

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Graduate school information is available in the honors program office (Hiemenga Hall 318) and in the Career Resource Center (2nd floor of Hekman Library). Other helpful sources include your academic department, career counselors in the career development office and the websites listed in this handout.

How do I decide if I should go to graduate school?

Graduate school may be a good idea for you if:

- Graduate school is necessary to attain your career goals.
- Graduate school would broaden your skills in ways that other certification and workshops would not.
- The cost benefits are worth the financial investment.
- You have had internship experiences in the field to support your interest in pursuing further education and a full-time career upon completion of a graduate degree.
- You are highly motivated and desire responsibility; you enjoy and perform well in an academic environment.

Graduate school may not be a good idea if:

- You are trying to postpone a career decision or avoid employment.
- You are responding to outside pressures from peers, family or faculty.
- Graduate school seems like a "safe" alternative to looking for a job.
- You are expecting to make more money or be assured job security from a graduate degree.

How do I evaluate graduate programs?

Research graduate programs carefully to select the one that fits best with your individual goals and needs. Selected items to consider when evaluating graduate programs include:

- Your interests, abilities and values
- Reputation of the institution and/or program
- Location
- Cost/funding
- Size of institution/program

One of the best ways to evaluate a graduate program is to visit the institution and talk with faculty, staff and current graduate students. The following websites may also be helpful in your research:

- www.gradschools.com
- www.petersons.com
- www.graduateguide.com

What is the timeline for applying to graduate schools?

If you intend to enter graduate school immediately after completing your bachelor's degree, the timeline below provides a general overview for the application process. However, admission requirements vary greatly among institutions, so make sure you read all application materials carefully and meet all stated deadlines.

Junior year

- Fall/Spring:
 - Research your areas of interest and graduate programs in your field.
 - Discuss the application process with advisors.
 - Sign up for required standardized tests and prepare by taking several practice exams.
 - Test preparation materials are available in the Career Resource Center (2nd floor of Hekman Library). Free materials are also often provided on the test websites (see back page for listing of websites).

Timeline (cont.)

- Summer:
 - Visit the institutions you are considering. Meet with faculty, staff and current graduate students in your program of interest.
 - Take any required standardized tests to allow time for a retake, if necessary.
 - Check application deadlines for admission and financial aid.
 - Research financial aid sources, fellowships and assistantships.
 - Create a draft of your personal statement/writing sample to submit with your applications.

Senior year

- September: revise your personal statement/writing sample based on feedback from an advisor or career counselor.
- October: apply for fellowships or assistantships if applicable.
- November:
 - Finalize your personal statement/writing sample.
 - Request letters of recommendation from faculty members and provide addressed envelopes and any required forms. (Faculty can find helpful tips for writing letters of recommendation at: www.calvin.edu/career/faculty/recommendations.html).
- December: finish and mail applications; confirm that your letters of recommendation have been completed.
- February-April: make campus visits to schools where you have been admitted, if possible.
- April: make your decision.

How do I write a personal statement or an application essay?

Your personal statement/essay serves as a sample of your writing ability and should distinguish you from other applicants. Some institutions provide specific questions for applicants to answer in a personal statement. If institutions do not provide specific questions, your personal statement should cover the following general areas:

- Goals: How does your education and experience connect with your future career goals? What has influenced your decision to attend graduate school?
- Uniqueness: What makes you unique? How can you contribute to the program's diversity?
- Abilities: What strengths and abilities do you have that will benefit the institution and program while you are a student and after you graduate?

Other considerations for writing a personal statement:

- Give direction to your personal statement by using a theme or thesis, which is the main point you want to communicate throughout the essay.
- Make an outline of each paragraph before writing it.
- Use concrete examples from your life to support your thesis.
- Adequately address each component of the question(s) on the application.
- Vary your sentence structure (i.e., don't start all of your sentences with "I").
- Meet with a career counselor for assistance if you are not sure how to get started, or if you want feedback on a rough draft.

Where do I find information about standardized tests?

- *DAT (Dental Admission Test)*: www.ada.org/dat
- *GRE (Graduate Record Examination)*: www.gre.org
- *GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test)*: www.mba.com
- *LSAT (Law School Admission Test)*: www.lsac.org
- *MCAT (Medical College Admission Test)*: www.aamc.org/students/mcat