

GRADUATE SCHOOL OPTION

THE
BEST
IS YET
TO COME

2013

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INTRODUCTION

Whether your interest stems from professional commitment or curiosity, the fact that you have opened this guide means you already have some idea of the importance of planning ahead for graduate or professional study. The choice to pursue further education involves much consideration, time, and paperwork. A good first step is the one you're taking now – reading this guide.

IS GRADUATE STUDY FOR YOU?

This is a question that appears in every guide of this type, and for good reason. Our country's graduate and professional schools have been experiencing a steady increase in applicants as more and more individuals seek specialization in one field or another. Unfortunately, some individuals enter graduate study with the idea that they can postpone the inevitable job search and/or the career decision-making process for another year or two. If this is your motivation for entering graduate school, it could have serious implications for your career development.

Before applying for further study, you need to be fully aware of the working conditions, employment prospects, and physical and mental requirements of the field you plan to pursue. In addition, the more immediate demands of research, coursework, and major papers that are all part of the graduate school experience must be considered. Although there are defined course requirements in most graduate and professional school curricula, by and large you are expected to build a program for yourself based on your interests and goals.

Before going any further, you may wish to carefully consider some important questions:

- » What do I want to accomplish in my lifetime?
- » What are my long and short-range professional goals?
- » Is graduate study necessary for me to achieve these goals?
- » Do I have the interest and ability to be successful in a graduate program?
- » By going to graduate school, am I simply delaying my career decision-making?
- » Am I willing to invest the time and money to take on another academic program?

Two of the reasons most frequently given by students who have dropped out of graduate programs are a dislike of concentrated academic work and a realization that they have not defined their career goals clearly enough. By answering the previous questions honestly, you can hopefully avoid similar problems in the future.

Through research, you should be able to get a solid idea of whether or not you would benefit from graduate study. Further education is not absolutely required for entry into every career

field. It is, of course, if you are planning to enter traditional professions such as law, medicine, dentistry, and college-level teaching. At this point, if you haven't already done so, it's a good idea to look over occupational resources and talk with faculty, friends, and alumni—people who have the kinds of jobs in which you are interested. The staff of Career Services will also be able to assist you in determining your job prospects in various fields at all degree levels.

The message is simple: If you don't have a good idea of what you want to do as a career, you will have a tough time making sensible choices. If you don't know where graduate or professional school might lead you, your investment of time and money in additional education might have only limited benefits.

WHEN TO GO

There are no absolute guidelines about when to go to graduate school. However, once the decision has been made in favor of graduate study, you will want to consider when the best time would be for you to begin.

It is highly advisable to speak with faculty advisors and with students currently pursuing programs of interest to you in order to hear their perspectives on immediate entry versus delay. But remember, what you hear from others is advice, not fact that necessarily applies to your personal circumstance. You must make your own decisions about the time frame for continuing your education.

There are pros and cons both with immediate entry and delay of graduate study. Some feel that going directly into graduate school after obtaining a bachelor's degree is easier because there are many sources of information on graduate programs available while an undergraduate. Also, faculty members will be more likely to remember your achievements for recommendation purposes. Likewise, study habits are generally well-developed and will help ease the transition into advanced course work. Another important consideration is that some professional schools, especially medical and dental, prefer to recruit students directly from undergraduate programs.

On the other hand, many graduate schools, and particularly those with well-known programs, tend to be more selective in their admissions process. Often, preference will be given to individuals with a few years' life/work experience behind them. The argument given in favor of this selection process is that work experience tends to give students more knowledge on which to base their graduate school decisions.

Once again, the decision on when to enter a graduate or professional program is yours. If you do decide to delay graduate study, yet plan to begin a program within three to five years, you may want to take the appropriate standardized

entrance examination(s) during your senior year of college, as scores on most of these tests are generally valid for this period of time.

WHERE TO GO

Although graduate and professional schools both are means of acquiring further education, there are some basic differences between the two. Graduate schools typically offer degrees in academic disciplines, while professional schools prepare individuals to practice a certain profession (e.g., law, medicine, ministry). In addition, business schools are sometimes considered graduate, and other times considered professional, schools.

