

Considering Graduate School?

Deciding to pursue graduate school is a major commitment of **time** and **money**. You will face several years of intensive study and research—a much more demanding course load than your undergraduate program. Receiving a graduate degree is rewarding and not a decision to take lightly. In this guide you will find key information to help you through the decision-making process, and guidance on how to prepare and apply to graduate school.

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Step 1

Deciding On/Planning for Grad School

The decision to advance your studies is a major decision which requires a defined purpose. Having a specific career focus will help you choose the program/school to help you achieve your end goal.

IDENTIFY YOUR PURPOSE + QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. **Why are you considering a graduate degree?** You need to have a clear understanding of what you want to do with your career and not use grad school as a default move. [Brainstorm your goals here](#).
 - **Career goal:** Be sure of what you want to do with your career and how earning a graduate degree will help you reach your goal. If you have doubts about your career goals, consider putting off grad school and instead spending time on self-assessment and career planning. Going to grad school without a clear goal can equal wasting both time and money. **Certain careers require an advanced degree**, and many **others offer plenty of job opportunities** with an undergraduate degree.
 - **Compensation:** Most studies show that people with advanced degrees earn more on average than people with a bachelor's degree. Don't let "increased compensation" be your only motivation!
 - **Marketable:** While a graduate degree is not required for most entry-level jobs, you may need to earn an advanced degree to keep your skills current and make you marketable for advancement.
 - **Career Change:** A graduate degree can often make sense for a jobseeker who is looking to make a career change. In this case enroll in a graduate degree in the field you plan to enter.
2. **When should you consider obtaining a graduate degree?** Think through attending grad school **right after** obtaining a bachelor's degree or **waiting** and gaining work/life experience.

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- The benefits of applying to grad school **right after** completing a bachelor's degree is that you are accustomed to being a student, have momentum, sharp study skills, few obligations, and some occupations require an advanced degree for entry-level positions.
 - Deciding to **wait** after completing a degree and working instead can help you understand your career goals, gain experience (required for some grad programs), develop a mature outlook on school, bring a broader worldview to your studies, gain a solid financial footing, increase the possibility of employers paying for some of your grad school expenses, and improve your acceptance chances (especially if you were not the best student in your undergrad program).
- 3. What is the best graduate degree for you?** There are **2 primary categories**, master's and doctoral.
- **Master's (1-3 yrs to complete):** Growing and evolving, with offerings in most fields that can be professional or academic. Professional degrees, i.e., Master of Business Administration (MBA), are designed for advancement within a given field. Academic degrees, i.e., Master of Science, are designed for intellectual growth and may be a prerequisite for doctoral work within a given field.
 - **Doctorate (3-6 yrs to complete):** Highest possible earned degrees; professional or academic. Professional doctoral degrees, such as the Doctor of Medicine (MD) and the Juris Doctor (JD), stress the practical application of knowledge and skills. Academic doctoral degrees, the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), focus on advancing knowledge through original research in an academic field.
- 4. What is the best graduate school/program for you?** Some experts say **where you attend** grad school is more important than your choice of an undergraduate school (Refer to [criteria to evaluate grad schools/programs](#)). A more fundamental question is whether to continue graduate studies at the college you earned your bachelor's degree or at a different college.
- Unless you attend(ed) a top-tier undergraduate college, experts suggest seeking a grad program at a different college from where you earned your bachelor's degree for exposure to different faculty, perspectives, and resources, broadening your knowledge and experiences.
- 5. Can you afford graduate school?** It is crucial to weigh the cost of various grad programs that interest you to determine what mix of financial aid will make attending feasible. Review the information the grad school/program sends you and compare it with your research. Meet with a financial aid advisor to review the details. **Start early** on finding ways to finance your studies. Consider these options:
- Besides the types of **financial aid** offered in undergrad, most grad programs also offer **fellowships, teaching** or **research assistance**. Research information on **paid internships** in your field of study.
 - If, employed, don't forget to inquire with your **employer** about **tuition reimbursement programs**.
 - Depending on your needs, consider committing your studies to **full-time** or **part-time**. If considering part-time, educate yourself on the type of financial aid available and your eligibility.
- 6. How will you balance work, life & studies?** Graduate studies require a higher academic rigor than your undergraduate studies. You will need to make life adjustments to succeed which involves time, and mental/emotional/financial commitment. Chances are that your loved ones will want to pull you in different directions, zapping essential study time. Prior to your final decision, be honest and clear with your family and friends about allotting time to your studies so you can receive the support you need.

