

ADMISSIONS GUIDE FOR

# GRADUATE CAREER SERVICES

SCHOOL



# Contents

- What Is a Graduate Education? . . . . . 4**
  - What are my options? . . . . . 4
  - Types of degrees . . . . . 4
  - Levels of degrees. . . . . 4
- Deciding to Go or Not to Go . . . . . 6**
  - You should consider graduate school if—. . . . . 6
  - You should do further research and/or consider other options if—. . . . . 6
  - Be honest with yourself, and answer these questions *yes* or *no* . . . . . 6
- The Successful Candidate . . . . . 8**
  - Tips for success . . . . . 8
- Timeline for Applying to Graduate School . . . . . 10**
  - Spring of junior year—summer before senior year . . . . . 10
  - August—September . . . . . 10
  - October—November . . . . . 11
  - December—January . . . . . 11
  - February—March. . . . . 12
  - April—May . . . . . 12
- Choosing a Program . . . . . 13**
  - Gathering information. . . . . 13
  - Questions about programs. . . . . 13
- The Graduate School Decision Table . . . . . 15**
- Graduate School Application Materials . . . . . 16**
  - Application form . . . . . 16
  - Application fee. . . . . 16
  - Official transcripts . . . . . 16
  - Admission essay . . . . . 17
  - Resume . . . . . 17
  - Letters of recommendation . . . . . 17
  - Entrance exams . . . . . 18
  - The interview and campus visit . . . . . 19
- Graduate School Admission Essays . . . . . 20**
  - Overview. . . . . 20
  - Self-assessment questions . . . . . 21
- The Graduate School Application Record . . . . . 22**
- Financial Aid. . . . . 23**
  - Additional resources . . . . . 23
- Graduate School Glossary . . . . . 24**
- Graduate School Websites . . . . . 25**
- How Can Career Services Help? . . . . . 26**
  - Ten things to do if you do not get in . . . . . 27

## What Is a Graduate Education?

Graduate education refers to formal study after receiving a bachelor's degree. It differs from undergraduate study in many ways, but a key difference is that a graduate program is designed to specialize in an academic discipline or profession and therefore offers less elective coursework. Classes tend to be smaller and are often targeted to a specific cohort, or the set of all students in the same year of the program. (For example, you may have heard a law student referred to as an "L1," "L2," or "L3," which means that the student is in the first, second, or third year of law school, respectively.) Faculty members expect more of graduate students—attendance and class participation are **not** optional. Besides course work, graduate students may be expected to conduct and defend independent research, complete internships or fieldwork, and/or sit for comprehensive exams.



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### WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

Many fields may be open to you. You do not necessarily have to stay in the field you major in as an undergrad, although you may be expected to complete additional course work to get ready for graduate level study in a different field.

Two **types** of graduate degrees, professional and research, can be earned at the master's, specialist, and doctoral **levels**, as well as a number of combinations of these types and levels. You are encouraged to research your desired career path well before selecting the discipline or program you will pursue in graduate school.

### TYPES OF DEGREES

**Professional degree programs.** A professional program is designed to prepare those who intend to enter a specific profession like law, medicine, college student personnel, education, and many others.

**Research degree programs.** A research program is designed to contribute original research and a body of knowledge to a particular discipline like those that compose the humanities, the social sciences, the natural sciences, engineering, or communications and information, for example.

### LEVELS OF DEGREES

**Master's.** Master's degrees can be earned in most academic fields. The Master of Science (M.S.) and the Master of Arts (M.A.) are the most common degrees at this level, however, there are also specialized degrees, such as the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) or Master of Business Administration (MBA), that carry a label unique to a particular program. Some master's degrees are designed to lead to doctoral studies, while others, like the MBA, are the terminal—or highest—degree for a profession. A **professional master's degree** usually indicates that the degree holder has a specific skill set needed to practice a profession or that the holder has enhanced a skill set to enable upward mobility in an existing career.

A **research master's degree** provides experience in research and allows further specialization in a particular field. It can also lead to increased responsibilities and marketability in an existing career without the time and financial commitment of a doctorate. Full-time students usually complete a master's degree in 2 years. As part of both types of master's degrees, you may be required to write a master's thesis or sit for comprehensive exams and often to complete an internship or a field experience.

**Specialist.** Specialist degrees are earned after a master's degree but before a doctorate and are usually offered in educational fields, including teaching, administration, or counseling (Ed.S.) and school psychology (either an SSP or an Ed.S. in school psychology). A specialist degree may require course work, training, an internship, or a combination of experiences beyond those required for a master's degree. This type of degree usually prepares its holders to meet professional certification or licensing requirements.

**Doctorate.** Doctorates are considered terminal degrees and, depending on the individual program's requirements, may be entered either directly after a bachelor's degree or only after completing a master's degree. **Be aware** that many programs that offer admittance after the bachelor's degree do not confer a master's degree if a student leaves the program after completing work comparable to the requirements for other master's programs. For such programs, students must complete all of the doctoral requirements in order for any course work to be applied toward a degree.

Other programs may grant the master's degree under certain circumstances should the student decide not to continue the program to its end. **It is essential to understand the degree options before committing to a program.**

Like master's degrees, doctoral degrees may be either research driven or professional.

**Research-driven doctorates.** A research doctorate is the most common type of doctoral degree and typically involves training to do research that results in original additions to the body of knowledge of an academic discipline. It is the primary credential to teach or conduct research at the university level, though a wide range of career options is possible. The most common research degree is the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D., for the Latin *philosophiæ doctor*, meaning "teacher of philosophy"). There are others, however, like the Doctor of Education degree (Ed.D. or D.Ed.) awarded by some colleges of education.

