



**CAREER
SERVICES**

GROVE CITY COLLEGE

Graduate School Guide

Career Services Office
Phone: 724-458-3371 • Email: career@gcc.edu
www.gcc.edu/cso

GRADUATE SCHOOL GUIDE

Applying to graduate school is an exciting process, but it can be time consuming. We encourage you to learn as much as you can about the graduate school admissions process and the various programs available before beginning the application process. The Career Services staff is available to provide general counsel to you in the process. Simply make an appointment by contacting us at 724-458-3371 or career@gcc.edu. We also strongly recommend that you make an appointment with a faculty member from your department for field-specific advice.

Additionally, the CSO provides the following resources and services to help you with your graduate school planning:

- Our library contains reference material on graduate programs in the U.S. and Canada, as well as various entrance exams you need to take (i.e., GRE, LSAT, MCAT).
- Our website (www.gcc.edu/cso) provides helpful information about the graduate school process (see the "Graduate School" link in the "Career Advice and Preparation" section of our website under "Students").
- Each fall, we sponsor the Career Fair which includes graduate and professional schools. We encourage you to attend and take advantage of this opportunity to speak to admissions representatives from these programs.
- You can arrange a mock interview to help prepare you for the interview portion of the application.

MAKING THE DECISION TO ATTEND GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

Deciding whether to go to graduate or professional school is as difficult as it is important. While pursuing graduate study affords you the opportunity to delve deeply into a chosen subject area, you will have to work hard and will need to develop personal motivation for independent study. Because of the demands as well as the rewards, not to mention the costs, it is important that you give this decision much thought.

We have all heard stories of the student who went directly from undergraduate to graduate study, partly out of indecision, only to be unhappy in graduate school and still without career direction.

Some Questions to Ask Yourself:

1. What do I want to do with my life?
2. What would I like to be doing five to ten years from now?
3. Will graduate study help me to get there?
4. What do I want to accomplish from graduate study?
5. Are there other ways to reach my goals?
6. Do I know what to expect from graduate/professional school?
7. What are the advantages of going to graduate school immediately after getting my B.A. or B.S.?

8. What are the advantages of waiting two to five years before going on for additional schooling?
9. Am I personally ready to tackle graduate school?
10. Do I have the necessary ability and interest to be successful in graduate school?
11. Has my academic training adequately prepared me to face the demands of graduate school?
12. Why am I planning to attend graduate school?
13. What do I hope to gain from the experience?
14. Am I choosing graduate school to delay the decision about what kind of career I want?
15. Am I choosing graduate school because I feel I have no options?
16. Have I investigated opportunities available to me at every educational level?
17. Am I willing to invest the time, effort, and expense to undertake a program that requires prolonged concentration in an academic setting?

Making Decisions about Graduate Study

The decision to attend graduate or professional school involves many factors, including tuition cost, location, and occupational opportunities. A decision as important as this calls for some careful initial inquiry.

In deciding on a graduate program it is important to consider the following:

- Your level of interest and ability in your chosen area of work and study.
- Your access to attractive employment opportunities.
- The cost of education in terms of investment and return.

As college education has become more common, people have sought increasingly to distinguish themselves by obtaining graduate degrees. However, we have learned that an advanced degree alone does not guarantee a good job. Good planning, coupled with part-time, volunteer, or internship experience, is as essential to a new MA, MBA, or Ph.D. as it is to any new college graduate.

Strategies for Making the Decision

- Talk with faculty members about your decision and about fields and schools that would match your interests.
- Meet with a counselor in the CSO who can help you with your graduate/professional school decision-making.
- Consider talking to professionals in your field of interest for graduate school advice (including GCC alumni), but keep in mind admissions requirements and programs can change over time.

EVALUATING GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Choosing a graduate school is not unlike the process you went through in choosing your undergraduate school. Which graduate school is the best for you depends upon your needs, goals, and aspirations. What do exist, however, are valuable resources to help you discover which graduate schools offer programs in your field and to analyze the programs they offer.

The choice of a graduate school requires three things: personal evaluation, careful research and planning, and thoughtful decision making.

If, after much thought and soul-searching, you decide that graduate school is for you, the next step is to begin your research to decide what kind of program you want and where. We recommend checking out **Peterson's** and **GradSchools.com** to learn about different programs in your field of interest, including admissions information, program details, student body, tuition and fees, research focus, location of the institution, etc.

Many other resources are also available in the Career Services Office. Among them are:

- Graduate Admissions Essays
- Peterson's Scholarships, Grants and Prizes
- Top MBA Programs
- Barron's Guide to Law School
- Kaplan's Getting Into Graduate School
- Getting Into Medical School
- Guide books for the GMAT, LSAT, GRE and MCAT exams
- U.S. News and World Report: America's Best Graduate Schools

While there are other general websites and directories on areas of study available in the Career Services Office and most public libraries, the most specific information on a particular program is on the school's website.

NARROWING DOWN YOUR CHOICES OF GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Write to the Graduate Division of the schools that interest you for application materials, information on financial aid, a catalog, and information on a particular program or department. (This latter information you may have to get from the department itself.) Keep in mind that much of this information is also available online through the school's website.

Establish which criteria are important to you in the selection of a school. Points you might wish to consider are:

1. What will I be doing in three to five years after I complete my graduate program?

It pays to find out what kinds of employment are most frequently taken by graduates of the program you are considering. Visit the school and ask some of the near-graduates what they expect to be doing after they graduate.

2. Attrition

Do students of this graduate department frequently fail to complete their degree programs? Once again, this is not something you will learn from the catalog or the department brochure. Visit the campus and ask both faculty and students.

3. Depth in the faculty

How many faculty members do they have? Does the department's reputation rest heavily upon the shoulders of just one or two professors? What if they should go elsewhere?

4. Diversity in the faculty

Is there a variety of points of view in the department, or are most of the faculty members' approach to the discipline rather single-minded? Would you rather be a disciple or develop your own approach to the field?

5. Faculty publications

What have the faculty members published lately? This will give you an idea of whether the faculty's interests are similar to your own. In many cases, what the professor publishes is what he or she spends the most time talking about, both in and out of the classroom.

6. Availability of faculty

Are there several "big names" on the faculty? If so, ask the students how often they actually see or talk with these people? Would you likely work with the "big name" on a research project, see him/her only in class, or just hear about him/her occasionally?

7. Internships and assistantships

Are there any planned practical programs? If so, where would you be likely to work and what would you do?

8. Fellowships and funds

How much fellowship money is available? How many students receive fellowships? Are you likely to be among the lucky few?

9. Ph.D. production

How many Ph.D.'s has this department produced yearly? What is the average length of time it takes to complete the degree?

10. Assistance in finding a job

What percentage of graduates and degree candidates in this department succeed in finding employment? To what extent is the department helpful in enabling the graduate to find suitable work?

11. Admissions preferences

Does the department prefer to have their applicants fresh out of undergraduate school? Or do they tend to prefer applicants having work experience relevant to their field?

12. Versatility

To what extent can you use the degree from this department to get into other kinds of work? Is there much latitude for applying this degree to other fields?

In addition, look at the size of the school/department, the city itself, transportation, geographic location, employment opportunities in your field, cost of living, and opportunities to pursue extra-curricular interests. Choosing a graduate school involves finding a program that matches your academic interests as well as your personal preferences and needs.

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION PROCESS / TIMELINE

Most applications consist of six parts:

- Application form
- Personal statement/autobiography/essays
- Transcripts of all past academic work
- Letters of recommendation
- Test scores (GRE, LSAT, MCAT, GMAT, etc.) Test application bulletins for most such tests are available in the Registrar's Office.
- Financial aid forms

Many schools have application deadlines well in advance of the entrance date. Be sure to check the particular departments to which you are applying for their deadlines. You also need to be aware that financial aid deadlines are often different (and sometimes earlier) from the regular application dates. Be sure to register for the appropriate test well in advance of when the schools need your scores. Begin to apply early. It often takes more time than you count on to complete all of the forms and to get the letters of recommendation and transcripts sent.

In completing the application form and personal statement, make sure it is well organized and written in clear and concise language. It should state who you are, your goals, and why you want to attend that particular school. For many schools the written essay plays an extremely important role in their candidate selection process. Have someone read it over and check for clarity and proper grammar. Most graduate/professional schools will want two or three letters of recommendation. Some schools may simply ask that you supply names and addresses; others will provide you with forms that you must give to letter writers (or that are emailed to recommenders), and still others will request letters, but have no specified form. Check with your recommenders to see if they are willing to submit individual letters for you. To facilitate the letter writing of the people from whom you have asked for references, you should:

- Provide them with information about you (career interests, classes you have taken, activities you have been involved in) and why you want to attend graduate/professional school. You may want to send them a copy of your resume to assist them in writing their letters.
- Include information about the particular graduate/professional school(s) that you are considering.
- Indicate the date by which you need the letter sent out. Make sure to give them at least three to four weeks before the deadline. Check back with them to make sure the letters have been sent.

- Give the writers pre-addressed, stamped envelopes (if sending hard copy and not electronically).
- Send a thank-you note to those who have recommended you.

If you are applying to more than one school, it is important to keep track of when you completed each application.

Be sure to start early in order to complete your applications on time. Most people should start applying a full year and a half before their anticipated date of matriculation. Application deadlines may range from August (before your senior year) for early decision programs of medical schools using the American Medical College Application Service to late spring or summer (after your senior year) for a few programs with rolling admissions. The majority of deadlines for the fall's entering class are between January and March. Many schools with rolling admissions encourage and act upon early applications. Once their predetermined enrollment number is met, they will place all other applicants on a waiting list, even if they are more qualified. You should apply as early as possible to schools with a rolling admission; early applicants are not rejected unless they are clearly below the institution's standards.

The following timetable is suggested by *Peterson's Annual Guides to Graduate Study* and represents the ideal for most students. However, requirements vary by school and should be noted.

Junior Year - Fall and Spring

- ✓ Research institutions offering graduate programs in your area of interest.
- ✓ Talk to your academic advisor about graduate school in general, and ask for advice on programs to research.
- ✓ Narrow your selection to two or three institutions.
- ✓ Investigate national and local scholarships

Junior Year - Summer

- ✓ Find out which admission exams are required and pick up test bulletins. Take required admissions tests.
- ✓ Request the school catalog, application materials, and financial aid information online or by telephone.
- ✓ Write to the prospective department for additional information regarding graduate assistantships offered by the university. Pay close attention to application deadlines.
- ✓ Visit the institutions of interest.
- ✓ Check on application deadlines and rolling admissions procedures.
- ✓ Begin to prepare your application forms and write your application essay.
- ✓ For medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry, or law school, you may need to register for the national application or data assembly service most programs use.

Senior Year - Fall

- ✓ Obtain letters of recommendation.
- ✓ Take graduate admissions tests if you haven't already.

- ✓ Send in completed applications and other required materials by the deadline to both the Graduate Admissions Office and the prospective department.
- ✓ Send a deposit to your institution of choice.
- ✓ Register for the Graduate and Professional Financial Aid Service (GAPSFAS) or the Financial Aid Form (FAF), if required.

Senior Year - Spring

- ✓ Check with all institutions before the deadline to make sure your application file is complete and all supporting materials have been received.
- ✓ Prepare for a visit and interview with institutions that have an interest in you.
- ✓ Notify other colleges and universities that accepted you of your acceptance to a program, so they may admit students on their waiting list.
- ✓ Send thank you notes to people who wrote your recommendation letters, informing them of your success.

Timeline information taken from WestPACS Graduate School Guide.

WRITING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

The personal statement, for some, will be the most difficult part of applying to graduate school. Each institution has a different format, so pay close attention to the instructions provided by the individual school. Before beginning to write, stop and consider what the reader is looking for. Following are some helpful tips in writing this piece.

Helpful hints for preparing your personal statement:

It should be...

1. A statement describing your background and knowledge of the field/discipline, experiences you have had relevant to the field/discipline, career goals and interest in the particular school/program
2. A focused essay showing you have a clear sense of your career goals and an enthusiasm for your chosen field of study
3. Positive*
4. Well-organized and structured
5. Free of errors (spelling and grammar)
6. Complete – make sure you are touching upon exactly what the application instructions specify
7. Revealing of your personality and a statement that shows depth, thoughtfulness and creativity (you want to do everything you can to distinguish yourself from other candidates)

*If your application contains information that might reflect negatively on you, such as poor grades or a low admission test score, it is better not to deal with it in your essay unless you are asked to. You can explain the negative aspects on a separate sheet labeled "Addendum" and then attach it to the application, or you could address it in a separate letter. Either way, keep your explanation short and to the point; avoid elaborate excuses.