Adapted: Hansen, R. S. (2020, September 24). Considering Graduate School? Answer These Questions First. LiveCareer. livecareer.com/resources/careers/recent-grads/considering-graduate-school

CREATE A LIST OF GRADUATE SCHOOLS/PROGRAMS

There are many graduate programs, so give yourself time to adequately research and get all needed information to achieve your career goal. It's wise to take **1-2 years** to research (schools start accepting applications just under 1 year before your **intended start date**). Make a **list** of important characteristics:

- Start with an **initial web-based search** regarding **the field of study** you are interested in.
- Review the **prerequisite courses** and discuss with your academic advisor; add courses to your academic plan. Graduate schools look for applicants with **solid academic backgrounds**.
- Learn about the **type of experience** you'll need to increase your acceptance odds. Search for **experiential learning opportunities** in your field of study (internship, work, volunteer).
- Learn about the **type of degree** needed (masters, doctoral, license/credential) to achieve your goals.
- Connect with **program faculty** to ask questions/get advice on preparing the best grad application.
- Contact **alumni** who did your program of interest to get the inside scoop ([FPU's Alumni Group](#)).
- Contact **employers** to see if they hire people from grad programs of your interest. Visit the Bureau of Labor Statistic's [Occupational Handbook](#) to learn about career paths by industry, educational requirements, market growth and earning potential to help you make informed decisions.
- Find a **mentor** in your discipline to gain support/guidance especially during the application process.

Additional search tools:

- [FPU Graduate Programs](#) | list of graduate programs offered at FPU.
- [Peterson's](#) | includes 50,000+ accredited schools/programs & 5,000+ scholarships.
- [CollegeSource](#) | database of 180,541 digital college catalogs, profiles, transcript keys, etc.
- [Gradschools.com](#) | resources for every stage of your search, including applications, testing & more.
- [Online Programs Search](#) | allows you to learn wherever you are.
- [Study Away Programs Search](#) | lists programs to help you gain access to international experiences.

CRITERIA TO EVALUATE GRADUATE SCHOOLS/PROGRAMS

Here are the most common grad school or program evaluation items to consider (in alphabetical order):

- **Accreditations:** There are 2 types: **institutional** and **program specific**. While accreditation is not an indicator of quality as much as process, you could face consequences from unaccredited programs. For example, students who attend an unaccredited law school may not be allowed to take the bar exam (required for a practicing lawyer). **Note:** unaccredited schools may not openly volunteer this info, so dig deep to confirm an institution's accreditation status: [ed.gov/accreditation](#).
- **Admission Standards:** It's better to be among the select few than with a larger group that may end up lowering the quality of your graduate education. Most schools publish information on the **# of applicants** compared to the **# of acceptances**. Search for base admission requirements, which usually include undergrad grade-point averages and standardized test scores.

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- **Career Assistance:** Examine the amount of *career development/placement assistance* a program provides. While this assistance should be a small part of your overall job search upon earning your degree, it's important. Search where grads are working and the salaries they are earning.
- **Cost/Financial Aid:** Examine all costs (tuition, books & supplies, housing, miscellaneous fees). Review the types of financial aid each program offers (*grants, loans, fellowships*). Don't be afraid to negotiate with your top schools; if a school really wants you, they will find resources for you.
- **Culture:** Identify schools with cultures that fit your style and comfort-level so that you'll have a better chance to excel. Some call this concept the *philosophy of education*.
- **Degrees Offered:** If the school doesn't have the degree you seek, then don't investigate any further. Know the degree/certificate/credential needed to take this next career step. Don't compromise or consider a lesser degree!
- **Faculty:** A grad program is only as good as the faculty who teach it. It's important to work with faculty who are respected/known in your field. Review the percentage of classes taught by fulltime, terminally qualified faculty, and investigate their reputation by examining the # of scholarly publications, as well as their national/regional acclaim/professional experiences.
- **Location:** Except for top-tier programs, the value of an advanced degree is typically strongest in the region where the school is located/known. Determine the degree needed for your next career move and where you want to live and work. Educational requirements vary in certain states.
- **Multicultural/Diversity Opportunities:** Better programs tend to be diverse, leading to a broader worldview. Examine both the faculty and student composition, determining a mix where you'll feel most comfortable. If interested, inquire if the program offers an international study opportunity.
- **Physical Facilities:** Investigate programs that stress "state-of-the-art" facilities to see if they really include the tools needed for your specific interests. Planning to specialize in market research? Find a program that has great computer facilities, as well as behavioral labs for focus group events.
- **Reputation/Ranking:** Different organizations rank graduate programs. While rankings are an important measure of quality, you also need to investigate the source of the rankings. Ranking may not be as important as other criteria here because of the flaws in the ranking process, including the ability for a school to have a high ranking while the program that interests you could still be weak.
- **Research/Academic Focus:** Grad programs tend to have a strength/focus in 1 or 2 areas within a specific discipline; fully investigate the faculty interests/research areas of each program.
- **Resources:** Research endowments/foundations that support student research/publications.
- **Size:** There are 2 aspects to evaluate: *program* and *university size*. Find what feels right for you, whether it's a small fish/big pond or a big fish/small pond. Examine university environments and available resources. More importantly, consider the program size, including faculty/student ratios, since this is where you'll spend the bulk of your time.
- **State Regulations & Residency Requirements:** Looking at state university programs? Examine admission requirements/costs for in-state residents vs others. If you love a specific state university where you don't live, consider relocating to that state and establishing residency before applying.