Besides course work, research doctoral candidates are expected to write and defend a dissertation—a book-length document that presents the candidate's research and findings—to a committee of scholars in the field, usually in the last year or two after completing all course work. Candidates may also be expected to sit for comprehensive exams ("comps") when they complete their graduate course work. The research doctorate typically takes approximately 4 to 6 years to complete, depending on a candidate's progress with the dissertation.

**Professional doctorates.** The most common professional doctorates are the Doctor of Jurisprudence (J.D., for the Latin *juris doctor*) in law and the Doctor of Medicine (M.D., for the Latin *medicinæ doctor*). The candidates for these professional doctorates typically complete the degree in a prescribed amount of time and often progress together in a cohort. A dissertation is rarely required for a professional doctorate, but depending on the profession, passing a comprehensive exam, a licensure exam, a certification exam, or a combination of these is often required.

## Deciding to Go or Not to Go

Examine your reasons for applying before going any further. While the decision is ultimately yours, by looking closely at your motivations and commitment to advanced education, you increase your chances for long-term success in both graduate school and your career. Take a moment to list your reasons for going to graduate school, then compare them to the statements below to help decide how to proceed.

### **YOU SHOULD CONSIDER GRADUATE SCHOOL IF—**

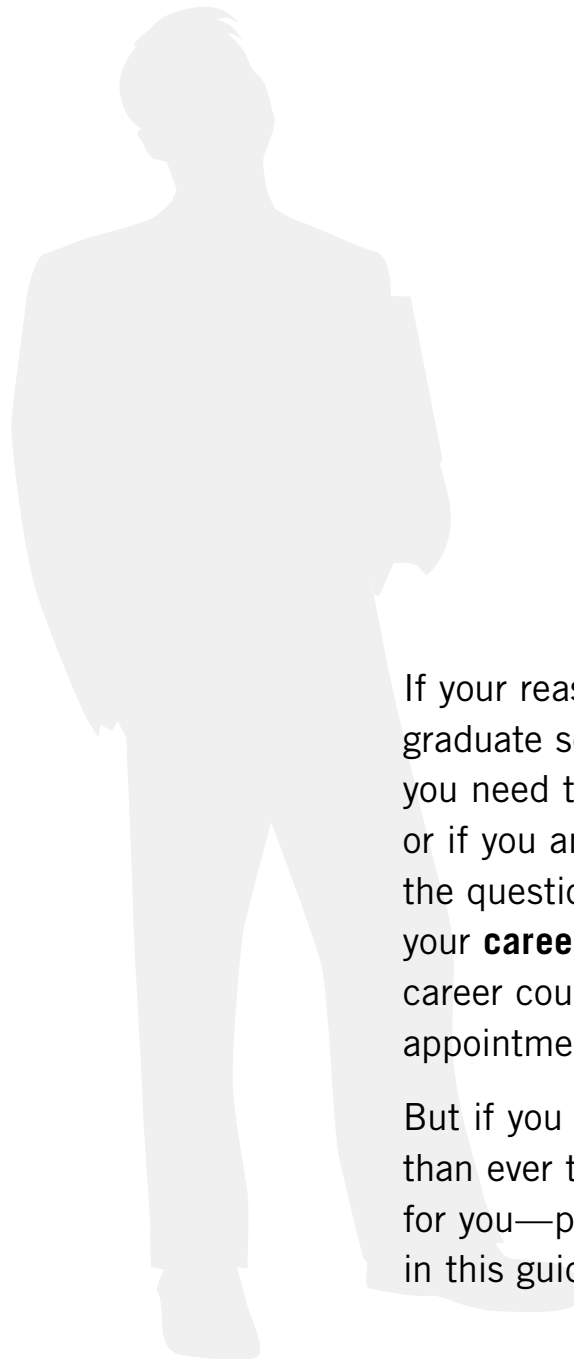
- Your research shows that your desired profession either requires an advanced degree or heavily favors people with advanced degrees.
- Your research shows that advanced education greatly increases your chances of advancement in your field.
- Your research shows that you need an advanced degree to increase your earning potential. You are confident that your increased earnings will outweigh the time, money, and energy you will invest in a graduate degree.
- You have a passion for your field of interest and appreciate the rigors of scholarly work.

### **YOU SHOULD DO FURTHER RESEARCH AND/OR CONSIDER OTHER OPTIONS IF—**

- You do not know what to do with your life and hope you will find direction in graduate school.
- Your major was really interesting, but you do not know what kind of job you can get. You assume that if you go to graduate school, the job search will be easier.
- You plan to go on to graduate school in the same discipline as your undergraduate major, but you are not really sure if you want to continue studying this field. You wish you could change subjects but do not know how or even whether changing is a good idea.
- You are not ready to join the world of work just yet—college was fun so grad school must be too!
- All your friends are going on to graduate school, so it must be the right thing to do.
- Your parents agreed to pay for it!

### **BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF, AND ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS YES OR NO:**

- Are you willing to invest the time, energy, and money associated with going to graduate school? Have you thoroughly investigated these costs?
- Are you prepared to spend the majority of the next 2 to 7 years studying while living on a meager budget and/or accruing loan debt?
- Can a single topic or narrow range of topics sustain your interest for the next 2 to 7 years?
- Are you a viable candidate for graduate schools? Do you at least meet the minimum requirements for the programs that interest you?
- Are you ready right now for more years of schooling?
- Do you have the career-related work experience that might help you get into graduate school?
- Does the idea of initiating and carrying out independent research excite you?



If your reasons for going to graduate school indicate that you need to do more research, or if you answered no to most of the questions, consider visiting your **career consultant** for career counseling. Schedule an appointment at 974-5435.

But if you are now more certain than ever that graduate school is for you—please continue along in this guide!

