

Strommen Career and Internship Center

Anderson Hall, Room 23
612.330.1148
careers@augsborg.edu
<http://cswl.pbworks.com/>

What is Graduate School?

Graduate study differs from undergraduate study in that it involves becoming more specialized and focused in a particular area of interest. In addition, graduate programs require not only taking additional courses but also active participation in research, practicums, internships, or clinical experiences as well.

There are two major categories of graduate degrees: professional degrees and research degrees. A professional degree prepares one for practicing in specific professions while a research degree prepares one for conducting research.

Why Attend Graduate School?

There are many reasons one may choose to pursue graduate study. One reason is the pure joy of learning and to satisfy one's intellectual curiosity. Another is that further study is required for the career you are choosing to pursue. In many fields (technology, teaching and business), a bachelors degree is considered an entry-level credential. For a number of other professions, however, an advanced degree is the entry-level credential.

When to go to Graduate School?

An important question to ask yourself is when to begin your graduate work. With the many different factors involved in this question, probably the most important is deciding if you are ready to begin.

Advantages to Starting Graduate School Immediately

- The momentum of your undergraduate work can be a positive motivator to continue studying, and if you start right away you will obviously finish sooner and begin your chosen profession sooner. In lengthier programs like medicine, law, architecture or pursuing a Ph. D., this may be particularly important.
- Graduate school is easier to finance when other obligations such as marriage, mortgage payments, children, and other events are not yet a part of life.
- In some fields, like the sciences (e.g., computer science or biological science), many report the importance of pursuing graduate work before their

undergraduate background becomes dated, enabling them to keep up with the most current advances in the field.

Advantages for Waiting to Begin Graduate School

- For some programs, it can be to one's advantage to spend time gaining valuable work experience within the field. Good work experience coupled with good recommendations from employers can better prepare you for admission into a good graduate school.
- For those with undefined career goals, it may be better to pursue work experience and take time conducting informational interviews until career goals become more focused, as graduate school forces you to pick a specific program.
- Financially, some students may not want to add to their current student loan debt by continuing their education. Some may want to work and put aside money for graduate study at a later time. In addition, some companies offer tuition reimbursement for employees pursuing graduate education related to their occupation/position.
- After spending the last four to five years earning an undergraduate degree, one may feel the need for a break from the academic world. After some "time out" students can approach their graduate program with renewed energy and a positive attitude.

Choosing a Graduate School

With so many institutions currently offering graduate degree programs, you need to conduct your research carefully and thoroughly before choosing to apply. Talk with faculty and staff members at your undergraduate institution, people currently working in the field, and students currently in a graduate program to ask where they did their graduate work and for their recommendations of graduate programs in the field.

There are many websites available to help you research graduate programs including Gradschools.com and the Princeton Review. For a complete list of helpful research websites visit our careers and internships wiki at <http://cswl.pbworks.com/>.

You can also attend the annual University of Minnesota Graduate and Professional School fair offered each fall. This event enables junior and senior students the opportunity to visit with a number of graduate and professional schools and learn about the various programs and requirements. Specific information about this event can be obtained in the careers and internships office.

The Application Process

Know that when applying to graduate school, you will be applying to not only the particular department or program but also to the institution as well. Call the institution or visit their website to review the institution's application documents. You can also request information regarding financial aid, assistantship/fellowship opportunities, and campus/community resources.

A variety of resources indicate that a general rule of thumb is to apply to a minimum of four to six graduate programs that fit your interests and needs. Application fees can vary from \$20 to \$50. Many institutions have an “application fee waiver program” for anyone needing financial assistance.

The application itself may contain all or most of the following parts and each section is important.

Application Form

This form will ask for personal information. It is recommended that you type, edit and proofread this information.