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- **Surrounding Community:** You're going to live there for years (unless attending online), so attend a university you feel comfortable with (large city vs small town; urban vs rural vs suburban setting). If possible, visit the schools you are considering to talk with people, get a better feel for the school, and check out the neighborhood, rental prices, etc. Visiting also provides the opportunity to make a positive first impression on the faculty with your research interests and enthusiasm. Try to determine if these are people you want to work with for the next couple of years or so.

Create a spreadsheet and add the above criteria to help you organize your grad school/program research.

Adapted: Hansen, R. S. (2020, September 24). *Criteria for Choosing a Graduate Program*. LiveCareer. livecareer.com/resources/careers/recent-grads/graduate-school-criteria.

Step 2

Preparing for Graduate School

Once you have decided on the right graduate program/school for you, begin preparing early to increase your chances of acceptance. **Before your senior year**, narrow down the programs you plan to apply to.

Prepare in advance to demonstrate that you are an outstanding applicant in your specific field.

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS + SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTS

Grad schools have remarkably similar admissions requirements and are looking for prospective students with a solid academic background, relevant employment, and research experience. Your task is to confidently demonstrate to the admissions committee that you will succeed in the program/profession.

Admission requirements to guide your preparation:

- **Application Forms:** Some schools utilize a **centralized online application** while others have a **unique campus application**. You'll provide your education, demographic, and contact info. Review the application thoroughly to make a list of the required/supplemental documents to prepare. Understand the submission process (mail, electronic, or a combination). Inquire about fee waivers.
- **Entrance Exams/Standardized Test:** Identify the entrance exam(s) required and scores range. It's important to **study** for the exams and take them the spring or summer before your senior year (if you are unhappy with your scores you can retake in the fall). Here are the most common entrance exams. **Know which exam is required and which schools you'll need to share your scores with:**
 - [Miller Analogies Test](#) (MAT) | used by some *graduate schools*; assesses analytical thinking ability.
 - Prep: [Lessons, practice tests, flashcards & study guides](#)
 - [Graduate Record Examination](#) (GRE) | used in most *graduate schools* and *business schools*; assesses verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning & analytical writing skills.
 - Info: [Discusses exam sections & how to prepare](#)
 - Prep: [2,200+ free practice questions to help you prepare](#)