## The Successful Candidate

Programs vary in competitiveness for admission and in what they value most in candidates. Not all universities have a centralized graduate school unit, but those that do may have separate requirements for both the graduate school and the department in which you want to study. And though both may have minimum requirements, you should be aware that satisfying the minimum requirements for both does not guarantee acceptance. A more accurate predictor of acceptance is how a candidate compares with the average qualifications of the current students in the program. Keep these general facts in mind:

- **Grade-point average.** 3.0 is often the minimum, but average GPAs of graduate students are often much higher. Some programs weigh grades in specific courses more heavily; for example, for medical school, performance in the science prerequisites counts heavily.
- **Test scores.** Test type and score requirements vary by institution and program. Typically there are minimum scores you must obtain to be considered, but again, average scores of the students in the program are often much higher. Some programs place more emphasis on particular sections of the test (for example, quantitative versus verbal). Be sure to check each program of interest for specifics.
- **Relevant experience.** Experience gained through internships, fieldwork, a practicum, volunteering, independent studies, research, and so forth is often a deciding factor.
- **Strong letters of reference.** References and effective networking with members of the faculty and staff can sometimes move your application to the top of the stack. Look for any opportunity to make contacts at your home institution, at institutions of interest, and in your field of interest.

### TIPS FOR SUCCESS

#### Prepare

- Build good writing skills and research techniques while you're an undergraduate and/or an employee. Keep your eyes open for opportunities to get involved with your faculty members' research.
- Focus on getting good grades, especially in your last few years of college. Many graduate programs value excellent recent academic performance for admittance. Pay special attention to course work that may be weighted more heavily, like the sciences for health-care-related programs.
- Consider taking a test-preparation course to help study for any required entrance exams if you typically struggle with standardized testing. But consider your budget—these courses can be very expensive!
- Study resource guides for writing top-notch personal statements and essays and get your statement critiqued by a competent reviewer.



**A more accurate predictor of acceptance is how a candidate compares with the average qualifications of the current students in the program.**



- Develop and maintain a portfolio, including letters of references, writing samples, and relevant projects.

### Explore

- Keep current on what trends and skills are sought in your chosen profession, such as artistic techniques, computer skills, communications skills, or analytical skills.
- Gain experience in the field; for example, volunteer at a hospital or clinic if you are considering healthcare-related graduate programs.
- Set up informational interviews with people in the field and/or alumni of the graduate program you are considering.
- Visit your top graduate schools, and request an appointment for an informational interview with the chair of the program you are interested in or a professor associated with it.



## Timeline for Applying to Graduate School

You need to begin preparing to apply at least a year before you expect to enter a graduate program. For most, this means the spring of junior year or summer before senior year. The timetable below is approximate—it's best used as a guide to adapt to your personal situation.

Generally, most start graduate school in the fall. Application deadlines for a fall start date usually occur in January and February. However, as you build your timetable, you need to pay very close attention to deadlines and try to complete applications well before the due date.

### SPRING OF JUNIOR YEAR—SUMMER BEFORE SENIOR YEAR

- ❑ Decide on the type of graduate program that is consistent with your career goals. If you are unsure which programs are right for you, talk with program faculty members and/or schedule an appointment with your Career Services **career consultant** at 974-5435.
- ❑ Meet with knowledgeable faculty members to discuss goals for your graduate and professional careers to learn about potential programs. This is also a good time to ask whether they might write a reference for you.
- ❑ Prioritize your values and criteria regarding the selection of the graduate program that will be consistent with your career goals. Create a list of your top 5 or 10 values and criteria.
- ❑ Identify an initial list of 10 to 15 prospective graduate schools based on your career goals and values. Use the most current *Peterson's Guides to Graduate Programs*, the Peterson's website at [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com), or other resources located in the Career Resource Center to help generate this list.
- ❑ Contact each prospective graduate school and request course catalogs, applications, financial aid information, and other literature that is relevant to your decision-making process. It may be necessary to contact BOTH a graduate admissions office AND a specific department of a university to receive all relevant information.
- ❑ Sign up for entrance exams (e.g., GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT) required by your program of choice. Be aware of deadlines and frequency of testing dates. Consider preparing for the test and taking it now to allow time for retesting if necessary.
- ❑ Some professional programs use a clearinghouse for applications—law and medicine, for example—so if the program you are applying to uses a clearinghouse, begin gathering the information required by that clearinghouse.
- ❑ Begin looking into financial aid, such as loans, scholarships, fellowships, and graduate assistantships.

### AUGUST—SEPTEMBER

- ❑ Begin writing a rough draft of your personal statement or essay. Polish it as much as possible, keeping in mind that you will tailor a final version for each program you are applying to.
- ❑ Take entrance exams if you haven't done so already.
- ❑ Review the literature for all the prospective graduate schools you have identified and begin your elimination process by comparing the programs across at least these five areas:

1. The nature and structure of the program—course requirements, internship requirements, thesis requirements, electives, various tracks or specialties
  2. The specialties and areas of research of faculty members who teach within the graduate program or department
  3. How your career objectives line up with where the graduates of this program find work
  4. Financial aid options (what you need to do to pursue graduate assistantships and other forms of financial aid)
  5. What the university and, more specifically, the graduate program value in candidates; for example, GPA, standardized test scores, personal statement or essay, the interview, letters of recommendation, related experience
- Consider initiating an exploratory discussion by phone or in person with the department chairperson or a faculty member at each of your prospective universities.
- Introduce yourself and ask the contact whether he or she would be able to schedule a time to talk with you about their program. Don't assume that they have 20 to 30 minutes to speak to you right then.
  - During the informal phone discussion, you should ask questions related to each of the five areas listed above. This discussion serves three purposes: First, it enables you to continue the elimination process while exploring the programs in greater depth. Second, you develop a contact and build rapport with a faculty member or the department chairperson. Third, initiating this discussion and asking quality questions can make a good first impression.

