



Northeastern University

GETTING INTO GRADUATE SCHOOL 101



SHOULD YOU ATTEND GRADUATE SCHOOL?

ASK YOURSELF:

- What do I want to study?
- Am I doing this to escape an unsatisfying job, or an unhealthy job market?
- Am I doing this to figure out what I want to do with my life?
- What makes me a good candidate for Graduate School?
- Am I ready to spend 2-6 years to do this?
- Can I get a fulfilling job without further education?
- Would I have a better idea about graduate school in this field if I worked it first?
- How will I finance grad school?

Go to Graduate School because you are committed to the idea yourself, not because someone else expects it of you.

FINDING THE RIGHT SCHOOL

Use many sources. The more sources you use, the more likely you are to find a program that meets your goals.

- If you are interested in a particular field, pay attention to who is working/researching in that field and where they are. Read their publications, and visit their websites. Contact them, and ask intelligent questions about their work. Explore the possibility of working with them in their lab or research.
- Locate the people who are writing your college textbooks. Those authors might be worth considering as prospective advisors.
- Ask college professors where the good programs are.
- Visit schools to get a “feel”, speak with current students, and meet with program administrators.
- Use directories such as Peterson’s Guide or the U.S. News & World Report to research programs.
- Go to the website of the colleges and universities in which you are interested.
- Send for college catalogs and financial information. Browse College Source Online: College Search which lists over 10,600 catalogs.
- Visit the Higher Education Information Center at 700 Boylston Street, 617-536-0200



EVALUATING GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Consider these criteria when choosing a graduate program:

- Quality and reputation of the faculty
- The focus of the curriculum (research, experiential)
- The availability and access to facilities and resources on campus
- COST and financial aid
- Racial and ethnic diversity
- Access to Career Services and academic assistance
- Housing availability
- Geographic location
- Internship or co-op opportunities
- Social and cultural opportunities
- Time needed to finish the degree
- Availability of grand funding
- The match between your interests and the professor's interests

To assist you in evaluating graduate programs, you may also want to look at some publications which rank schools. Some of these include: U.S. News & World Report, The Gourman Report, and the NRC Graduate Programs Rankings Form.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Now that you've figured out where to apply to graduate school, how do you go about doing it? The application process differs for each school, and each type of degree. Make sure you understand each one's requirements. In general, you will most likely complete the following:

Graduate Admissions Test - The most commonly-used admissions tests are the GRE and the GMAT, both products of the Educational Testing Service. Another test that is sometimes used is the Miller Analogies Test (MAT). There are specialized tests for admission to professional schools (e.g. LSAT, MCAT).

Register early for these tests by calling your Regional Registration Center.

Transcripts – Request that your undergraduate transcripts be mailed to selected graduate programs, providing names, addresses, and appropriate fees to the Registrar's Office.

Recommendations – Provide your references with stamps and addressed envelopes. Give them enough information including a resume, a sample of your work, and plenty of lead time prior to the application deadline.



Personal Statement – Demonstrate that you have done your research. In your essay include a statement of your interests in the field and how you came to have these interests, what your goals and ambitions in the field are, and how the program to which you are applying can help you achieve those goals. **Make sure you have several people edit it!**

Resume – Send your most recent resume outlining your educational background and experience.

Admission Application and Financial Aid Application – Dot every I, and cross every T! Be aware of deadlines, which usually occur in November, January and at the latest, March.

Aim to send between 5-7 applications to increase your chances of getting in.

Keep copies and follow up with admissions offices to ensure all of your materials have been received.

TIME LINE FOR APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

June – September (Junior Year)

- Research Graduate programs
- Obtain catalogs and application packages
- Prepare for the appropriate graduate school exam by taking a preparation course or studying a review book
- Register for the required standardized tests. Educational Testing Service's phone number is 609-921-9052 and their website is www.ets.org

September (Senior Year)

- Meet with faculty members to discuss your personal statement
- Ask for 3-5 letters of recommendation. Provide your references with the appropriate materials
- Verify deadlines including those for financial aid

October (Senior Year)

- Take the tests
- Complete your personal statement. Have several people edit it. Revise, revise, revise!
- Order transcripts. Check for errors or omissions
- Attend open houses held by programs of interest

November (Senior Year)

- Complete application forms (do a draft on a photocopy first) or do the on-line application



- Write the final draft of your statement

December (Senior Year)

- Retake the graduate school exam, if necessary
- Submit applications and fees. **Keep a Xeroxed copy of each application! Mail them two weeks before the deadline.**
- Verify that your letters of recommendation have been sent

December – April

If you have not received acknowledgement of the receipt of application material within a reasonable time, then a telephone call for verification may be necessary.