A common concern of individuals considering graduate education deals with which institution has the “best” program of study. There is no single reliable ranking of graduate schools. National rankings do exist; however, each is based on different criteria. You can find rankings online from:

- » U.S. News & World Report:
- » www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/articles/us-news-ranks-best-graduate-schools
- » LinkedIn’s Graduate school rankings:
- » www.linkedin.com/edu/rankings/us/graduate?trk=li_corpblog_corp_itamar_gradschoolrankings
- » And through the Career Services website:
- » MiamiOH.edu/careers/graduate-school-options/graduate-and-professional-school-links/index.html

Professors, Advisors, & National Conferences

Your professors and advisors are a valuable resource when researching which graduate schools and programs are a good fit for you. They know you as a student and understand your aptitudes. Ask for their advice, both before and after, researching schools.

If you are conducting research with a member of the faculty and have the opportunity to present at or attend a conference, check to see if there are faculty members registered from graduate programs you would like to attend. Make it a point to talk with them during the conference and let them know of your interest in their research and graduate program. Again, talk with your professor/advisor about ways to approach someone during a conference.

Print/Online Resources

While actual rankings may be somewhat misleading, comparative information about various programs of study is readily available. You may find the following directories helpful as you attempt to gain an overview of the many programs available for advanced study. These and various other directories are available online,

in many libraries, and on the Career Services website [MiamiOH.edu/careers/graduate-school-options/graduate-and-professional-school-links/index.html].

Peterson's Graduate and Professional Programs

These guides profile over 4,000 accredited institutions offering master's and/or doctoral programs in more than 490 fields. It also provides financial aid information and test preparation. Included in many profiles are a directory of institutional offerings, academic contact persons, and a listing of departmental faculty and their research interests. It also provides information on graduate programs in business, education, health, information studies, law and social work. You may also access Peterson's Annual Guides to Graduate Study at www.petersons.com

Peterson's MBA Programs

[www.petersons.com/graduate-schools/mba-programs.aspx]

MBA (Master of Business Administration) programs at schools in the U.S., Canada and worldwide. Sections cover future trends and opportunities for MBA holders; tips on what to look for in programs; tips on how to choose the right program for your career needs; and information on getting admitted to programs, financial aid and going abroad for your MBA.

ABA • LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools

[officialguide.lsac.org]

This is a service of the Law School Admission Council and provides descriptions of American Bar Association-approved law schools. Each institutional description contains a class profile according to grade-point-average and LSAT scores, as well as special programs and degree requirements. Also included is career information regarding the legal profession and information on pre-law curriculum alternatives.

Miami University Pre-Law Program

[MiamiOH.edu/cas/academics/programs/pre-law/]

Miami's Pre-Law Program educates students about law school and the practice of law, as well as providing focused guidance and counseling on undergraduate coursework and law school admissions.

Miami University Mallory-Wilson Center for Healthcare Education

[MiamiOH.edu/cas/academics/programs/mwche/]

The Mallory-Wilson Center for Healthcare Education provides programs and services that inform students of the issues facing today's healthcare professionals and prepare them for their future careers.

GradSchools.com

[www.gradschools.com]

An online provider of information about graduate schools by subject, school, and distance learning.

Phds.org

[www.phds.org]

Allows students to enter criteria that are important to them when searching for a PhD program and the site will generate a list of schools that match that criteria.

The Princeton Review

[www.princetonreview.com/]

Information on finding and applying to graduate and professional school, including detailed information on each test related to graduate and professional school.

Additional Online Resources

In addition to the websites listed in this guide, look at the website of the national association within your field. The national organization for someone interested in Chemistry is the American Chemical Society [www.acs.org/content/acs/en.html, go to the 'education tab'].

After investigating various advanced degree programs through directories and online resources, you may also wish to refer to websites for the institutions you are considering. At this point you will want to give serious attention to your personal criteria for selecting an institution. Once you have determined that programs in your field of interest are available, you may want to take the following factors into consideration as you evaluate various specific programs:

Geographic Location. The weather, political/social climate, an urban versus rural setting, as well as accessibility of employment opportunities upon graduation may be important in your planning.