## **OCTOBER—NOVEMBER**

- Generate a final list of universities to which you want to apply. Career Services recommends applying the “Rule of 6”—choose two “reach,” two “middle-of-the-pack,” and two “safe bets.”
- Adjust your timeline based on deadlines of your selected programs.
- All entrance exams should be completed by this time.
- Finalize versions of your personal statement to address each program's specific requirements.
- Order transcripts from all of your post-secondary institutions.
- Complete application forms.
- Meet with your recommenders again to discuss your program choices and give them information they will need to write the recommendations.

## **DECEMBER—JANUARY**

- Mail all applications even though they are not yet due. Many schools pay special attention to early applications. Also, those programs that roll admissions could fill their seats before the stated application deadline. Call to check that all materials were received.
- Fill out the FAFSA to qualify for federal aid. You'll fill out the same form for grad school that you did for college. Get the FAFSA in as soon after January 1 as possible.

- Research any deadlines to apply for graduate assistantships offered by your program or other departments on campus.

### **FEBRUARY—MARCH**

- Contact the schools on your final list and plan a visit to meet with faculty members and current students in the program. These visits can help you make the best decision for yourself and also increase your chances of being admitted into the program. You should continue to ask more specific questions within each of the five areas of exploration listed above.

**IMPORTANT: If you plan to speak to a faculty member, be sure to have first read some of their research or other published work!**

### **APRIL—MAY**

- You should start to receive admission offers around April. Compare offers based on your top values.
- Assess your financial aid package. If it doesn't quite meet your needs, look into alternative loan programs. Remember that each loan program sets its own terms, so compare terms carefully.
- Make a decision—call other programs to decline or withdraw.
- Write thank you letters to those who helped you during this process.



## Choosing a Program

Once you decide that graduate school is the right next step on your career path, you must then answer a very important question: Where will I go?

You'll need to explore a number of programs to find the best fits and increase your chances of being admitted to those programs. However, graduate schools' application fees can often be as much as \$80, so you should examine your personal goals and values concerning your graduate education and apply only to programs that would meet your needs and satisfy your goals. You may start with a list of approximately 10 to 15 programs, but a good rule of thumb is to narrow your application list to about six programs, using the "Rule of 6": two "reach" programs, two "middle-of-the-pack," and two "safe bets."

### GATHERING INFORMATION

**Faculty.** Members of the UT Knoxville faculty have attended and taught at a number of universities and may be able to provide inside information or suggestions about programs you should consider.

**Other students and alumni.** Alumni of and students now in graduate programs will give you the most honest information about the quality of the program and its faculty. Ask your program contact to schedule time for you to speak with current students during a campus visit.

**Individual program websites.** Visit each program's website for general information, such as the program's mission, faculty qualifications, admission and graduation requirements, and deadlines. But don't stop there—contact the school for more details.

**General graduate school websites.** These sites can provide a wealth of information on graduate school in general or on specific fields. Many of them also provide search engines to help identify programs that meet your needs. See the list in the "Graduate School Websites" section of this guide, on page 28.

**Peterson's guides.** These printed guides are available in Career Services' Resource Center Library. They are categorized by discipline and list every accredited program in the United States.

**Specialty guides.** Find guides for your field (for example, *Graduate Programs in Neurosciences* if the neurosciences is your field of choice) by asking professors which guides are the most reputable, by using the subject search engine at *amazon.com*, or by using the subject search engine from *Books in Print.com*. Some associations also print guides to graduate programs. Find out about them by looking up the association's headquarters phone number in the *Encyclopedia of Associations*; then just call and ask.

**Academic journals in your field.** Top students should get grad school ideas directly from the academic journals. The best programs generate the best and the most often cited articles, so look in the journals for articles and reports of research that interest you. Then find out where the article writer teaches and research his or her program.

### QUESTIONS ABOUT PROGRAMS

**Accreditation.** There are two main types of accreditation, institutional and program specific. You need to determine the properly accredited degree programs in your field. While accreditation is not necessarily the key indicator of quality, you could face negative consequences if the program that confers your degree is not accredited.

**NOTE: A school that is not properly accredited may not volunteer this information, so dig deep.**

**Admission standards.** Most schools publish this kind of information, so look for the number of applicants compared with the number of acceptances and the base requirements for admission, which usually include undergraduate grade-point average and scores on standardized tests.

**Multicultural/diversity opportunities.** Better programs tend to be diverse because diversity of all types often can signal a broader worldview. Examine the composition of both the faculty and the students in the program. You need to determine a mix where you'll feel both comfortable and appropriately challenged.

**Reputation/ranking.** Lots of different organizations rank graduate programs, so while rankings are an important measure of quality, you also need to investigate the source of the rankings. Examples of organizations that rank graduate programs include *U.S. News & World Report* and *Business Week*.

**Size.** There are two aspects of size you should evaluate—size of the program and size of its home university. Just as with your undergraduate school, you need to find a size that feels right for you. Examine the resources available to the program, as well as the faculty–student ratios.

**Faculty.** Are the program's faculty members well published? Do they publish in well-regarded peer-reviewed journals? What are they currently researching? Does this research match your interests? Are they available or do they travel frequently? (Consider, though, that their invitations to be presenters or speakers at prestigious conferences can be a big plus for you if they take their grad students along to network with the top people in the field!)

**Current students.** Request contact information or arrange a talk with current students to learn the pros and cons of the program from an insider's view.

**Student life.** What is the student population? How large is the graduate program? What is the student–faculty ratio? What is the average age of the students enrolled? Do students attend primarily full or part time? Are there any student organizations? Where do most of them live with respect to the campus? What support services are on campus?

**Location.** Where is the school located? What is the climate? What recreational activities are available? What is the social atmosphere? Can you be happy in this environment for the duration of your program?

**Finances.** What is the tuition for the program? What kind of financial assistance is available? Do they have a variety of assistantships, fellowships, grants, and loans? Make sure you examine all associated costs, including tuition, books and supplies, housing, and miscellaneous fees and expenses.