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- [Graduate Management Admission Test \(GMAT\)](#) | used mostly for prospective *business school* students; assesses analytical writing, problem solving, data sufficiency, logic & critical reasoning.
 - Prep: [Free starter kit, practice exams, study planner & podcast](#)
- [Law School Admission Test \(LSAT\)](#) | used for *law school* admission; assesses critical reading, analytical/logical reasoning, and persuasive writing. [View LSAT rankings/acceptance rates here.](#)
 - Info: [Useful resource to help you crush the LSAT](#)
 - Prep: [4 free study guides for effective preparation](#)
- [Medical College Admission Test \(MCAT\)](#) | used for *medical school* admission; assesses problem solving, critical thinking, and knowledge of natural/behavioral/social science concepts.
 - Info: [Resources & tips on how to prepare](#) & [Top 5 genius MCAT study tips](#)
 - Prep: [12 proven & free practice exams](#)
- [Dental Admission Test \(DAT\)](#) - used for *dental education programs*; assesses perceptual ability, reading comprehension, and quantitative reasoning.
 - Prep: [Free practice tests for each section of the DAT](#)
- [Pharmacy College Admission Test \(PCAT\)](#) | used by *pharmacy colleges* to identify qualified applicants; assesses academic ability and scientific knowledge.
 - Prep: [Free practice test, study guide & flashcards](#)
- [National Council Licensure Exam \(NCLEX\)](#) | used for *nursing programs*; refers to 1 of 2 standardized tests to become a licensed practical nurse (LPN) or a registered nurse (RN).
 - Prep: [Free study resources, tips, strategies & tactics](#)
- **Essays:** Each application will have **1 or more essay(s)** unique to the program (instructions noted in each application packet). Respond to *all* parts of the prompt and follow the word limit. Essays are a window to share your story and represent who you are. You are writing to an audience of professionals (admissions committee); write in a way that lets them hear your voice. Show your willingness to learn as an amateur in their field. Your goal is to **persuade the committee** that you are an outstanding applicant. Partner with someone you trust to provide feedback while writing your essay(s), utilize our [Graduate School Essay resource](#), and **get support (in-person/virtual) from a free writing tutor**. Here are 2 overarching themes you can modify as needed:
 - **A Statement of Purpose** is a short statement written to present your academic background, career goals, and reasons the program will help you achieve your goals. Clearly and concisely convey your career/research interests and readiness to succeed in the program/profession.
 - **A Personal Statement** is a bit broader and presents your background, life experiences, personal challenges, goals, and motivations for pursuing a specialized degree. Demonstrate/persuade the committee of your clarity, focus and passion for the program with openness to learn/succeed.
- **Letters of Recommendation:** Most schools request **3-4 recommendation letters**. Utilize our [Recommendations + Reference Guide](#) to carefully choose recommenders (preferably faculty or supervisors with whom you have interacted for 1+ years) who can **attest** to your potential to succeed in graduate-level studies. Your recommenders have a busy schedule and are doing you a

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favor; request all recommendations at least **2 months in advance of the submission deadline**.

Grad schools require letters to be completed in their own recommendation forms or electronically:

- **Recommendation forms** are created/utilized by some grad schools. Provide these forms to your recommenders; include stamped envelopes addressed to the schools and faculty members to whom the forms are to be sent.
- **Electronic recommendation systems** are utilized by some grad schools. You'll be asked to provide your recommender's name and contact info. Your recommender then receives an email from the school with a link/directions to complete/submit their letters.
- **Resume/Curriculum Vitae (CV):** Grad schools require a **CV** or **resume** as a supplemental document. It is key to understand which is required and their differences (see our [CV Guide](#) & [Resume Guide](#)) so you can submit the correct document and display your educational background, academic achievements, work history, research experience, internships and volunteerism.
- **Transcripts:** Provide a record of your solid academic background, including grades, GPA, and the rigorous courses completed. If you attended more than one college, request/share transcripts for each institution. If still enrolled, follow-up and send official transcripts once you graduate.

FINANCING GRADUATE SCHOOL

Financial aid is money to help pay for college through **grants, scholarships, work study and loans** to help make college affordable. Have a clear understanding of your financial need, the school attendance cost and the type of aid you'll accept to make an informed decision. During your initial research you identified the **types of financial assistance** each program offers by contacting each school's financial aid office. It's important to also **search** for ways to fund your education. *First*, fund your education with **free money**, grants, scholarships, and employer tuition programs. *Secondly*, with **earned income**, fellowships, teaching (TAs) and research assistantships (RAs). *Finally*, finance your education with **borrowed money**, federal student loans. It's key to learn if you'll need to apply for institutional scholarships, fellowships, TAs or RAs at the same time when submitting your application or after you receive an admissions offer.

Ways to finance your graduate studies:

- Complete the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** to verify your financial eligibility.
- **Grants & scholarships** are funds available for education financed by the government, schools and private/non-profit organizations that don't have to be paid back. Most grants are needs-based, and scholarship programs are either need or merit-based. Find state grant agency info [here](#).
- Schools offer **Teaching & Research Assistantships**, a competitive form of funding for students. *Teaching Assistants (TAs)* work with professors and may require instruction responsibilities. *Research Assistants (RAs)* assist with conducting academic research. Both TAs & RAs may be need or merit-based. Inquire about these opportunities to earn income and gain experience.
- Academic **fellowships** subsidize the cost of school, are a type of scholarship awarded to students pursuing a specialized degree and are competitive (most are merit-based). The fellowship length depends on the school. Inquire about these opportunities to earn income and gain experience.

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- If you are working and considering grad school, find out if your employer offers **tuition reimbursement assistance**. Examine your career goals, investigate if your employer has tuition reimbursement programs and learn about the specifications. You'll be surprised to find out that employers are willing to cover some of the cost of your advanced education.
- Most students will have the need to finance their education through loans, **borrowed money**. It's a decision not to take lightly since you'll have to pay back the loans with accrued interest. Learn about loan types ([Direct Unsubsidized & Direct Plus Loans](#)) and terms/conditions of accepting. Check your credit score before applying to school to learn how it can impact your school loans.
- Learn about [Public Service Loan Forgiveness](#) (PSLF) and check your eligibility.

Additional resources to fund your education:

- [FPU Scholarships](#) | if you plan to attend FPU for grad school, there are scholarships available!
- [Peterson's](#) | find 5,000+ scholarship providers & \$10 billion+ in scholarship awards.
- [Gradschools.com Scholarships](#) | tips on where to look in your scholarship search.
- [Gradschools.com Fellowships](#) | discover fellowship options for graduate & doctorate students.
- [GoGrad Scholarships](#) | explore funding options to finance your advanced degree.
- [College Affordability Guide](#) | learn about the diverse ways to fund your education.

Adapted: Hoffman, M. (2018, November 28). Preparing for Graduate School: Here's What You Need to Know. GoGrad.org. gograd.org/graduate-school-guide-book

Step 3

Applying to Graduate School

You have narrowed down your schools, done a broad online search, prepared your documents, and taken the required entrance exam(s). It is time to get your **documents organized** and **create a timeline** to meet due dates for each school you will be applying to, as well as confirming that your application was received.

ORGANIZING APPLICATION DOCUMENTS

You have collected your letters of recommendations, transcripts, test scores, and have completed your statement of purpose/personal statement, and other supplemental documents. Organize with meticulous detail to avoid missing an important document or worse, send a document to the incorrect school.

Organization Tips:

- Develop a **checklist/timeline** for each school to track pending/completed and required/ supplemental documents and avoid missing deadlines (see [Grad School Timeline](#), page 12).
- Create **individual file folders** (paper or electronic) for each graduate school.
- **Collect/add application documents** to their corresponding folder.
- **Revise your essays** to ensure you are responding to *all parts* of the prompt.
- Check that documents are **addressed specifically** to each school (don't send APU your FPU essay).

SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION + RECEIPT CONFIRMATION

Some graduate schools accept applications by **mail**, while others accept them **online**. It is imperative that you understand the submission process and deadlines for each school.

Submission + Receipt Confirmation Tips:

- If **mailing** your grad school application packet, be sure to include **all required documents**:
 - Make a **photocopy** of the application and documents for each grad school.
 - You may want to **postmark** your application packet.
 - Use a **legal-size envelope**; include the correct designation and your return address.
 - Enclose a **self-addressed, stamped postcard** with each application with a message "Please send to verify receipt of application," this way the school can return to verify receipt.
 - Include the **application fee** or **fee waiver** (see details below).
- If **applying online** understand the process and label each of your documents accurately:
 - **Complete all parts** of the applications to avoid submitting an incomplete application.
 - **Upload all** required and supplemental documents.
 - Have a credit card ready to cover the **application fee** or have your **fee waiver** available.
 - Check the **status** of your application online and documents received/processed.

Application Fee Waivers | Many grad schools/programs have application fee waivers available (not typically publicly announced) for eligible U.S. citizens/permanent residents based on program participation, income need, or members of a particular demographic, minority, or underrepresented group. Reach out to the school's program, admissions, and financial aid offices to inquire about fee waivers and gather information on the process for applying. You may need to be persistent; it's helpful if you can inquire with an admissions counselor that you are already in contact with.

Sample Fee Waiver Inquiry for Undocumented/DACA-Eligible Students

My name is _____ and I am applying for admissions to the [graduate program] for the [fall/spring year] semester. I recently checked the school's admission website and noticed that only U.S. citizens and permanent residents are eligible for application fee waivers. I want to confirm with you, and perhaps the Office of Graduate Admissions, regarding the case of undocumented/DACA-eligible students on this restriction? Receiving the fee waiver would relieve a great financial burden for my family and me. Thank you in advance for your response.

