



CENTER FOR CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Graduate School Application Process

Am I Ready?

Whether to attend graduate school, and how soon after the completion of your bachelor's degree, is an important question in the process of constructing your well-managed professional life. Have you had an enriching undergraduate experience and feel confident about choosing your field of interest for grad school? How will graduate study shape your professional identity? Have your undergrad experiences resulted in the development of requisite 21st century career-readiness skills to succeed in the competitive in the admissions process as well as graduate study? Do you have the motivation and commitment to engage in a course of study that will involve at least two years at the master's level to an average of 5-6 years (variable) at the doctoral level? If you are hesitant to respond, you may find that you would benefit from working first to assess your career goals and develop experience. Simultaneously, you may consider some additional coursework to bridge your interests, especially if you are choosing a course of study different from your bachelor's degree, or if you are concerned about the strength of your undergraduate record. However, if the answer to these questions is "yes," then consider applying to graduate programs that immediately follow your bachelor's degree. Whatever your situation, the following information provides a guide to the graduate school application process.

How to Get Started

Ideally, you should begin to focus on the graduate school application process *at least one full year* in advance of when you would expect to see yourself beginning a graduate program.

To begin, you must **identify your interest**. Although you may know you want to continue your education, you may not be sure of exactly what area you want to pursue. The Center for Career & Professional Development (CCPD) team can help you assess your interests, values, and other goals to identify your desired program of study. To take personality, interest, values, and/or skills inventories and meet with a CCPD team member, call (512) 863-1346 to schedule an appointment.

Next, you need to **identify programs** where you would like to apply. Two helpful resources are www.gradschools.com and www.petersons.com. These websites have databases searchable by academic field and location. University websites offer details on program information, application materials, and information about financial aid and housing.

The **GRE Search Service** is a free, web-based service that matches prospective graduate students with participating graduate schools

as well as with fellowship sponsors and non-profit organizations that promote graduate education. If you match the recruitment profile of a participating institution/organization, you will be sent information about graduate programs, admission requirements, financial aid opportunities, fellowships, and other education opportunities. You will automatically be included in the Search Service when you register for a GRE test. Anyone considering graduate study may also register for the free GRE Search Service without registering for the GRE. See www.ets.org/gre for more details.

Every fall, CCPD offers Getting into Graduate School, a free event for all students interested in getting advice from SU faculty, entrance exam specialists, and/or graduate school admission counselors. Other support services include free practice entrance exams, test prep workshops, and practice admission interviews.

It's a good idea to consult with your advisor and/or professors in your area of interest. They may be able to provide suggestions about schools to consider as well as important information about the reputation of a school or the quality of the faculty teaching there. Graduate students who are currently enrolled in programs are also a valuable source of information. Since they have recently gone through the application process, they may be able to share their experiences with you.

What Graduate Schools Are Looking For

Typically, graduate schools will evaluate you in five different areas: grade point average, Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores, letters of recommendation, personal statement, and experience. However, each institution's departmental faculty decide upon admission requirements for prospective students to their program, so you may find other factors taken into consideration as well (e.g. personal interviews or writing samples).

GPA

The GPA is a standard estimate of your aptitude to be academically successful in graduate school. GPAs are calculated in a number of ways, including cumulatively, by major, or using the most recent units earned. You will need to check with individual institutions to see how they handle GPA calculation.

GRE

The GRE General Test is required by most universities in the United States. It is used not only for purposes of admission but also sometimes used (in conjunction with other criteria) to award fellowships, teaching assistantships, and research assistantships. The general exam tests three areas: verbal reasoning, quantitative

reasoning, and analytical writing. **Verbal reasoning** has sections of text-completion, sentence equivalents, and reading comprehension. **Quantitative reasoning** involves quantitative comparison and problem solving covering arithmetic, algebra, and geometry. There are both multiple-choice questions and numeric-entry questions. An on-screen calculator is available. The **analytical writing** section (“analyze an issue” writing task and “analyze an argument” writing task) requires you to provide focused responses based on the tasks presented, so you can accurately demonstrate your skill in directly responding to a task.

The GRE is administered year-round via computer at testing facilities around the world. Score reports will be mailed (physically or electronically) to you and to recipient institutions 10-15 days after you complete the test (provided you complete the writing tasks on the computer).

For detailed information about test fees, test center locations, preparation materials, the search service, etc., see the comprehensive GRE website at www.ets.org/gre. Additional preparation help, including materials, free workshops, and fee-based prep classes, are offered by vendors such as Kaplan and the Princeton Review.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Getting these letters, which are very important in the application process, can be daunting. Typically, you will need to contact three writers. Depending on the requirements of your program, they may be from faculty, internship supervisors, employers, or others who can confidently discuss your potential for graduate-level work. Be sure to *ask* if the writer is willing and able to write you a *positive* letter of recommendation, and give your references plenty of time to write the letters.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

The personal statement (sometimes referred to as the “essay” or “statement of purpose”) is your opportunity to state who you are, where you are coming from, and where you are going professionally. The statement is typically two to three pages (typed, double-spaced) and should be an essay of the highest quality. *Graduate Admission Essays* by Donald Asher is available in CCPD’s Career Café to assist you in getting started in writing your personal statement. Additionally, CCPD offers statement critiques, and your advisor/other faculty may also be able to assist you.

EXPERIENCE

Admissions committees want to know how much and what types of experience you have had in your field. Your statement of purpose is the place to let them know. You might include internships, research experiences, capstones, applicable employment, laboratory assignments, etc. Providing such information demonstrates that you have the experience and commitment necessary as you pursue your professional goals.

Financial Aid

INSTITUTIONAL

Typically, these awards consist of research and teaching assistantships, tuition fee waivers, and fellowships. Awards are usually based upon merit rather than financial need and are instrumental in recruiting candidates to their programs. The

application process is usually included as part of the admissions application. **The deadline to apply for these awards, however, is often much earlier than program deadlines.**

FEDERAL AND STATE

Applying for Federal and state assistance is separate from the admissions process. At some schools, applying for Federal aid and institutional support are combined. In all instances, you will be required to complete a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). You will only need to complete one FAFSA (per year) as there is a section in the form where you can specify multiple institutions to which you wish the data be sent.

Some schools may require a supplemental application. This usually occurs when schools combine the awarding of Federal and institutional aid. This may not be a free service, so check with each school to make sure it is required. For comprehensive information about financing graduate school, including a downloadable FAFSA, see www.finaid.org.

PRIVATE SECTOR

This body encompasses local, national, and international organizations, foundations, and corporations. Funds are available to support graduate education in a number of ways. Fellowships primarily provide for living expenses and, in some instances, payment of tuition and fees. As private sector funding is usually free to be utilized at the college of the recipient’s choice, such funds may be more flexible than institutional aid. Application deadlines vary, so start your investigation early.

Timeline for Fall Applications

The “ideal” timeline for applying to graduate school upon graduation from SU begins the spring of your junior year.

SPRING

Begin the exploration process online, by talking to faculty at SU and other campuses, and with the CCPD team. Pave the way for letters of recommendation.

SUMMER

Prepare seriously for entrance exams. Start a draft of your personal statement.

FALL

Take entrance exams. Complete your personal statement. Finish gathering letters of recommendation. By the end of the fall semester, turn in all applications to meet priority deadlines for funding and admission.