

Going to Graduate School

Objectives

1. Explore types of graduate/professional degree options and considerations for choosing programs.
2. Review resources to assist in finding and applying for graduate or professional school.
3. Learn about options to finance your degree.

Why Go to Graduate School?

Attending graduate or professional school may be different from your experience as an undergraduate student. It is recommended that you thoughtfully consider your reasons for wanting to attend graduate school, just as you would when deciding on an undergraduate degree or program. Some common reasons for pursuing graduate education include:

- Satisfying intellectual curiosity
- Seeking employment in the academic environment
- Preparing/positioning for career advancement
- Specializing in a particular area or interest
- Adding depth to academic background

Things to consider while making the decision:

- Are you confident enough in your decision to make the necessary commitment in time, effort, and resources?
- Will this advanced degree lead you to where you want to be professionally or personally?
- How will attending graduate school affect your family or relationships?
- How will you finance it?
- Do the programs require or recommend related experience before entry?
- What is your timeline for attending? Have you reviewed program deadlines for entry?

What Degrees are Available?

Master's Degree

(M.S., M.A., M.Ed., M.B.A., M.M., M.F.A., M.S.W., etc.)

- Course-type program: Students satisfactorily complete a required program of study.
- Comprehensive exam program: Student is required to complete coursework at the end of which an examination must be passed.
- Thesis-type program: Students complete required coursework and must submit a thesis (original piece of research).



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- Proficiency program requirements: Many of the creative disciplines (music, dance, theatre, art) offer programs that require the student to demonstrate proficiency in order to graduate.

Advanced Master's and Specialist Degrees (Ed.S., Adv.M.)

Students complete coursework beyond the master's degree but less extensive than the doctoral degree. They are most often offered in education.

Professional Degree

(J.D., M.D., D.V.M., Pharm.D., D.D.S., D.M.D., etc.)

Professional degrees are awarded upon completion of programs that prepare individuals to enter certain professions. Though the word "Doctor" is usually found in the degree title (e.g., "Juris Doctorate" for a law degree), the degrees in this category are referred to as professional degrees rather than doctorates. Higher degrees, such as master's degrees and Ph.D.s, may be available in these areas as well.

Doctoral Degree

(Ph.D., Ed.D., D.M., Psy.D., etc.)

These are the highest degrees awarded. In addition to completion of an academic program of study and a comprehensive examination, the majority require a dissertation, which is a significant work of original research.

How Do I Choose a School or Program?

Like any important decision, selecting a graduate program is often complex. If possible, start early to give yourself a year or more to explore and choose.

Research Possible Programs

1. *Identify programs in your chosen field.*

- There are various resources available to help, including many that are available in the FSU Career Center. Refer to books, online resources, and speak to your department advisor to identify programs. Some sample resources you may want to use include:

Peterson's Guides to Graduate and Professional Programs

The Official GRE/CGS Directory of Graduate Programs

Edition XII Worldwide Directories of Postgraduate Studies

www.gradschools.com

www.graduateguide.com

www.petersons.com/gradchannel

2. *Gather information on programs of interest.*

- Review institutional and departmental webpages.
- Access University bulletins/catalogs.
- Contact departments directly for additional materials describing the department, programs, and courses in detail.

3. *Check program "ratings."*

- Research current issues in your field. Are the programs you're considering active in these areas?
- Ask your professors and advisors what they know about the programs you are considering.
- Consult resources that review/evaluate programs. Many of these resources are available in both print and electronic formats.

The Gourman Reports (several volumes that review programs in different graduate areas)

National Research Council Research — Doctorate Program Rankings

U.S. News and World Report Graduate School Rankings at grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools

Choose Where to Apply

When selecting a program, your choices will likely depend on the compatibility of the department and program with your goals and purposes. The information you will need to determine your fit with the program may or may not be available in print. A visit to the program site is often the only way to acquire the information you will need. Consider the following questions:

1. ***What is the program culture?*** Is it research- or application-focused? Are the faculty members active in their field, and do they involve students in their professional endeavors (research or application)? How do faculty, staff, and students get along with one another? The best way to answer questions like these is to visit the program, speak with faculty and students, sit in on classes, and observe.
2. ***What is the quality of the program?*** Information might include: whether the department is accredited by an appropriate entity, whether faculty are publishing in your area of interest, whether any of the faculty are recognized as members of distinction in their field, and whether recent graduates are employed.
3. ***How do you compare to those who are admitted?*** In other words, how do your qualifications stack up against the competition? What are your chances?
4. ***What are the program costs?*** What will the program costs total and what forms of assistance are available? Are there assistantships, fellowships, scholarships, or other forms of institutional awards available that would help meet your expenses?
5. ***Will the program lead to licensure or certification?*** If you are entering a field where licensure or certification is required or desirable, will completion of the program meet the necessary educational requirements? You may need to research relevant accrediting bodies and any programs that are accredited by said organization.
6. ***What other program features are important?*** This will depend a lot on your situation but may include: length of the program, time classes are offered, size of the entering class, actual class size, and if the program requires a comprehensive examination or thesis/dissertation.

How Do I Apply?

Most prospective graduate students apply to several programs, often ranging from the ideal program, through good choices, to a back-up program (just in case acceptance into ideal programs are not obtained). Applications to graduate programs are often complicated, may require fees, and have specific deadlines. Creating a chart of deadlines, fees, and contacts can help you keep track of this information. Begin the application process early, usually in the fall semester *before* you plan to begin your graduate program.