Size. How large is the institution and the department in which you're interested? The number of students, and particularly the student/faculty ratio, will affect the amount of individual attention you receive. The amount and availability of financial aid can also be affected.

State Regulations. In regard to admissions, many state universities are required by law to give preference to in-state residents. These regulations apply to your legal residence and may affect the cost of your tuition.

Philosophy of Education. What is the average length of time spent in the program? Do opportunities exist for specialization in areas of your specific interest? Some institutions may approach the subject matter theoretically, while others may be more pragmatic in their approach.

Available Work Experiences. Are opportunities available for career-related assistantships?

Residence Requirements. How much time must you spend taking courses at the particular institution in order to earn your advanced degree? Residence requirements also determine whether you pay in-state tuition (charged to legal residents of that state) or out-of-state tuition (charged if you are not a legal resident of that state). Out-of-state tuition may be twice that which a legal resident would pay.

Career Services. Will you receive assistance in your job search when you are ready to graduate? You will want to check with the institution's career services personnel, if possible, to find out what types of employers typically express an interest in graduates of the department of interest to you. Keep in mind, too, that departmental faculty often get actively involved in helping their graduate students with the employment process.

Other Considerations. Some doctoral programs require demonstrated competence in one or two foreign languages before the advanced degree is awarded. Universities may also require—or in some cases permit as a substitute for a foreign language—knowledge of a research tool (for example, computer programming). Similarly, you will want to investigate how much research effort you will be expected to make and whether or not a thesis is required at the master's degree level.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GRADES AND TEST SCORES

Although most graduate and professional programs require applicants to submit scores from standardized admission tests, one of the most critical factors in gaining admission to graduate or professional study is your grade-point-average. The main reason is that, as with applicants for full-time employment, performance in the past is usually a good predictor of future performance.

Almost all of the standardized tests produced by the Educational Testing Service and other organizations have faced criticism because of alleged cultural bias. It has also been questioned as to whether they measure anything more than your ability to take standardized tests. The upshot has been that, in general, their importance has been somewhat de-emphasized in the admissions process. However, they are still widely required and are usually regarded as the second most important criterion for admission.

Admissions testing will be explained in greater detail later in this guide, but it is important to keep in mind that some of these tests are administered only at certain times during the year and that virtually all tests require pre-registration prior to the designated testing date. This is changing with the availability of computerized testing. Check the website(s) for the appropriate admission test(s), for test dates and application process.

Most universities have established minimum grade-point-averages and/or test scores that you must attain in order to be eligible for admission. You can generally find this information on the graduate school's website. If this information is not on the website, but set standards of admission are alluded to, you should contact the admissions officer at the institutions where you are applying. Admissions officers can help you evaluate your record in advance, even if they are unable to give you an immediate and definitive answer regarding admission. The point to remember is not to "self-select" yourself out of the application process before you have thoroughly investigated the situation from various perspectives.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Formal applications vary from one institution to the next, but usually consist of the following:

- » an application form
- » separate financial aid application
- » transcripts
- » letters of recommendation
- » required test scores

As you research each institution, you may wish to keep a record or file noting admission requirements and application deadlines. Some graduate programs require a personal interview; most require a nonrefundable application fee (which may cause you to limit the number of schools to which you actually apply).

Following are some suggestions for completing the application process:

Application Forms. Most institutions require applications online. If not, application forms should be neatly typed; handwritten applications are generally unacceptable.

Many institutions will ask that you submit a personal statement in addition to basic personal data requested on the application form. Personal statements provide you with the opportunity to supplement standard application materials with your own goals and objectives with respect to the program; therefore, they should not be taken lightly. Typically, when a personal statement is requested or required (as is the case with most applications for professional schools), the institutions will offer suggestions on items to consider including, your reasons for applying in relation to personal goals and professional expectations. Good grammar and writing styles are extremely important. Don't hesitate to seek help from faculty members if you need advice and guidance in preparing your personal statement or other application materials. The Howe Writing Center, located in King Library, Farmer School of Business, and various other locations on campus is another resource for guidance in writing your personal statement.

Be aware of application deadlines listed in graduate school bulletins. If admissions are handled on a “rolling” basis (i.e., qualified applicants are accepted as they apply), it is to your distinct advantage to apply at the earliest possible date in order to receive maximum consideration. This is also advantageous if you are applying for financial assistance.

Testing. As mentioned previously, most graduate and professional schools require that you take one or more standardized examinations before they decide upon your application for admission. Listed below are some of the more commonly required examinations:

- » Graduate Record Examination (GRE) for study in the academic disciplines
- » Law School Admission Test (LSAT)
- » Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)
- » Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) for MBA programs
- » Miller’s Analogies Test (MAT) for, among others, education programs
- » Dental Admission Test (DAT)

Online registration is available for most of the exams.

Due to increased competition for admission and financial assistance, it will work to your advantage to take the appropriate standardized test(s) early in your application process. For example, those wishing to enter a graduate program in the fall of a given academic year will want to consider testing up to a year in advance of this desired entry date.

There are many alternatives to preparing for one of the tests. The companies who administer the tests each have manuals, DVDs, and online courses. These resources typically contain several practice tests based on different units of each examination, as well as “refresher” sections designed to assist in updating your skills in recall, judgment and mathematics. In addition, private “short courses” exist to help applicants prepare for examinations such as the MCAT and LSAT. Before investing a considerable amount of money in one of these services, it is advisable to check them out thoroughly with faculty members or with persons currently or formerly enrolled in them.

Transcripts. All transcripts must be official; that is, transcripts must be sent to admissions offices directly from the Registrar’s Office. If you receive your transcript first and then send it on, there is no proof that it is “official” and therefore it may be considered invalid. For additional information on transcripts, contact the Office of the Registrar, 301 S.Campus Avenue Building or check their website: **MiamiOH.edu/onestop/your-records/how-to/request-transcript/index.html**

References. Most institutions will request between three and five letters of recommendation on your behalf. As with application forms and test dates, it is important to pay close attention to application deadlines; you can then contact people whom you wish to write letters well in advance of the deadline date(s).

Letters of recommendation are useful to graduate admissions committees only if the letters tell them something about you that is not particularly evident in the rest of your application packet. It is best to obtain recommendations from people qualified to evaluate your academic and/or work potential and performance, based on personal observation—namely, faculty members and former employers. At least one, and preferably two or more, letters should come from faculty members in your major field. You may also wish to obtain a recommendation from a professor in an unrelated discipline (perhaps your minor field) in order to show the breadth of your academic interests.

It is absolutely essential that the reference person know you well enough that he or she can make a good assessment of your academic or work abilities. Do not hesitate to ask references if they feel they know you well enough to write a good recommendation. You might find it beneficial to “touch base” with your reference persons and discuss the qualities you feel you have demonstrated for them and which they could highlight effectively in their letters. Provide them with a copy of your resume. In addition, you will want to share with them your reasons for applying to graduate or professional school as it relates to your overall goals and objectives.

Administratively, reference persons will expect you to supply them with updated personal and professional data as needed, recommendation forms (if required by the institution), and a list of deadlines. Most programs have online systems for the submission of references. It is a good idea to let your references know the exact procedure they are required to use.

Some students find it helpful to establish a confidential credential file to keep confidential letters of recommendation, curriculum vitae, writing samples, evaluations, and transcripts. Career Services recommends students use Interfolio—an intuitive, fast, and secure online service to maintain their confidential credential files. For more information, please visit the Interfolio website (www.interfolio.com) or the Career Services website: MiamiOH.edu/careers/graduate-school-options/credential-files/index.html

INTERVIEWS

Some graduate and professional schools will require an interview as part of the application process. The interview gives the graduate admissions committee an opportunity to determine if there is a match between what you are seeking in graduate study and what their institution has to offer. At the same time, the interview gives you the opportunity to find out more about the

graduate program as well as visit the campus to talk to faculty members and currently enrolled students.

The following listings are designed to give you an idea of the types of questions you may expect in a typical interview situation and provide some useful examples of questions you may wish to ask the interviewer.

Sample interview questions:

- » Why are you interested in this graduate program at this particular school?
- » What are your plans after you complete your graduate work?
- » Are you interested in an assistantship? If so, which one(s)?
- » How did you decide to pursue this field of study?
- » What are your research interests?
- » What courses or experiences at your undergraduate institution caused you to think about graduate study in this field?
- » What other graduate schools are you considering?
- » What are your plans if you should not be accepted into a graduate program?

Questions for the interviewer:

- » What are the academic backgrounds and research interests of your faculty?
- » Do students select, or are they assigned to, an academic adviser?
- » What is the size of a typical graduate class in your department?
- » What is the relationship between academic coursework and practica (or internships)?
- » What are the typical duties of a graduate assistant?
- » Is a comprehensive examination or thesis required?
- » What is the placement record of graduates of this program?
- » What is the availability of housing?

FINANCIAL AID

Monetary support to attend graduate/professional school is available from several sources: universities themselves, government sources, banks, and private foundations. One major problem lies in discovering just what is available at any given time. New sources are continually being developed, and in the case of government aid, the amount available is subject to current executive and legislative policy.

Financial aid information can be found on the websites of graduate/professional schools, governmental units, and foundations. Individual faculty and staff members, both at Miami and at the school where admission is being sought, can be particularly helpful.

Typically, deadlines are quite early for financial aid applications. If you will require financial assistance, be sure to touch base with someone in the financial assistance office and make sure you understand the application process and the due

date. The information you supply will be used by financial aid administrators to determine your financial need, so it is important to provide them with accurate and timely information.

Types of financial aid available for graduate study are somewhat different from aid you may have been familiar with as an undergraduate. General types of aid include the following:

Fellowships. On the graduate level, the equivalent of a scholarship is a fellowship. It is usually a straight monetary award given on the basis of scholastic achievement. Fellowships are often tax-free unless they involve teaching or research; in these cases the recipient will more than likely be required to report them for income tax purposes. Specific institutions have their own fellowships, which you may identify by contacting the school's financial aid office and the department to which you are applying. The federal government also supports some fellowships, for which applications may be made through the institution to which you are applying.

Assistantships. Teaching or research assistantships are often available through the academic department or program of study. Assistantships usually involve working 10-20 hours per week in exchange for some stipend and/or fee remission. Although fee remissions are common, be aware that in accepting a graduate assistantship, you still may be responsible for partial payment of your tuition and/or fees. Requests for information on graduate assistantships and applications should be made directly to the department or program of interest to you.

Resident Assistantships. Some institutions have programs in which graduate students earn a stipend, room and board, or both by working as assistants in undergraduate residence halls. If you do not receive information on such a program, along with your application materials, you might contact the school's director of residence halls to inquire about such possibilities.

Long-term Educational Loans. Most institutions have loan programs for which graduate students may be eligible. Such programs include private, state, and federally-sponsored Guaranteed Student Loan Programs. The institution's financial aid office will be able to explain these loan programs to you.

Other Employment. Some "college towns" provide good opportunities for part-time work. In some cases, schools may have cooperative agreements with neighboring businesses and industries and governmental agencies whereby graduate students might be employed for research and/or consultation. Check with the institution's financial aid office, or the chairperson of the department to which you are applying, regarding possible part-time employment opportunities in the local community.

A general word of caution: Financial support of graduate education may vary widely from institution to institution. Therefore, it is essential for prospective applicants to thoroughly

investigate the availability of financial aid in all its various forms as they go about the admissions process. Both the sources and amounts of financial aid are important considerations. This is another of the reasons why students considering further education should begin the process early.

SOME CLOSING SUGGESTIONS

The information found on graduate and professional school websites may be of only limited value because, by design, it is directed toward a general audience. In other words, websites may not answer specific questions you may have about the particular program you wish to pursue. Admissions officials and faculty members at the institution you would like to attend can help you with this information. Do not hesitate to contact them by phone, e-mail, letter, or even a personal visit.