Sincerely,
[name]

Step 4

After Submitting Your Application

Once you've submitted your application, the waiting begins. Stay in contact with the program coordinator or faculty to continue monitoring your application status. The program faculty will review and possibly extend an invitation to an admission interview—a common practice but not always required.

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Types of admission interviews:

- **Evaluative interviews** take place at prestigious graduate schools to gain admission; your performance is evaluated and considered when deciding whether to offer you admission.
- **Informative interviews** are a way for an interviewer to impress you, and learn more about you and your goals, while allowing you to make a positive impression and show interest in the program.

ADMISSION INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Adequately prepare to leave a lasting impression and increase your acceptance odds during the interview.

Tips to help you stand out:

- Review your **career goal** so you can confidently share why you are pursuing this specialized degree. Create your **elevator pitch** to help you respond to “tell me about yourself.”
- Study the **program curriculum** and how the program will help you achieve your next career goal.
- Review your **essays, statement of purpose** or **personal statement**. Prepare to respond to questions regarding the content in your essays (be honest/transparent in your application).
- Review your **Resume/CV** so you can clearly convey your educational background and experiences.
- **Demonstrate interest** in the graduate program; develop a **list of open-ended questions** to ask during your interview and practice/review [Possible Interview Questions](#) below.
- **Practice/improve your interviewing skills** for the admission interview with your mentor, career counselor, professor, friend, etc. Use FPU’s mock interviewing platform, [StandOut](#), to help you.
- Learn about answering interview questions with **STAR Stories** (watch our [Ace the Interview Video](#)).
- Take copies of all **application documents** and your e-portfolio, LinkedIn, blog, etc. if available.
- **Dress professionally** to make a great first impression. Plan what to wear the day prior.
- **Confirm** your admission interview and arrive early.

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Prepare to Answer	Consider Asking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about yourself. • Why do you want to study at our school? • What are your strengths and weaknesses? • If accepted, what will be your biggest challenge? • How are you prepared to succeed in this program? • How will studying here help you achieve your goals? • Describe your greatest accomplishment. • What unique qualities can you offer this program? • What appeals to you most about our program? • What are your research interests? • How do you motivate yourself? How do you deal with stress? • What do you do in your spare time? • What are your plans if you are not accepted here? • Define teamwork? Success? Leadership? Fairness? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General questions about the degree program • Preparations for the program - do they prefer experience? • Interviewee’s educational path • Culture/environment of the school • What characteristics distinguish this program? • What financial assistance is offered? (Scholarships, fellowships, TAs, RAs, etc.) • What experiential learning opportunities are there? How to apply? Placement? (TAs, RAs, Adjunct, Internships, etc.) • What factors are most important in admitting students? • Where do alumni of the program work? • Do students usually publish or present papers? • When do I need to begin your research/thesis? • Will I choose or be assigned a thesis advisor?

Adapted: University of Illinois, Springfield . (n.d.). Graduate School Interviews - Career Development Center.
<https://www.uis.edu/career/students/career-planning/launch-your-career/graduate-school-strategies/graduate-school-interviews/>.

RECEIVING A RESPONSE + EVALUATING YOUR OPTIONS

You have successfully navigated the application process and completed an outstanding interview! The waiting period is almost over; you begin to receive responses from graduate schools. Mixed emotions are normal as you receive acceptance letters and evaluate your options to make a decision.

Evaluate your options:

- Review the **number of applications** you submitted.
- Check your **school priority list**; have you received a response from your top choice school?
- You may be celebrating your **1st admission offer** and be tempted to immediately accept. But wait until you review the program, financial assistance, and the pros/cons to make an informed decision.
- If you have **not received a response** from your top school choice, consider waiting and don't make a premature decision. Contact your representative to find out the response timeframe.
- If you are fortunate, you may receive admission offers to all the schools you applied to. However, **avoid holding on to all admission offers**. [ThoughtCo](#) advises this for 2 reasons:
 - Choosing a program is itself a hard decision; choosing among 3+ can be overwhelming.
 - Holding on to programs you don't intend to accept prevents waitlisted students from admission.
- **Discuss your options** with your mentor/family/faculty who give a fresh and academic perspective.
- **Examine the specifics** of each admission offer to determine which program will fit your needs:
 - What factors/characteristics of the program are important to you?
 - Will this program prepare you for your next career goal?
 - What financial assistance is offered?