Personal Statement or Statement of Purpose and/or Biographic Essay

As part of your application form, many programs require that you provide a biography or a statement about why you are applying to the specific program. Generally, it will involve describing past college experiences, community and volunteer projects, and family experiences which have contributed to your development and further goals. Readers will not only be using it to gain a better understanding of who you are but also to assess your writing skills, how you communicate your ideas, and whether your interests fit the department/school to which you are applying.

Letters of Recommendation

Your recommendations should provide the readers with a balanced perception of your academic skills and personal abilities. It is recommended that you make an appointment and spend time individually with those writing letters of recommendation in order to provide them with an understanding of your goals and motivations for graduate work. You may also want to provide them with a copy of your resume as they will appreciate the information when writing letters of support.

In cases where the graduate school provides forms/stationary, always provide the writer with addressed and stamped envelopes and the date the letters should be sent. Also, make sure to give the writers at least three to four weeks lead time prior to the deadline. After the letters have been written, show your appreciation by sending the writers a thank-you note.

Graduate Admissions Tests

Colleges and universities usually require a specific graduate admission test (e.g. GRE, LSAT, MCAT) and departments sometimes have their own requirements as well. Professional school admission tests are administered at many locations throughout the year. Information about the various tests, testing dates and preparation programs can be found in the careers and internships office or by visiting the careers and internships wiki at <http://cswl.pbworks.com/>. Students can purchase various test guides at any bookstore.

Transcripts

The graduate school application process will also require an official record of your undergraduate work to be sent to the graduate admission office. If you attended more than one institution, you will need to request an “official” transcript from each institution you attended.

An “official” copy of your transcript means that it bears the college seal and it is not a copy. It is usually sent directly from the registrar’s office to the institution you are making application to. There is generally a small fee for each request.

Interviews, Portfolios, and Auditions

Some graduate programs will require you to appear for an interview. In other fields, you will have to submit a portfolio of your work or schedule an audition.

Financial Aid Forms

A financial aid application will most likely be included in the application package sent to you. If the graduate program offers assistantships and/or fellowships you may have to apply separately for those as well as for any institutional loan programs. When aid money is limited for assistantships/fellowships, it is very important that you apply early, before the deadlines.

Keeping a Log

Keep a log of what institutions you have made application to, copies of what was sent, and the dates sent. This record will be helpful in organizing the application process which requires attention to detail and follow through. Keeping track of your correspondence helps the application process run smoothly.

Acceptance and Rejection from Graduate Schools

If accepted to a graduate program, you will be asked to verify whether or not you choose to attend. You will be asked to indicate your decision in writing by an established deadline. Should you not be accepted, you may find it helpful to request feedback from the school that may be helpful in correcting or changing your approach for future applications.

In the event that you are not accepted into graduate school or you elect not to attend, it is always a good idea to have a “Plan B” or an alternate plan in mind from the very beginning.

Employment opportunities, internships, travel, part-time employment, continued studies, should all be considered in your alternative plans to graduate school.

Suggested Timeline for Applying

Adapted from: *Peterson's Guides to Graduate Study: An Overview*

Junior Year, Fall and Spring

- Research areas of interest, institutions and programs.
- Talk to advisers about application requirements.
- Register and prepare for appropriate graduate admission tests.
- Investigate national scholarships.
- Obtain letters of recommendation, if appropriate.

Junior Year, Summer

- Take required graduate admission tests.
- Write for application materials.
- Visit institutions of interest, if possible.
- Write your application essay.
- Check on application deadlines and rolling admissions policies.
- For medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry, or law school, you may need to register the national application or data assembly service most programs use.

Senior Year, Fall

- Obtain letters of recommendation.
- Take graduate admission tests if you haven't already.
- Send in completed applications.
- Pick up the free application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the Financial Aid Profile, if required.

Senior Year, Spring

- Check with all institutions before the deadline to make sure your file is complete.
- Visit institutions that accept you.
- Send a deposit to your institution of choice.
- Notify other colleges and universities which have accepted you of your decision so they may admit students on their waiting list.
- Send thank-you notes to people who wrote your recommendation letters.