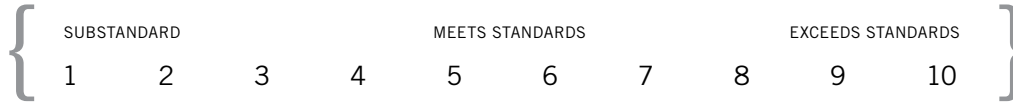
**“Fit” with your career interests.** If you have a specialized career interest—like environmental law, for example—you need to know whether the graduate program offers specialized courses and experiential opportunities in that area and whether it has faculty members with research interests that will allow you to develop the necessary knowledge, skills, and contacts to start your professional career successfully.

**The future.** Does the program assist with the job search after you receive your degree? Where do the graduates end up working? What opportunities for internships, research, and jobs are available while you are in the program?

**Graduation requirements.** Does the program require an exit project, such as a thesis, dissertation, or comprehensive test?

# The Graduate School Decision Table

Please rate each of your university/program options on a scale of 1 to 10 for each criterion. The subtotals for your top 10 criteria should be multiplied by 2 to give greater weight to those criteria. Make as many copies of this table with your completed values list as you need to rate all of the programs you have identified as possibilities.



SUBSTANDARD: Offers little to nothing to fulfill this value  
 MEETS STANDARDS: Offers basic resources to fulfill this value  
 EXCEEDS STANDARDS: Offers excellent resources to fulfill this value

Top 10 criteria/values	Universities/programs		
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
Subtotal			
Weighted subtotal (Subtotal x 2)			
Other criteria/values			
Subtotal			
TOTAL (Weighted subtotal for top 10 + subtotal for other criteria)			

## Graduate School Application Materials

A complete graduate school application usually consists of some or all of the following:

- Application form
- Application fee
- Official transcripts
- Admission essay
- Resume (or list of experiences)
- Letters of recommendation
- Entrance exams
- Interview and campus visit

Most programs will not begin to review your application until your file is complete, and they most likely will not review it at all if anything is late—so start early! Also, be sure to call to confirm the receipt of all your materials, and record the date and the name of the person you speak with.

Get organized quickly, using the "Graduate School Application Record" on page 22 if you need help getting started. You can use this format or create one for yourself to ensure you meet all your deadlines with well-prepared materials that display your qualifications in the best light.

### APPLICATION FORM

Get the appropriate application form as soon as you know that you are interested in a program. The form is often available online or you can request one from the school. The form comprises standardized questions that the program will use to track your application and ensure that you meet minimum qualifications. Your answers to the questions should be clear, consistent, and accurate. Type your answers, if possible, to appear more professional, and be sure to use your full legal name on all pages. Remember, most programs receive many applications and may be looking for quick ways to eliminate applicants. A small error or an unprofessional-looking application may be all they need to send yours to the bottom of the stack.

### APPLICATION FEE

You should plan to have approximately \$300 to \$500 available, as application fees can be as much as \$80 per school. These fees are typically not refundable for any reason, so do your research and be fairly certain of your interest in a school before applying.

### OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPTS

Just about every graduate program requires an official transcript from every post-secondary institution you have attended, even if you took only one course at an institution. An "official" transcript bears the university's seal and the signature of its registrar. You must order these and usually pay a small fee for each one. You can order University of Tennessee official transcripts by contacting the registrar's office at [registrar.tennessee.edu/records/transcripts.shtml](http://registrar.tennessee.edu/records/transcripts.shtml). Contact the registrar's office at other schools for official transcripts from those schools. You may also want to double-check the availability of grades for the most recent term, depending on your desired program's requirements.



## ADMISSION ESSAY

Also called a personal statement, letter of intent, letter of purpose, and other titles, the admission essay is your chance to influence the admissions committee beyond what is apparent in a transcript or resume. While most schools want you to address such basic questions as *Why are you interested in the field?*, *Why are you interested in this program?*, and *Why do your experiences make you a qualified candidate?*, be aware that the wording of the essay question varies from school to school. Pay very close attention to how the question is worded and be sure to answer the question that is actually asked. **Do not make the mistake of trying to write one essay to cover all your applications.** For more help writing essays, visit your Career Services **career consultant** and/or UT Knoxville's Writing Center. Also check out the "Graduate School Admission Essays" section of this guide, beginning on page 20.

## RESUME

Graduate schools often ask for resumes—or at least a list of experiences—for admissions boards to consider in addition to your GPA and test scores as admission criteria. A resume for a graduate school application is essentially the same as for a job search; however, it's a good idea to structure the resume to highlight the skills and qualifications that would be valued in a particular graduate program, like research experience, related jobs or activities, and so forth. Visit your Career Services **career consultant** for help, or review materials available at [career.utk.edu](http://career.utk.edu).

## LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

While your grades, test scores, and experience will weigh heaviest in admission decisions, a well-written recommendation can often be a deciding factor, especially if you have any weak spots in your qualifications. You will typically be asked for two or three recommendations, but the number required varies from school to school. A program may provide a recommendation form to give to your recommenders or simply request a letter.

When you are deciding from whom to request recommendations, consider these contacts:

- A professor in your field who knows you well and can vouch for your academic and/or research abilities. Build relationships with professors early so that they can report on more than just your grade in a class.
- Someone in your field, preferably someone with an advanced degree, who has supervised you through an internship or job or who has overseen your fieldwork.

**NOTE: Using family members, members of the clergy, and politicians as recommenders is strongly discouraged. Not only are their comments less relevant to your academic qualifications, they can actually be detrimental to your case.**

Remember that **you are asking recommenders for the favor of their time and effort, so treat them with care and consideration.** Keep these pointers in mind:

- Start thinking about potential recommenders early. Visit professors during office hours, get involved in research or community service projects, and have conversations with supervisors



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**Most programs will not begin to review your application until your file is complete, and they most likely will not review it at all if anything is late—so start early!**

about your career goals. You want to enable someone to know your abilities and career goals and be comfortable talking about you to professional peers.