Application Forms and Application Fees

- Check the program's website for application information prior to or early in the fall before you plan to begin your graduate studies. Also check the institution's graduate school admissions site as some graduate programs require application to both the program *and* the institution itself.
- Complete the application forms exactly as instructed. Each item is included for a reason, and only complete applications will receive consideration.
- Submit the application form and all other materials by the deadline and to the proper office. Ensure the application fee is correct in amount and form.

Admissions Examinations

Most graduate programs require submission of examination scores as part of the admission process. You might be wondering "Which exam(s) should I take?" and "When should I take them?" It is recommended that you take admissions exams early. Some programs require that exam scores be "current" (usually meaning that the exam has been taken in the past five years), so you want to ensure scores meet the requirements specified by each institution. Some exams can be taken multiple times, and the scores may be averaged, but there may be restrictions as to how many times the exam can be taken in a certain timeframe (for example, three times in a year, but not more than once in a thirty-day period).

The exam to be taken really depends on the field you plan to enter. Some common tests include:

- **DAT** (Dental Admissions Test)
Most dental schools
<http://www.ada.org/dat.aspx>
- **GMAT** (Graduate Management Admission Test)
Most graduate programs in business
www.mba.com

- **GRE** (Graduate Record Examination)
Most other programs
www.ets.org/gre
- **LSAT** (Law School Admission Test)
Law schools
www.lsac.org
- **MAT** (Miller Analogies Test)
Used by some graduate schools
www.milleranalogies.com
- **MCAT** (Medical College Admission Test)
Most medical schools
www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat

What Should My Personal Statement Include?

A personal statement may be requested to assess your interest and motivation in the program and also to assess your ability to write clearly and correctly. For more information, review the "Writing a Personal Statement" guide located at career.fsu.edu/Resources/Career-Guides. Often personal statements include information about:

- Special qualities you possess
- When/how you became interested in the field
- What you learned from experiences related to the field (employment, volunteer activities, research)
- Your career goals
- Explanations of gaps/oddities in your academic record (if applicable)
- If you have overcome any unusual obstacles
- What personal characteristics (integrity, persistence) or special skills (leadership, writing) you have that would enhance your prospects for success in this program or field
- Why you are interested in the program
- Anything else that makes you a strong applicant

Letters of Recommendation

Most graduate and professional programs require you to obtain letters of recommendation from people in a position to speak to your qualifications. They may specify the types of recommendations that must be submitted (academic, personal, employment). Some programs will ask that detailed forms be submitted, while others will ask for individualized letters. In general, you should:

- Check the program's requirements for recommendations before asking anyone. Know the type of recommendations requested and the format they must follow (form or letter).
- Ask permission *before* listing someone as a reference.

- Send a written request for the recommendation to each person being asked at least two weeks before the due date and provide each with: a copy of your résumé/curriculum vitae and any other information you feel is relevant, the form or guidelines that outline exactly what is expected in the recommendation, the deadline by which the recommendation must be received, and a correctly addressed, stamped envelope.
- Send a thank you note to each person writing a letter.

How Can I Finance My Degree?

It is important to begin researching sources of financial support early in the application process. This is because many funding organizations have applications due in the fall for the following year. Types of awards/assistance available:

- **Fellowships:** Prestigious awards, often quite substantial. They are competitive, based on academic achievement, and do not usually require work. For more information, see FSU's Office of National Fellowships, onf.fsu.edu.
- **Assistantships:** Paid, part-time employment that may include a full or partial tuition waiver (often of the out-of-state portion of tuition). Those with this type of award often teach, conduct research, or work in student affairs. These are often available via your academic department.
- **Loans:** Low-interest loans are available to most graduate students. Contact the institution's financial aid for more information.
- **Grants and Scholarships:** These are gifts of money. They may be "free scholarship money" with no obligation for work or repayment, or they may be for a specific purpose. Science organizations, for instance, may award a grant for completion of a student research project.
- **Academic Common Market:** The Academic Common Market is a program that helps students obtain in-state tuition at out-of-state institutions for programs that are unavailable in a student's home state. Participating institutions are located in 15 southern and mid-Atlantic states. For more information on the Academic Common Market, visit www.sreb.org/academic-common-market.

Summary

The Career Center is here to support you in your decision to attend graduate or professional school. We hope this guide has provided some useful information about the process involved in deciding on, applying to, and financing graduate or professional school.

Additional Resources

Select Career Center Library Resources

Peterson's Graduate and Professional Programs: An Overview.....IIC1 P416
Sample Personal Statements Notebook.....IIC C3
Peterson's Guide to MBA Programs.....IIC2 P4
Getting in: A Step-by-Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology.....IIC2 A56
Get into Law School: a strategic approach.....IIC3 L33
Graduate School on a Budget.....IIC2 G55
Graduate Admissions Essays.....IIC A75

Select Online Resources

- The Graduate School at FSU
www.gradschool.fsu.edu
- FSU Center for Academic Excellence (ACE)
ace.fsu.edu
- Peterson's Graduate School Guide
www.petersons.com
- FSU Financial Aid
www.financialaid.fsu.edu
- FinAid
www.finaid.org
- Federal Student Aid
www.studentaid.ed.gov

Other

Federal Student Aid Information Center:
1-800-433-3243

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