April

Depending on their application deadlines, graduate schools begin sending out letters of acceptance around April 15. The student is usually given a period of two weeks to make a decision.

AFTER THE ACCEPTANCE

- Meet with an academic advisor to establish a plan of study
- Relocate, if necessary
- Follow up regarding financial aid, assistantships, etc
- Attend Orientation

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR GETTING INTO GRAD SCHOOL

(Especially if you do not have the best grades
or do not do well on standardized tests!)

If your G.P.A. is a bit lower than the stated admissions minimum, or if you simply don't do well on standardized tests, there are ways you can increase your chances of getting into a particular grad school. WWW.Gradschools.com offers the following advice:

- Zero in on a key faculty member whose work particularly intrigues you. Contact the professor via letter or e-mail, and discuss your interest in getting involved with her work. Try to arrange an in-person interview. If the faculty member is impressed with your passion for the subject matter, he/she may recommend that you be accepted into the programs
- Find out what institutions recently received research grants from government or corporate entities. Chances are that the program is looking for qualified students to



carry out the research for which that money was intended. If you express your interest(s) in the specific program, it may help you get accepted.

- If you are interested in obtaining a professional degree, make sure your application reflects your professional accomplishments. Demonstrate that you have been active in professional associations or attended conferences in your field.
- Publish an article with a faculty member or contribute to his/her original research.
- Research satellite programs that are held off-campus. It may be easier to get into the program of your choice at a less popular site.
- Request an interview if it isn't already required. Sometimes it is easier to sell yourself in person than on paper.

RESOURCES

Finding the Right School

Directories

- America's Best Graduate Schools (U.S. News), 2003 edition of Best Graduate Schools, 1-800-836-6397, ext 225
- Gradschools.com: Directory of Graduate School Programs
- Petersons.com (Graduate School Channel)

Rankings

- Graduate Schools Rankings (U.S. News)
- The Gourman Report – A Rating of Graduate and Professional Programs in American and International Universities

Testing

- www.ets.org-select Test Centers option, type in zip code and find the nearest testing center. You may register by phone with a credit card.
- Kaplan Prep courses

Indices to Colleges/Universities on the WWW

- College and University Home Pages (Christine DeMello, 1996)
- Web U.S. Higher Education (University of Texas, Austin 1998)

Applying to Graduate School

- Getting In: An Applicant's Guide to Graduate School Admissions (David Burrell, Ohio State University, 1995)
- So You Want to Go to Grad School (Princeton Review Online, 1998)



Writing the Personal Statement

- Writing for Graduate School Admission (www.Accepted.com)
- Admission Essay Help (www.4tests.com)

Funding: Scholarships, Fellowships, Grants and Loans

- www.scholarships.com
- www.fastweb.com
- www.finaid.com
- www.estudentloan.com
- www.fafsa.ed.gov

GRADUATE EDUCATION

Peterson's Guide www.petersons.com

U.S. News Online www.usnews.com (Click on 'Education' link)

Search for graduate and professional schools by ranking, location and curriculum on these sites.

All Career Schools www.allcareerschools.com

Search for career program by location or program, for example, culinary arts, massage therapy, art and design, medical assisting.

FinAid www.finaid.org

Comprehensive guide to financial aid issues, applications and resources.

FastWeb www.fastweb.com

This free site matches your profile with available scholarships, most for undergraduate education.

Scholarship Experts www.scholarshipexperts.com

Fee-based site that matches your profile with scholarship opportunities for both undergraduate and graduate studies.

Standardized Test Information

These sites provide information about preparing and registering for admissions examinations.

Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) www.mba.com

Graduate Record Examination (GRE) www.gre.org

Law School Admission Test (LSAT) www.lsat.org

Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) www.aamc.org/students/mcat

Miller Analogies Test (MAT) www.milleranalogies.com