Aspects of yourself that you could include in your personal statement:

1. Reasons for deciding to pursue a graduate degree in a particular field.
2. Reasons you want to attend that particular institution.
3. Motivation and commitment to a field of study.
4. Expectations with regard to the program and career opportunities.
5. Educational background.
6. Research and/or work experience.
7. Immediate and long-range goals.
8. Major areas of interest.
9. Personal uniqueness - what could you add to the diversity of the class.

After completing your essay, you should have several people critique it. Your advisor or those who write your letters of recommendation may be able to assist you. If they are in the field you plan to pursue, they will be able to tell what points to stress. More than likely you will get varying opinions on the content of your essay. Remember, only you can decide on the best way to present yourself.

Additional Tips

The following article on *Guidelines for Writing Your Personal Statement* is published by College Recruitment Media, Inc.

Guidelines for Writing Your Personal Statement

STEP 1: Brainstorming

Actions:

- Devote time to reflect on the following questions.
- Discuss them with friends or family members.
- Jot down notes. In some cases write sentences.
- Think about the flip side of each question. For example, why are you really committed to the field of biology despite pressure from your parents to become a lawyer or to get a job?

Your answers to some of these questions will form the heart of your personal statement.

1. How did your pre-college education influence your decision to pursue graduate study in your field?
Think about: High school courses, teachers, special programs, student organizations, and community or volunteer work.
2. How has your college experience influenced your decision?
Think about: College courses, professors, academic interests, research, special programs, student organizations, and the decision-making process you went through to choose your major.
3. How has your work experience influenced your decision?
Think about: Internships, externships, part-time jobs, summer jobs, and volunteer or community work.
4. Who has had the most influence on your decision to pursue graduate study? In what ways?
Think about: Parents, relatives, teachers, professors, clergy, friends of the family, college friends, parents of friends, local merchants, supervisors, coaches, doctors, dentists, lawyers, etc.
5. What situation has had the most influence on your decision?
Think about: Family, academic, work or athletic situations. Think about happy, sad, traumatic, moving, or memorable situations.
6. What personally motivates you to pursue graduate study in this field?
Think about: Your personal skills, interests, and values.

STEP 2: Writing Your Personal Statement

Actions:

Incorporate your responses to the above questions. Begin writing your first draft:

1. Develop an outline of your statement prior to writing. It doesn't have to be detailed. It can be three or four main points in the order you want to make them.
2. Accentuate your strengths and what makes you unique.
3. Explain your weaknesses in positive ways. For example, refer to them not as weaknesses but as areas for improvement or growth.
4. Paint pictures and tell stories about what makes you special. In this way the admissions readers will remember you. The story can be happy or sad. The more feeling you can inject into your statement, the more you will stand out.
5. Find out the specific orientation and philosophy of the graduate program. Adapt and refine your statement to fit. This will make you stand out from other applicants who recycle the same personal statement with each application.

Suggested Outline

Your personal statement will likely range from 250-1200 words or 1-6 pages. The typical personal statement should be 2-3 double-spaced pages or 500-700 words. Here is a suggested outline. You should adjust the main point of each paragraph and number of paragraphs depending on the desired length of your personal statement and the areas in your background that you choose to emphasize.

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Paragraph 1 | A personal human-interest story |
| Paragraph 2 | Your academic interests and achievements |
| Paragraph 3 | Your relevant work and/or research experiences |
| Paragraph 4 | Your career interests |
| Paragraph 5 | Why you are interested in this particular school |
| Paragraph 6 | The qualities you will bring to this school |

References

Write for Success: Preparing a Successful Professional School Application, Third Edition, October 2005 by Evelyn W. Jackson, PhD and Harold R. Bardo, PhD. NAAHP, National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions, Inc.

"Perfect Personal Statements" by Mark Alan Stewart. *Peterson's Guide 2004*

Personal Statement Critiques

Contact your campus career office and make an appointment with a career counselor to have your personal statement critiqued. Ask a professor if they would review it as well. Having feedback from professionals with different points of view can only make for a stronger personal statement overall.

Adapted with permission from the Office of Career Services at Rutgers University, New Brunswick Campus.