Pre-Law Website – prelaw.fsu.edu
- Association of American Medical Schools (Student/Applicant Information Pages) - https://students-residents.aamc.org/search/?q=premed.pdf
- FSU Pre-Health & Pre-Med Advising – http://med.fsu.edu/index.cfm?page=AdvisingOutreach.home
- Health Professions Advising Office Pre-Medical Handbook – med.fsu.edu/userfiles/file/PreMedHandbook.pdf
- American Association of Colleges of Nursing Guide to Graduate Nursing Programs: www.aacn.nche.edu/publications/brochures/GradStudentsBrochure.pdf
- Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC) Business School Application Timeline and Checklist: www.mba.com/us/plan-for-business-school/apply-to-school/general-application-advice/application-checklist.aspx

available in alternative format