RESPONDING TO AN ADMISSIONS OFFER

- Inform *all* programs you received an offer from about your decision: **accepting or declining**.
- Find out **how/when to provide a response**. Some colleges accept by email, formal letter, or through your online application account.
- If responding **by email or letter** (accepting or declining) be professional; follow proper forms of email etiquette and formal writing style (see [examples](#)). Be humble and thank the committee.
- Providing a response for **declining offers** allows offers to be made to waitlisted students.

Follow up with your recommenders and mentors with a thank you note!

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TIMELINE TO PREPARE FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

(Application requirements/deadlines vary by school)

Freshman & Sophomore Years

- Take core courses & enroll in courses helpful for grad school
- Explore career choices
- Brainstorm and define your career goals
- Meet with a career counselor & academic advisor
- Explore volunteer opportunities
- Find an academic mentor
- Conduct informational interviews with professionals
- Join student clubs/organizations; become an active member
- Attend departmental colloquial & social gatherings
- Get to know your professors

Junior Year

- Take more advance courses
- Engage in experiential learning opportunities (internship, practicum, volunteer, work)
- Research topics of interest for research projects/thesis
- Continue developing professional relationships with supervisors, mentors, professors, employers
- Join career-specific professional organizations/associations
- Join in FPU's Career Achievement Program (CAP)
- Prepare a professional portfolio: Cover Letter, Resume/CV, compile projects/work samples, LinkedIn
- Attend state/regional conventions in your field
- Meet with a career counselor to discuss grad school plans
- Research grad programs that meet your career goals
- Research grad schools that offer the degree program to help achieve your next career goal

Summer Before Senior Year | June-July

- Have a defined career goal:
 - Education level required to achieve your career goal
 - Type of degree (Masters, Doctoral, Credential/License)
- Narrow down your grad school list (5-10): Do grad schools offer the program to advance your career?
- Request info, application & admission requirements
- Make list of the admission requirements & due dates
- Prepare for exams: GRE/LSAT/MCAT/GMAT/MAT/DAT/PCAT:
 - Study for the require exam
 - Review registration & exam dates
 - Take this summer (retake in fall if necessary)

Senior Year | August-September

- Continue requesting admission requirements from programs
- Thoroughly review program info (explore financial assistance)
- Consult with your mentor, career counselor, academic advisor, faculty regarding the various programs of interest
- Take exams: GRE/LSAT/MCAT/GMAT/MAT/DAT/PCAT
- Update your professional portfolio:, Cover Letter, Resume/CV, Compile projects/work samples, LinkedIn

Senior Year | October-November

- Take/retake exams: GRE/LSAT/MCAT/GMAT/MAT/DAT/PCAT
- Request letters of recommendation
- Request transcripts:
 - Inspect your transcripts for any errors
 - Registrar to send official transcripts to schools
- Prepare your essays:
 - Personal statement or statement of purpose
 - Supplemental questions
- Complete the FAFSA
- Research financial assistance (How/when to apply):
 - Scholarships, fellowships
 - Teacher & research assistance
 - Loans

Senior Year | December

- Gather letters of recommendation
- Finalize your essays:
 - Personal statement or statement of purpose
 - Supplemental questions
- Complete & submit applications:
 - Make list of each school's required documents
 - Make photocopies of all documents
 - By Mail: enclose *all* required documents, including application fee (or fee waiver)
 - Online: upload *all* required documents; pay the application fee (or fee waiver)
 - Verify receipt of your application & documents

Senior Year | January-March

- Wait patiently, review your email & mail periodically; check your application status online (if this is a possible option)
- Keep recommenders updated on your application status
- Stay in contact with faculty; share if you will be absent
- Prepare for an admission interview:
 - Practice your interviewing skills (StandOut)
 - Practice answering interview questions with STAR Stories
 - Watch our Ace the Interview Video

Senior Year | April-May

- Start receiving admission offers: Not your top choice? Contact the admission representative of your top choice schools to check on your application status
- Evaluate your admission offers:
 - What characteristics of the program are important to you?
 - Will this program prepare you for your next career goal?
 - What financial assistance is offered?
- Decline less preferred/accept preferred admission offers
- Keep exploring financial assistance & meet a financial adviser
- Follow up with final official transcripts