- Your recommenders are busy. Start asking for recommendations early in your senior year, with plenty of time before your deadline. This typically means you need to be lining up recommenders in the early fall of one year if you plan to attend graduate school in the fall of the next year. Even if you plan to take a year or so off after graduation or defer your admission to graduate school, go ahead and get the letters while your recommenders are still accessible to you and you are fresh on their minds.
- Schedule an appointment with each potential recommender to sit and talk about how your chosen program aligns with your career goals and why you think you are a good candidate. This just may spark their memory about some positive things they can write about you.
- Be sure to give them the list of schools you are applying to, instructions for sending the letter, the recommendation form (if the desired program requires it), the deadline for receipt of the letters, your contact information if they should need to reach you, and any pertinent information that will help them write an appropriate letter. You might include your personal statement and resume to help jog their memories.
- Remember that writing recommendations is optional for the recommender. If you notice that a person you asked for a recommendation seems hesitant, move on to an alternate. You do not want to run the risk of their writing a poor recommendation.

## ENTRANCE EXAMS

Most graduate and professional schools require your scores on at least one standardized test for admission. Typically getting a minimum score is required for consideration for a program, but getting that score does not guarantee admission. We encourage you find out about the “average” test scores of people admitted to a program you are interested in.

### Types of standardized tests

- Graduate Record Exam (GRE) General and Subject test—the most commonly required by many academic programs (Masters and Doctoral degrees). [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org)
- Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT)—MBA and other management programs, [www.gmac.com](http://www.gmac.com)
- Law School Admission Test (LSAT)—[www.lsat.org](http://www.lsat.org)
- Medical Admission Test (MCAT)—[www.aamc.org/students/mcat](http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat)
- Dental Admission Test (DAT)—[www.ada.org/prof/ed/testing/dat](http://www.ada.org/prof/ed/testing/dat)
- Optometry Admission Test (OAT)—[www.opted.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3444](http://www.opted.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3444)
- Test of as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)—English proficiency test for international students, [www.toefl.org](http://www.toefl.org)
- Miller Analogies Test (MAT)—Accepted by a variety of graduate programs, [pearsonassess.com/haiweb/Cultures/en-US/site/Community/PostSecondary/Products/MAT/mathome.htm](http://pearsonassess.com/haiweb/Cultures/en-US/site/Community/PostSecondary/Products/MAT/mathome.htm)

**Tips for preparing to take entrance tests:**

- Prepare for and take the test early!
- Take entrance tests at the end of your junior year so that you can submit your application materials early and have time to retake the test if necessary. Be sure to plan according to admissions deadlines; refer to the “Timeline for Applying to Graduate School” on page 10 to plan your schedule.

**NOTE: It is not advisable to take these tests “cold” for practice or to see how you will do. Some programs, especially law schools, use an average of all your test scores for evaluation.**

- Sign up early!
- There are no registration deadlines for computer-based tests (GRE General and Written Assessment, GMAT), but registration is first come, first served. The registration deadlines for GRE Subject Tests are approximately 6 weeks before the exam dates. Late registration is available for some tests for an additional fee. Special accommodation for students with disabilities can be arranged with prior notice. Check with each testing organization to verify their policies.

**THE INTERVIEW AND CAMPUS VISIT**

You may find that the admissions committee for your prospective program, especially medical schools, wants to meet with you in person to discuss your goals and your fit with their program. Don't panic; just call 865-974-5435 to schedule a mock interview with your Career Services **career consultant**. Do this early so that you have time to process your consultant's suggestions and possibly do a follow-up mock interview. For more information, visit [gradschool.about.com/cs/interviews/a/admint.htm](http://gradschool.about.com/cs/interviews/a/admint.htm).

Whether the program requires an interview or not, do plan to visit your top choices if you can. While you are there you will want talk with admissions, faculty, and other students to gain a better understanding of how the program fits your criteria. You should sit in on a class, if possible, and visit the community to gain a feel for the surrounding areas. We suggest contacting the program in advance to determine if they offer a formal visitation or if they can help you plan your informal visit. Regardless of formality, remember that while you might be there to gather information about their program, they will also have the chance to learn more about you—be professional and prepared at all times!

# Graduate School Admission Essays

## OVERVIEW

### General tips

- Essay should be typed, not handwritten, and error free.
- Read the questions! Make sure you respond to the questions asked. Follow instructions regarding length of essay. If there is no limit, two double-spaced pages is good rule of thumb.
- Essays range from a general comprehensive personal statement to responses to very specific questions.
- Use a strong opening sentence or paragraph. Try to grab the reader's attention.
- Be clear and concise. Organize your essay effectively.

### Content tips

- Include a combination of personal and academic information.
- Discuss the history of your interest and your goals for obtaining the graduate degree.
- When talking about yourself, use examples rather than just stating facts.
- Do not simply repeat information found elsewhere in your application, such as extracurricular activities. Go beyond the obvious and indicate how these activities have impacted you or your choice of career.
- Substantiate your academic preparation and ability to perform. Be as specific about your career goals as possible. Emphasize your passion for the field.
- Indicate some knowledge of the program to which you are applying, the more specific, the better.
- Be yourself. Don't write what you **think** the admissions committee wants to hear.
- Be positive and enthusiastic. Help the admissions committee learn who you are beyond the "numbers."
- Avoid controversial topics like politics and religion. Don't criticize the profession that you plan to join. Avoid clichés, for example, "I want to be a doctor because I'm good at science and I like to help people."
- The statement can include some explanation of less-than-stellar grades or test scores.