If further education at this point in time looms as an alternative to a job search, you may wish to re-examine your career objectives to see if they “fit” with the opportunities that the chosen program offers. As practical work experience is an education in itself, a combination of work and study may be a possible solution.

Graduate/professional study can be a worthwhile and rewarding career additive; it should not be a disappointing employment alternative.

The staff of Career Services encourages you to take advantage of the many campus resources that can help to make your choice more meaningful and enjoyable. Of course, you are particularly encouraged to attend our workshop on “Planning for Graduate School,” to visit our website: **MiamiOH.edu/careers/graduate-school-options/graduate-and-professional-school-links/index.html**, and to meet individually with our advising staff as you consider pursuing advanced education.

For additional information about Career Services and other pertinent websites, please refer to our website at: **MiamiOH.edu/careers**

For assistance in using the website, check with our Career Assistants in 200 Hoyt Hall.

Graduate School Application Checklist

Planning to apply to Graduate/Professional School? Start early! Presented below is a suggested timetable that you may find helpful when considering graduate school for the upcoming fall semester. This timetable may vary depending on application deadlines for different graduate programs. Check for specific application deadlines on the websites of each graduate school of interest. Peterson's Graduate Program Guides and other graduate school resources are available online. When e-mailing graduate institutions, be certain to address your correspondence to the graduate admissions office. For additional information about graduate school services, please refer to our website at: MiamiOH.edu/careers/graduate-school-options/index.html

MAY
(of your Junior Year)

- Begin researching potential schools. If appropriate, take a practice test (GRE, LSAT, GMAT, etc.).

JULY
AUGUST
SEPTEMBER

- Continue to research areas of interest, institutions, and programs.
- Talk to advisors and faculty for advice.
- Contact graduate schools directly for information about specific programs and check on each school's website.
- Investigate assistantship, fellowship, and scholarship opportunities, including support for specific student populations (e.g., veterans, under-represented populations, etc.) as appropriate.
- Determine if there are any special admission requirements (e.g., portfolios, auditions, prior professional work experience, etc.).
- Register and prepare for appropriate graduate admission tests, if required.
- For medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry, law school, etc., you may need to register for the national centralized application service most programs use.
- Take required graduate admission tests.
- Attend our workshop, "Planning for Graduate School."
- If you plan to attend Law School, check out the programs sponsored by the Pre-Law Center. [MiamiOH.edu/prelaw/]
- If you plan to attend Medical School or other healthcare graduate programs, connect with the Mallory-Wilson Center for Healthcare Education: MiamiOH.edu/cas/academics/programs/mwche/

**OCTOBER
NOVEMBER**

- Visit institutions of interest, if possible.
- Take or retake graduate admission tests if necessary.
- Check on application deadlines for specific assistantship, fellowship, and scholarship opportunities.
- Request letters of recommendation, as necessary.
- Write application essay or statement of professional goals if required.
- Budget for nonrefundable application fees.

DECEMBER

- Take or retake graduate admission tests if necessary.
- Work on completing application forms.
- Submit online application forms for schools of your choice (application deadlines vary; check with individual schools). Remember, earlier is usually better.
- Keep copies of everything you send or submit online.

**JANUARY
FEBRUARY
MARCH
APRIL**

- Submit online application forms for schools of your choice if not already done.
- Check with all institutions before the application deadline to make sure your file is complete.
- Submit the free application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at www.fafsa.gov, if required.
- Prepare for campus interviews if required.
- Be sure to follow up with thank-you notes after interviews.
- Notify other graduate schools of your choice once accepted.

**MAY
JUNE
JULY
AUGUST**

- Make arrangements for housing.
- Plan to attend the appropriate fall orientation programs for new graduate students.

Titles in the Career Development and Workbook Series include:

Cover Letters & Other Job Search Correspondence

The Graduate School Option

Interviewing Guide

A Job Search Guide for International Students

Job Search Strategies

Mapping Your Miami Journey

Resume Preparation

Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Your Job Search

Telling Your Story

Translating Your Study Abroad Experience

The Value of Service in Your Career Search

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