

GRADUATE SCHOOL ADVISEMENT

GRADUATE STUDY

WHAT IS GRADUATE SCHOOL?

Graduate schools are institutions that award advanced academic degrees to students who have previously completed an undergraduate Bachelor's degree. Graduate programs provide instruction in specific subject areas such as the arts, sciences and humanities, and can include programs in the medical professions, law, business, social work, mental health counseling, technology, and other specialized fields.

REASONS FOR PURSUING GRADUATE STUDY

Most students pursue graduate study to advance knowledge in an area of interest, to improve their skills and credentials, and to enhance their marketability in their chosen field and the workplace.

- **Mandatory study and licensure** – Certain professions require professional degrees. For example, you cannot become a medical doctor, dentist, lawyer, social worker, psychologist, mental health counselor, and others without the appropriate degree and subsequent license.
- **Recommended for your career field** – Many professions do not require the completion of an advanced degree, but your chances of entering that profession may be limited without one. For this reason, it is important that you research the educational level of professionals in your field of interest.
- **To enhance your skills and prospects** – Many professionals pursue graduate study as a means of furthering their careers. Graduate degrees can build skills and competencies in your field, potentially help you to

secure a higher-level position in your field, and increase your earning power.

RESEARCHING AND FINDING THE RIGHT PROGRAM

- **Explore!** Conduct research online to identify programs of interest and discuss with your Faculty Advisor. Your Faculty Advisor can provide additional resources to help you research programs and their requirements, and can assist you with your graduate school application.
- **Obtain accurate information** – Beware of websites with “graduate school” in the URL. They are often not comprehensive and typically feature programs that have paid to be listed. *Peterson’s Graduate & Professional Programs* is a credible resource for graduate and professional school information. Visit the CSI Library on-campus or online to utilize this guide and others. Ask the librarian to direct you to resources for graduate programs within CUNY and be sure to click on this link for more information.

<https://www.cuny.edu/admissions/graduate-studies/>

- **Review admission criteria** – Review the program’s admission criteria to determine if you meet the requirements. Check to see if your GPA and test scores are similar to those of recently admitted students. If your credentials are not competitive with recently admitted students, speak with your faculty advisor about building a stronger candidacy. Alternately, if your credentials far exceed those of current students, you may not find the program suitably challenging.
- **Consider cost and availability of financial support** – Gather as much information as possible regarding tuition (in-state vs. out-of-state for public university systems), fees, and living expenses. Consider opportunities for financial aid, scholarships, fellowships, graduate assistantships, campus employment, and possible sponsorship from your place of work.
- **Consider the reputation and offerings of each school** – Determine each program’s accreditation status and rankings, and research each program’s offerings, along with the faculty’s qualifications and research activities. Do not assume a graduate degree guarantees employment. Take into consideration additional valuable services the school offers

including career counseling, specialized opportunity programs and facilities, and additional resources for career advisement and employment consultation through the school's alumni network. This information will help you make an informed decision in selecting a graduate program that increases your hiring and earning power.

COMMON COMPONENTS OF A GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION

- **Personal Statement** – This is one of the most important parts of your application and is sometimes referred to as the “heart” of your application. Your personal statement is the opportunity to explain to admission committees why you are a good fit for their program. Personal statements should always convey your reasons for undertaking graduate study including
 - what you hope to gain from the program
 - meaningful experiences that inspired you to pursue your field of choice,
 - relevant skills you have developed
- **Curriculum Vitae or Resume**
 - A curriculum vitae is an academic resume that typically includes thesis/special course projects, honors and awards you have received, research experience, and participation in academic programs. It also includes standard resume sections such as work, internship and volunteer experience. A Curriculum Vitae usually details the whole course of one's academic career.
 - A resume is a one- to two-page document presenting key facts about your professional experience, educational background, and skills. It is generally used for a job or internship search and for students applying for graduate school early in their academic careers.
- **Recommendation Letters** – Recommendation letters can make a huge difference in acceptance to graduate school. Applications typically ask for at least one letter from a professor, and may give you options for other recommenders, such as a work or internship supervisor. Family members cannot submit recommendation letters to support your application.

- **Entrance Examinations** – Many graduate programs require the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and use those scores as part of their selection process. The GRE tests students' skills in reading comprehension, writing and mathematics. Some schools have a policy that exempts students from the GRE if they meet a certain Grade Point Average (GPA) requirement. Other common entrance exams include the GMAT (for Business related programs), the MCAT (for medical school) and the LSAT (for law school).

HELPFUL HINTS

- Expect the level of graduate work to increase significantly compared to your undergraduate experience. Graduate students are expected to complete advanced coursework, reading, research, writing, and study compared to undergraduate requirements.
- Graduate schools admissions committee members will expect you to have very clear reasons for pursuing graduate study. Take the time to self-reflect and engage in discussions with your faculty advisor, other faculty members, mentors in your field so you can provide well thought out reasons for your postgraduate study.
- You can become a more competitive candidate for graduate school admission by completing relevant internships, volunteer work, community service, and extra-curricular activities to demonstrate commitment to your field of interest and to highlight leadership ability. Leadership experience can be a "game changer" in the selection process as it demonstrates commitment to civic engagement, social justice, and the betterment of your community or society.
- Research special features and opportunities offered by the schools that interest you. Review any programs of study that are in line with your career goals and learn more about faculty research, instructional methods, and student services departments, especially employment placement services through the career center. This can have a positive effect on the admissions committee.
- Provide faculty or other professional recommenders with your resume, curriculum vitae and/or a list of your academic and leadership achievements. This will prove valuable in helping to provide you with an authentic and accurate recommendation. Friends and family members are usually not eligible to serve as your recommenders.
- If you are required to take an entrance exam, take several practice versions of the test to prepare you for the actual exam. Test performance

generally improves by taking more practice tests. This is known as the "Practice Effect."

- Have several people read over your application, especially professionals that have expertise in your field and can give you constructive advice and editing suggestions for your application.

TIMEFRAME

- You should begin to think about graduate school in your third year of your undergraduate degree, if not before. Even if you are in your first year of college, it is never too early to develop of "plan of action" to ensure you will be a competitive applicant at the graduate level. Even if you decide not to pursue graduate study, you will still be an excellent candidate for internship and employment opportunities.
- Begin the application process early enough to leave ample time to meet program deadlines, especially if you are required to take an entrance exam. Give yourself at least four to six months to develop your personal statement. Work with an editor (either faculty or graduate school advisor) because it will take several drafts working together to arrive at the final personal statement. Always give your recommenders at least one to two months if not more to write and submit your letters of recommendation – remember recommenders have other responsibilities and may have several other students requesting recommendations. Check with your recommenders regularly to ensure your letter is written/submitted within the deadline date.
- Preparation for entrance exams such as the GRE, LSAT, and MCAT should be started six months prior to the application deadline. Research important factors such as re-test policies. If you are not happy with your initial test score, learn the period for scheduling a retest.