



Guide to Graduate School

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MU Career Center's Guide to Graduate School: Part of the After College Planning Guide Series

After College Planning Guide Series:

- ⇒ Guide to Job Hunting
- ⇒ Guide to Accepting the Job
- ⇒ Guide to First Year on the Job
- ⇒ **Guide to Graduate School**
- ⇒ Guide to Alumni Resumes
- ⇒ Resources for Adults in Transition

**MU Career Center
Guide Series:**
*Career and Major Exploration
Job Search Preparation
After College Planning
Diversity*

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General Information

IS GRADUATE SCHOOL RIGHT FOR YOU?

Is a graduate degree needed for your professional and occupational goals, and are you passionate about the field?

What can you do with a bachelor's degree in your chosen field? Talk to professors, advisors, and professionals in your field about career opportunities. Think about where you want to be in five or ten years. Will you need a graduate degree to reach your goals?

Have you decided on a specific career path?

If not, then graduate school may not be the best option for you at this time. Graduate programs are typically very specialized and will not give you an opportunity to explore a variety of options.

How will your personal values and goals fit into graduate school life?

What is important to you? Prioritize your values to make sure graduate school is a good fit with your other values and goals. Depending on the degree you are working towards, be prepared to spend two or more years after your undergraduate degree working towards your goal.

Assess yourself!

Graduate programs differ greatly in their requirements and amount of faculty supervision. How is your stress management? Can you work well in a situation with little structure from professors? Are you self-motivated? What do you hope to gain by continuing your education? Answering these questions will help you determine if graduate school is right for you and which programs are best suited for you.

Online resources for more information

<http://www.gradschools.com>

<http://www.review.com>

<http://www.petersons.com>

<http://www.kaplan.com>

<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/grhome.htm>

<http://www.allaboutgradschool.com>

<http://www.graduateguide.com>

<http://www.gradview.com>

MASTER'S AND DOCTORAL DEGREES EXPLAINED

The Master's Candidate

As a master's candidate, you will spend about two years in graduate school, depending on your program of study. The purpose of this program is to give you a solid education in a specialized field of scholarship. You will probably receive less financial aid than declared doctoral candidates do; in many cases, you may receive none at all.

Your first year- You will take courses that are similar in structure to your undergraduate classes. These classes are usually designed to build a foundation for future coursework. The workload is heavier, the course topics are more specific, and much more is expected. You may choose or be assigned an advisor at the beginning of your program. With your advisor's help, you will begin to develop an academic focus.

Your second year- You may take further courses to complete your degree requirements. You will likely direct more and more energy toward your concentration. Some programs may require you to complete at least one practicum. These positions can be paid or unpaid and allow you to gain hands-on experience in your chosen field. Also, depending on the program, you will probably complete a master's thesis, a portfolio, a manuscript, or sit for comprehensive exams. The purpose of this is to demonstrate mastery in your field. Depending on your chosen field and profession, you may decide to continue your education and begin work on a doctorate.

The Doctoral Candidate

The doctoral candidate spends four or six years at graduate school. The purpose of the program is to give you extensive knowledge of your field, train you to do original and meaningful research, and prepare you to function as a member of a teaching faculty.

Your first two to three years- You will take courses to satisfy your degree requirements and gain a broad knowledge of the field. If you are fortunate, you will gain valuable experience by securing a research or teaching assistantship. You will gradually focus your research interests, working with an advisor in your area of interest who is usually appointed at the beginning of your program. At the end of your second or third year, you will take comprehensive exams and possibly start preparing a dissertation topic. The exams will help demonstrate your qualifications to continue with your doctoral work. A previously completed Master's Degree may replace some of this coursework.

The lasts two to three years- Coursework becomes a much smaller part of your academic work, and may end altogether as you work at conceptualizing and completing your doctoral dissertation. Your dissertation must constitute a new and meaningful contribution to knowledge in your field. Depending on your focus, you will teach classes, and may even teach a course of your own design. You will collaborate increasingly with faculty members, who may rely on you for research and inform you of their own work. You will probably become closely associated with a single professor who will become your dissertation director. Your program culminates in the completion of your dissertation, which may include an oral defense of your work before a faculty committee.

Preparing for Graduate School

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND ASK

Where do you want to study?

Do you want to be on a coastline or in the Midwest? Geographic location is important because you will be living there for at least two years.

How much does the school cost?

What forms of financial aid are available? Are graduate assistantships or fellowships available? How can you secure one? How reliable is financial support from year to year?

What types of degrees are offered?

For example, if you want a Master of Arts degree, is that an option at that program?

What is the emphasis of the program?

Is it on practice or research?

What are the program requirements?

Do you have to complete a thesis, dissertation, manuscript, practicum, or exit exams?

What are the professors' interests?

Are they similar to your own?

How is your advisor assigned?

Do you select your advisor or is that choice made for you?

Talk to current student if possible

Are their interests and experiences similar to your own? Are these people you want to spend a lot of time with? What do they like about the program?

Where are graduates from the program employed?

What kind of assistance does the school provide in helping you find a job upon graduation?

Is practical experience possible?

Can you gain experience through internships or a practicum?

Visit the school you are applying to

Can you picture yourself at that school and in that city?

Does your experience meet the program requirements?

How selective is the program?

What will you do if you are not accepted into the program?

Do you have a back-up plan?

FUNDING GRADUATE SCHOOL

Graduate school can be expensive; however, financial aid is available in several forms. Depending on your program and school, you may qualify for scholarships, fellowships, grants, assistantships, loans, and more.

Fellowships

Fellowships are designed to encourage study in your area. Applications are generally available from departments or agencies. Fellowships vary and may include tuition and a stipend. They usually require full-time enrollment.

Assistantships

Assistantships are teaching, research, and other staff positions that usually include tuition, a stipend, and some benefits. At MU, applications can be obtained from your department.

Scholarships

Scholarships are awarded to incoming graduate students with proven academic records of achievement and typically focus on a specific area of study. Applications are generally available from departments or agencies.

Federal Work Study (FWS)

Work-study positions allow you to earn money towards your educational expenses while enrolled in school.

Federal Stafford Loans

These loans can be subsidized (the government pays the interest while you're in school) or unsubsidized (you pay all the interest, although the payments can be deferred until after graduation) and have variable interest rates.

Federal Perkins Loans

These are subsidized loans with low interest rates.

Private or Alternative Loans

These loans are made by private lenders and have variable interest rates. They generally cost more than federal loans.

Many students have to borrow money, but remember that it is an investment in your future. For more information on your financial aid options, visit <http://www.gradview.com/finaid/index.html>, <http://web.missouri.edu/~gradschl/financial/index.htm>, <http://finaid.org>, and <http://www.fastweb.com/>.

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To apply for federal aid, you must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Your school may also require this to apply for scholarships and other forms of aid. To complete your FAFSA online, visit <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>.

* Adapted from <http://www.finaid.org>.

GRADUATE EXAMS

Although not all graduate programs require applicants to take entrance exams, many do. The main exams for graduate and professional programs are...

GRE (Graduate Records Examination)

This exam is taken for admittance into a variety of graduate programs. It has three parts: verbal, quantitative, and analytical writing. Each part is used to measure your ability in different areas. The GRE also offers subject tests. Visit <http://www.gre.org> for more information.

GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test)

This exam is used by business schools to assess the qualifications of applicants for advanced study in business and management. It measures verbal, quantitative, and writing skills. Visit <http://www.gmac.com> for more information.

LSAT (Law School Admissions Test)

This exam is required for admittance into law school. It tests verbal and verbal reasoning skills. Visit <http://www.lsac.org> for more information.

MCAT (Medical College Admission Test)

This exam is used for admission into medical school. It assesses problem-solving, critical thinking, and writing skills in addition to knowledge of scientific concepts and principles. Visit <http://www.aamc.org> for more information.

PCAT (Pharmacy College Admission Test)

This exam helps identify qualified applicants for admission into pharmacy school. It measures general academic ability and scientific knowledge necessary for pharmaceutical education. Visit <http://www.pcatweb.info> for more information.

DAT (Dental Admission Test)

This exam is required when applying to dental schools. It measures knowledge in natural science, perceptual ability, reading comprehension, and quantitative reasoning. Visit <http://www.ada.org> for more information.

MAT (Miller Analogies Test)

This is a standardized test of verbal analogies that some graduate programs use to assist in their admission process. Visit <http://www.milleranalogies.com> for more information.

How do I pick a test date?

First, determine the application deadlines for the schools to which you are applying. Then, work backwards from your earliest deadline. Some exams (such as the GRE) can be taken at any time of the year; however, other exams are only offered a few times per year or have restrictions as to how many times they can be taken. To determine when and where a particular test is offered, visit its website and talk with the professionals at Testing Services.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

There are numerous resources available to you to help you prepare for graduate school entrance exams. For professional help, companies such as Kaplan and The Princeton Review offer classes and personal tutoring sessions. If you would rather study on your own, these companies as well as others have books and computer programs available for purchase. More over, many companies guarantee that their classes and products will improve your score, so take advantage of what's available!

The following offices and resources are available to help you prepare for and take graduate exams:

On-Campus Resources

The Learning Center-

Student Success Center, 882-2493

Paper GRE and LSAT practice exams with answer sheets are available to check out.

Testing Services-

205 Parker Hall, 882-4801

Sign up to take exams at Testing Services.

Exams offered include: MAT, GRE, MCAT, LSAT, OATP, PCAT, VCAT, NTE, GSFLT, and GMAT.

Off-Campus Resources

The Princeton Review-

1-800-2Review (live courses), 1-888-500-PREP (online courses)

<http://www.review.com>

Small classes are offered in person, online, or with personal tutorials.

Free online course demos are also available.

Kaplan-

1-800-KAPTEST

<http://www.kaplan.com>

Classes are offered in person, online, or with a personal tutor.

Practice exams are available online.

Kaplan exam preparation software is available for purchase.

Educational Testing Services-

(609) 921-9000

<http://www.ets.org>

Information about tests available online.

TIMETABLE FOR APPLYING

Junior Year and Summer before Senior Year

Begin researching graduate programs and deciding where you would like to apply.

Call, write, or email schools to request catalogs.

Determine test requirements, application deadlines, test dates, etc.

Meet with advisors, faculty members, and career counselors to discuss programs.

Sign up for required standardized tests and practice for them.

September and October of Senior Year

Take standardized tests.

Write draft of statement of purpose. Include career goals and areas of interest.

Research financial aid sources, fellowships, and assistantships.

Request letters of recommendation from faculty members and former employers from related jobs. Make sure they are individuals who know you well and will be able to write a strong letter for you. Provide these people with your personal statement and resume.

November and December of Senior Year

Order official transcripts from the Registrar's Office. Be sure to request transcripts from all of the schools from which you have earned college credit, including hours obtained while in high school.

Finalize your statement of purpose according to the question(s) asked on the applications.

Mail applications.

Apply for fellowships and assistantships.

January through March of Senior Year

Contact the schools about the possibility of visiting or scheduling an interview.

Fill out the FAFSA form.

April of Senior Year

Discuss acceptances, rejections, and other career options with a faculty member, advisor, or a member of your college's career services office.

Notify schools as to your decision to accept or decline admission.