

To Go or Not to Go: Is Graduate School for You?

Learning never stops whether one is in or out of the classroom. Graduate study requires significant commitments of time and money, not to mention the rigorous academic demands it presents. Successful completion of a graduate program requires wholehearted personal motivation.

Reasons to Go

- Compelling academic, intellectual, or career interest
- To advance in a field to which you already have had significant exposure (The above reasons assume that your professional career goals have been well thought out and that advanced study is the next logical step to achieving these goals.)

Reasons Not to Go

- You do not know what to do with your Liberal Arts degree
 - To avoid entering the “real world”
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Assessing the Appropriateness of Graduate School. . .

Asking yourself the following questions will help you assess your needs, interests, values, skills and goals in order to make an informed decision about pursuing a graduate degree.

- What are my short-range and long-range career goals?
- How might graduate school affect my career or professional plans?
- Will the graduate degree enhance or narrow my employment prospects?
- Do I have the interest and abilities to be successful in a graduate program?
- Am I mentally and physically prepared to undertake this type of an academic commitment?
- At the present time, do I have other needs that conflict with pursuing a graduate degree?
- Would I benefit more by gaining some practical experience before pursuing graduate studies?
- Can I realistically invest the time and money required to pursue another academic degree?
- What type of value, if any, do I place on attaining a graduate degree?

Graduate School Planning Timeline

SPRING **Prior to Applying**

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

SUMMER **Prior to Applying**

- Take required graduate admissions exams.
- Request application materials.
- Visit institutions of interest, if possible.
- Write your application essay and have it reviewed for comments by faculty and a career advisor.
- Check on application deadlines and rolling admissions policies.
- For medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry, or law school, you may need to register for the national application or data assembly service most programs use.

FALL **Application Time**

- Obtain letters of recommendation.
- Send in completed applications.
- Fill out the Free Applications for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) online at www.fafsa.ed.gov or pick up at the Financial Aid Office.

SPRING **Follow-up**

- Check with all institutions before their deadlines to make sure your file is complete.
- Schedule interviews as needed.
- Visit institutions that accept you.
- Send a deposit to your chosen institution.
- Notify other colleges and universities that accepted you of your decision so that they can admit students on their waiting list.
- Send thank-you notes to people who wrote your recommendation letters, informing them of your decision.

Selecting a Graduate School

It is important to assess your interests, skills, and values and clarify specific career goals before you begin the process of choosing a program to apply for admission.

A. Identifying Potential Schools

- Use Peterson's Guides to Graduate School (Career Services Library or online)
- Graduate School program descriptions via links to specific school on the web.
- Talk with faculty and alumni for recommendations of programs to consider.
- Read professional journals and posters in academic departments.

B. Researching Schools

- Request catalogs and application materials directly from the graduate programs.
- Check ratings in various publications (U.S. News and World Reports) and also professional associations regarding the reputation for academic preparation.
- Visit campuses: talk to students, faculty, attend a couple of classes.

C. Comparing Graduate Schools/Programs

- Factors to consider include:
 - * Personal interests, goals, needs
 - * Costs, financial aid offered
 - * Reputation of program and faculty
 - * Locations, size, facilities of school
 - * Requirements, departmental courses and offerings, and design of program (thesis vs. non-thesis, comprehensive exams, practical experience)
 - * Entrance requirements (GPA, tests, course prerequisites)
 - * Housing options
 - * Assistance from mentors and success of graduates in finding employment upon completion of the degree
 - * Application requirements and ratio of applications to acceptances (acceptance rate)
- Also consider the research and teaching interests and biographical backgrounds of the faculty members.

D. Making Your Decision

- Apply as early as possible
- Narrow your list of schools to 4-6. Application fees can get expensive!
- Apply to reach schools, probable admits, and also have a least one safety school.
- Think about your match with the schools – what kind of graduate experience would you like to have? (i.e. location, size, similar to/different from Wooster, relationships with faculty, emphasis on theory vs. application)

Entrance Examinations

Most graduate programs of major rank require the appropriate entrance examination as part of the application for admission.

A. Register for the Entrance Examination

- Registration materials are available in Career Services or online.
- Many tests (i.e. GRE & GMAT) are taken on a computer and testing dates are arranged on an individual basis.
- Pay attention to the entrance requirements of each graduate school – some may require more than one test (i.e. GRE subject tests in addition to the general GRE).
- Be aware of any test registration deadlines, many are earlier than you might expect. Don't be late or you pay extra or even risk the opportunity of being able to take the exam.

B. Prepare for the Examination

- It is important for you to spend some time familiarizing yourself with the design and content of the examination before the last minute.
- Study guides are available in the Career Services Library. These books can also be purchased in the bookstore. In addition some external organizations, such as Kaplan, offer preparatory courses.

Recommendations from Faculty & Other Professionals

It takes some time and planned thought for your references to prepare a strong recommendation to support your application to graduate school. Never give a person's name as a reference without asking the person first and giving them ample time to write it.

A. Selecting Someone as a Reference

- Choose professors and professionals who know your capabilities and academic strengths.
- Vary your references from different departments and someone outside the classroom.

B. Providing your Reference with Helpful Information

- Schedule an appointment to discuss your plans and career goals with your references.
- Prepare a packet for this professional which provides them with information that they can utilize to strengthen their comments: current resume, samples of your work, a copy of your personal statement, information specific to the graduate program.
- The reference form (if applicable) provided as part of the application materials and a stamped, addressed envelope.
- Allow your references ample time and always follow up to insure completion.

C. Always say “Thank You” (verbally and in writing)

- Also keep your references informed of your status throughout the search process.

Graduate School Applications

Your application is one of the most revealing indications of your motivation towards graduate study. Often times it also might be the first impression that the institution will receive of you. It is critical that you are attentive to details and deadlines. Apply early!

A. The Application

- Make a copy of the application and write out the information before finalizing the information that you are providing the school.
- Be certain that your application is complete, neatly typed, contains no spelling errors and is written clearly where handwriting is required. (A messy application gives a very poor impression.)
- Make a copy for your personal files. (Important to have if your original application does not reach its intended destination.)
- Mail early and confirm that the institution has received your application.

B. Personal Statement

- Read the question and answer what they're asking! What does the reader want to know?
- Write straight from the heart. Create a sense of your personality. Catch the reader with a bold or interesting opening statement.
- Include specific reasons for your interest in this area of study, highlights from your academic achievements (i.e. Independent Study), future plans and details of special and unique experiences (i.e. travel or community service).
- After writing your first draft, take a break and then return to it later for revision.
- Ask a faculty member, career advisor, and writing center tutor to review and critique it.
- Keep a copy for your files and refer to it in preparation for an interview with graduate school faculty members. Many interviewers use the statement of purpose as an opener.

C. Transcripts

- For details regarding requests for and costs related to obtaining academic transcripts, please visit the Registrar's Office in Gault Library.
- Don't forget to obtain transcripts from other colleges/universities you have attended, as necessary.

D. Interviews

- Most schools do not conduct interviews, however; you may be invited to the school for a personal interview. This is your chance to "make it or break it". For details on preparation for the interview, please review the Interviewing Guide available in Career Services.
- Another opportunity available through Career Services is to practice your interviewing skills in a videotaped mock interview. Learn how to market yourself and make your mistakes with an advisor rather than during the actual interview.

Independent Study and its Value for Graduate Studies

A. Skills Gained Through Independent Study

- Time Management Strategies
- Decision Making Capabilities
- Critical Thinking Skills
- Organizational Experience
- Research Techniques
- