



## Is Graduate School For Me?

### What is Graduate School?

Graduate school constitutes an advanced program of study focused on a particular academic discipline or a specific profession. Traditionally, graduate school has been “academic” (centered on generating original research in a particular discipline), but it may be “professional” (centered on imparting skills and knowledge to future professionals), or a combination of both traditions.

### Do you really want to be a graduate student?

- Are you willing to invest the time, energy, and money associated with going to graduate school? Have you thoroughly invested these costs?
- Are you prepared to spend the majority of the next 2-7 years study with little or no income?
- Can a single topic or narrow range of topics sustain your interest for the next 2-7 years?
- Are you comfortable initiating and carrying your independent research?

### Why do you want to go to graduate school?

- Do you want to enter a profession that requires an advanced degree?
- Are you applying to graduate school because “everyone else is doing it?” (The decision to attend graduate school is ideally based on your own criteria, including how graduate education will fit in with your goals).
- Are you applying to graduate school because you feel like you have no career options?
- Do you know what your short and long term goals are and how a graduate degree can help you achieve them?

### Gathering information

- Talk to faculty on campus and at other institutions that teach in the field you to pursue; they often will be able to provide you with the best information that will help steer you in the direction of good programs.
- Contact programs directly to get more detailed program information such as courses, professors, costs, financial aid and application forms.
- Conduct informational interviews with current graduate students, professionals and faculty in the graduate programs you are considering to gain insider information about programs.
- Read professional and academic journals related to your area of interest.

# Okay, it is for me; now what?

## Decide where to apply - factors to consider:

- **Faculty Reputation:** What is their academic background/research specialty? What is the student/faculty ratio?
- **Program Quality:** Talk to several faculty members and graduate students in the field you are pursuing to get an informed view on the variety of graduate programs available. You may choose to look at graduate school rankings to help you assess a program's quality.
- **Financial Cost:** What are the opportunities for fellowships, assistantships, or scholarships? What other sources of financial aid are available?
- **Program Requirements:** You must satisfy to gain admittance into the program in terms of GPA test scores, undergraduate coursework, and specific entrance examinations (e.g., GRE).
- **Course Offerings:** Are courses you need fulfill degree requirements frequently offered? Will the course offerings help you meet your professional or educational goal?
- **Facilities:** Consider the quality of on-site facilities such as libraries, computer labs, and research facilities.
- **Employment:** Where are graduates of the program working, and how much are they earning?
- **Geographic Location:** Will studying in a particular location help you meet your personal or professional goals?
- **Student Life:** Consider the diversity of students, student organizations, housing and campus support services.

## What kinds of admissions tests are there?

Most graduate and professional schools require test scores for admission. The Graduate Record Exam (GRE) General and Subject test (Psychology) are required by many academic programs (Masters and Doctoral degrees). The TOEFL English proficiency test may be required for international students.

## Getting Started

One of the initial steps in applying to a graduate or professional school is to research application deadlines so that you can develop a timeline of when to submit test scores, letters of recommendation, personal essays, etc. Below is a sample timeline to help you in planning your application process:

### Junior Year - Spring Semester

- Begin researching available programs by talking to faculty/alumni/current students in the program, reviewing grad school guides/directories, requesting promotional materials and visiting schools' websites
- Start exploring financial aid resources
- Sign up and study for required standardized test
- Identify potential letter writers
- Order an unofficial transcript and check for and correct any discrepancies
- Take the required standardized test

### Junior Year - Summer

- Write the first draft of your statement of purpose
- Request your letters of recommendation from faculty
- Order official transcripts
- Write final draft of statement of purpose

### Senior Year—Fall Semester

- Complete and mail your applications
- Apply for aid available through programs: assistantships, fellowships, scholarships, etc
- Follow-up with schools to make sure your file is complete

### Senior Year—Spring Semester

- Visit schools to attend invited interviews or campus tours
- After reviewing acceptance from the school of your choice, confirm acceptance and contact other schools and decline acceptances
- Write thank you notes to people who helped you