### Before you mail it—

- Ask yourself and others if your essay is relevant, interesting, and memorable.
- Always have someone proofread your essay—particularly a professor or someone familiar with admission essays.
- Don't send exactly the same essay to several schools if the questions asked are different. Never send an essay to one school with the name of **another** school in the text! This happens, and it's a serious turn off to admission committees.

## Resources

There are several books and numerous web sites that contain general information about writing a personal statement as well as examples of graduate admission essays. Among them are these good ones:

- *Graduate Admission Essays: Write Your Way into the Graduate School of Your Choice* by Donald Asher, Ten Speed Press, 2000
- *How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School* by Richard Stelzer, Petersons, 1997
- [career.utk.edu/admission\\_essays.php](http://career.utk.edu/admission_essays.php)
- “Application Essay Writing 101” at [www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com) includes more than a hundred pages of instruction
- Click on “Graduate” at [www.essayedge.com](http://www.essayedge.com) to access samples by field of study
- [www.statementofpurpose.com](http://www.statementofpurpose.com)
- [www.accepted.com/grad/personalstatement.aspx](http://www.accepted.com/grad/personalstatement.aspx)

## SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Before you start writing, organize your thoughts, goals, and experiences by answering the following questions:

- What is the most unusual/unique thing about you?
- Who and what were intellectual influences on you?
- Which writers, articles, or books in your field of study have impacted you?
- Who were your favorite college professors, and why?
- What is the best paper, exam, or lab you wrote in your major, and why?
- What is the most important concept you have learned in college?
- Define your career goals as specifically as possible.
- What are your plans?
- How will graduate education facilitate those plans?
- What is your 5-year goal? 10-year goal?
- What is the historical background to choosing those goals?
- When and why did your interest in the field begin?
- What work/volunteer experiences influenced your choice?
- How has your family impacted your choice?
- How have you prepared yourself to succeed in graduate school?
- What personal attributes make you likely to succeed in the profession you have chosen?
- Discuss any research you've been involved in.
- What were the outcomes?

# The Graduate School Application Record

University/program: \_\_\_\_\_

URL (web address): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Completed application	Delivery method (or other instructions)	Final deadline	Date sent	Receipt confirmed <input type="checkbox"/>	Contact person
Program application form				<input type="checkbox"/>	
Transcripts				<input type="checkbox"/>	
Letter(s) of rec				<input type="checkbox"/>	
(name)	Requested <input type="checkbox"/>	Meeting date: (person/phone)		<input type="checkbox"/>	
(name)	Requested <input type="checkbox"/>	Meeting date: (person/phone)		<input type="checkbox"/>	
(name)	Requested <input type="checkbox"/>	Meeting date: (person/phone)		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Personal statement				<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Required <input type="checkbox"/>	Prep/research <input type="checkbox"/>	Draft <input type="checkbox"/>	Critiqued <input type="checkbox"/>	Completed <input type="checkbox"/>
Tests (GRE, LSAT, etc.)	Test type:	Final deadline:	Scheduled: (date)/(location)	Receipt confirmed <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Reg. deadline:	Date sent:		
Financial aid	Type(s):	Application deadline:		Receipt confirmed <input type="checkbox"/>	Awarded \$:
Interview	Yes/no(phone/in-person)	Date:	Agenda confirmed <input type="checkbox"/>	Arranged travel (if applicable) <input type="checkbox"/>	
Campus visit	Yes/no	Date (s):	Agenda confirmed <input type="checkbox"/>	Arranged travel <input type="checkbox"/>	

## Financial Aid

Financial aid is available for graduate school, although competition for the various forms of aid for graduate study is often greater than you may have experienced in your undergraduate program. The most common forms of aid are fellowships, assistantships, grants, and loans. An aid package may consist of a combination of these funding sources.

**Fellowships.** Fellowships cover living expenses and often tuition in return for research or work on a project. Fellowships may be single- or multi-year awards and are usually based on an individual's merit as measured by grades, GRE scores, publications, and letters of recommendation.

**Assistantships.** Assistantships are campus-affiliated work assignments (for example, graduate teaching instructor, research associate, or paraprofessional) that provide a stipend and often waive tuition and/or other matriculation fees for a designated number of work hours. Talk with administrators of your individual program about availability of assistantships with your department. Other general assistantships may be available elsewhere on campus, often within student services units. These may or may not relate to your field of study. It is common for students in doctoral programs to hold assistantships for some or all of their time in their program. In research-driven fields, it is more likely for students to be supported by program funds, but in some areas, like law and medicine, students are much less likely to receive assistantships.

**Grants.** Grants are awarded to cover expenses associated with carrying out research or other specific projects, such as expenses for travel, materials, or computers.

**Loans.** Loans are available from the government and from private sources. These are very similar to those you may have applied for during your undergraduate program.

**Special opportunities for underrepresented and disadvantaged students.** Some institutions offer application-fee waivers and other forms of funding in order to help diversify their student body. Outside scholarships and specialized funding may also be available. If you are part of an underrepresented group, research any special funding options within your chosen program and other outside sources.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**U.S. Department of Education: Find and Pay for College** at [www.ed.gov/students/landing.jhtml](http://www.ed.gov/students/landing.jhtml)

**FastWeb: Free Scholarship and College Searches, & Financial Aid Tools**—Free scholarship search site that has 500,000 scholarships worth more than \$1 billion. Registration required. [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

**FinAid: The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid**—This award-winning site is a comprehensive annotated collection of information about student financial aid on the web. [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)

**UTK Graduate School Fellowships** at [gradschool.utk.edu/fellowships.shtml](http://gradschool.utk.edu/fellowships.shtml)

**GradSchools.com**—Article and resources for fellowships at [www.gradschools.com/category/finance-your-study.html](http://www.gradschools.com/category/finance-your-study.html)

**Tips for Financing Graduate School** at <http://career.utk.edu/financial-aid.php>

## Graduate School Glossary

**TA**—teaching assistant

**RA**—research assistant or residence assistant

**GA**—graduate assistant

**Thesis**—research paper completed after course work for master’s degree; the length varies to as many as 75 pages

**Dissertation**—extensive research paper completed after course work for a doctorate; usually more in-depth than a thesis and may exceed a hundred pages in length

**Nonthesis option**—option to take 12 or more additional hours as a substitute for a thesis

**Comps**—written and/or oral exams administered at the end of course work for graduate programs. Oral exams are administered by a committee of faculty members from the program. (Students may or may not be allowed to contribute to the composition of the committee.)

