



Choosing and Applying to Graduate & Professional Schools: The Decision-Making Process

Initial Steps

- Talk with faculty members who are best acquainted with the field(s) of study that interest you.
- Talk with professionals in the occupations you wish to enter about the types of degrees and/or credentials they hold or recommend for entry or advancement in field.
- Browse program websites or look through catalogs and graduate school reference books (some of these are available in the CSC Resource Library) and determine prerequisites, length and scope of program, etc.
- Narrow down your choices based on realistic assessment of your strengths and the programs, which will meet your needs.

Questions to consider

1. **Career Options** – What are options for career development once graduate training is completed? To determine this, you need to find out how graduates of the program are employed. If you can, visit the school and talk to near graduates about their career expectations and plans for employment.
2. **Attrition** – Do students of this department frequently fail to complete their degree programs? This information is obviously not contained in catalogs or brochures. Visit the campus and ask faculty and students.
3. **Program Size** – How large is the department in which you are interested? Does its reputation rest heavily on one or two professors? What if they go on leave for a year?
4. **Program Content** – Are a variety of points of view represented in the department or are most approaches to the discipline along the same lines? Which would you prefer?
5. **Faculty Expertise** – What have faculty members published recently? Publications give you a good idea of the faculty's areas of concern. Do they coincide with your interests/goals?
6. **Faculty/Student Content** – Would you like to work with prominent professors in your field on a research project; see them only in class or just hear about them occasionally? Again, planning a visit to the school and having discussions with current students can help.
7. **Fellowship Funds** – How much fellowship money is available? How are student recipients of funds selected? Ask faculty and students as well as checking in the literature.

The Application Process

The following guidelines, presented in order of what needs to be handled first, are specifically applicable to graduate schools of arts and sciences. *The students interested in professional schools may be subject to other requirements.*

1. Budget sufficient funds to cover your application expenses (i.e., application fees, transcript fees, testing fees, placement files fees, postage, trips for campus visits, telephone expenses, etc.)
2. Check program websites to determine how to obtain catalogs and application forms. If possible, download catalogs and application forms, otherwise have them sent to you early – if not received within a month, write again, or if possible, contact them by phone. Often it is better to write to the specific department rather than the admissions office. Request additional information about department programs, major research concerns of the faculty, financial aid information and forms.
3. For medical, dental, law school and some other professional fields, you may need to register for the national application or data assembly service most programs use.
4. Register to take the admissions test (i.e., GRE, GMAT, MCAT, LSAT), which are required by the graduate programs you are considering. It is suggested that you take these tests either in the summer of your junior year or no later than October of your senior year, if you plan on starting graduate school immediately after obtaining your Bachelors.
5. Obtain letters of recommendation from faculty members – preferably those in the discipline you wish to enter, who are aligned with your work and academic interests, and possess expertise. The foremost consideration should be someone who knows your work well. Make sure you get permission from individuals you want as references and discuss your plans with them. Give people ample warning (1-month minimum) and provide stamped, addressed envelopes.
6. Keep in mind the various application requirements for both the schools and admissions tests. Be sure to meet all deadlines. If deadlines are impossible to meet, call the institution to see if a late application will be considered.

Deferring Admission

Some schools will admit and then allow a student to defer entrance for a year or two (especially in the case of talented candidates), others will not. Since re-application can be very expensive both monetarily and emotionally, it is best to ascertain an individual school's policy before applying. In any case, you can prepare for later graduate school entry by obtaining letters of recommendation and taking the entrance exams in your senior year.

Web Resources

<http://www.gradschools.com/>

<https://www.petersons.com/>

<https://www.livecareer.com>

<https://www.ets.org/>

<https://www.kaplanpathways.com>

<https://www.princetonreview.com/>

<https://magoosh.com/>

<https://www.essayedge.com/>