**Full load**—9 hours (9 hours is a heavy load in graduate school)

**Residency requirement**—required on-campus full-time residence at the university; varies by institution

**Reading list**—materials to be read in preparation for comps

**GSA**—Graduate Student Association

**Thesis or dissertation committee**—faculty members who direct and evaluate the development of your thesis or dissertation

**Major professor or advisor**—the faculty member who most closely guides your work

**Failing grade**—a C may be considered a failing grade; most graduate programs require students to earn A’s and B’s

SOURCE: Adapted from *Graduate Admissions Essays* by Donald Asher (Ten Speed Press, 2000), 1-800-841-book or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Donald Asher, Asher Associates, San Francisco, 415-543-7130, [donasher@ix.netcom.com](mailto:donasher@ix.netcom.com)



# Graduate School Websites

**gradschools.com**

Find details about graduate departments and programs that you may be considering

**info.gradschools.com**

Use the “Application Essay Course” to learn great information about personal statements

**graduateguide.com**

Learn detailed information about grad schools, financial aid, and loans

**gradschooltips.com**

Provides advice about how to get into graduate school, reasons to consider graduate school, applications, essays, and interviewing

**gradview.com**

Details financial aid information, scholarships, test preparation, careers, and graduate programs

**petersons.com**

Helps students find the right graduate school, details test preparation, and how to pay for graduate school

**princetonreview.com**

Information about different graduate programs and careers, entrance exams, scholarships, and financial aid

**www.lsac.org** (Law School Admissions Council)

Provides in-depth information about the law school application process

**mba.com**

Provides in-depth information about MBA programs

**www.aamc.org** (Association of American Medical Colleges)

Gives a wide variety of information about the medical field such as professional development groups, MCAT, medical schools, jobs, surveys, and data

**www.artsci.utk.edu/advising** (Arts and Sciences Advising pre-law, pre-health)**www.lib.utk.edu/refs** (Professional Journals and Publications in your field of interest)

Library subject guides provide excellent resources on various fields of interest

**https://career.berkeley.edu/Grad/GradResources.stm** (University of California, Berkeley)

Excellent general and subject specific sites

## How Can Career Services Help?

### Meet with your Career Services *career consultant* early in the process:

- Discuss your career objectives and goals for graduate school.
- Get help answering questions about the various parts of the application process, including admission essay or personal statement reviews.

### Attend annual Career Services sponsored and other Graduate School events:

- Don Asher—“Gaining Admission into Highly Competitive Graduate Programs,” fall semester
- “Graduate School 101” Workshop; spring semester and online anytime at <http://career.utk.edu>
- “Writing Personal Statements and Admissions Essays” Workshop, fall semester
- “What if You Don’t Get into Medical School?” Workshop, spring semester
- Law School Admissions Workshop; sponsored by UTK Law School and Arts & Sciences Advising, fall and spring semesters

### Visit Career Services Graduate School website at [career.utk.edu/graduate.php](http://career.utk.edu/graduate.php)—excellent materials and other links to relevant information on the topics listed above

### Visit the Career Resource Center in 100 Dunford Hall to access these popular references:

*Best 159 Law Schools; Best 162 Medical Schools; Best 237 Business Schools; Best Graduate Schools*

*Graduate Admissions Essays*

Peterson’s guides:

*Graduate & Professional Programs: An Overview*

*Graduate Programs in Business, Education, Health, Information Studies, Law & Social Work;*

*Graduate Programs in Engineering & Applied Sciences; Graduate Programs in the Biological*

*Sciences; Graduate Programs in the Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences; Graduate Programs in the*

*Physical Sciences, Mathematics, Agricultural Sciences, the Environment, and Natural Resources*

*How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate & Professional School*

## TEN THINGS TO DO IF YOU DO NOT GET IN

1. Apply earlier. Avoid the last 6 weeks before the deadline.
2. Apply to more schools. Six schools are usually considered a prudent minimum: two safe schools, two middle-of-the-pack schools, and two “reach” schools.
3. Apply to more safe schools. Even students with 4.0 GPAs can and do get rejected.
4. Visit and wow 'em.
5. Go to summer school in the targeted subject and wow 'em. It's easy to get into summer school, even at Harvard.
6. Take one class at a time in the targeted subject and wow 'em. Remember: your most recent grades count the most.
7. Get entry-level experiences in the targeted field; for example, internships or even volunteer work.
8. Work in a “real” job in the targeted field. There's no substitute for actual experience and recommendations from supervisors in the profession.
9. Get an intermediate qualification, like a master's degree or even just a credential.
10. Get older and try again. Many times, that's all it takes.

**NOTE: Consider contacting a professor at a university where you didn't get in to ask for advice on how to become a more competitive applicant. They are often willing to give you helpful insights to use when you reapply. Such feedback takes you out of the dark about why you didn't get in and gives you a chance to beef up your weak areas!**

SOURCE: Adapted from *Graduate Admissions Essays* by Donald Asher (Ten Speed Press, 2000)





# CAREER SERVICES

**100 Dunford Hall**

**Mon–Fri**

**8 a.m.–5 p.m.**

**865-974-5435**

***<http://career.utk.edu>***

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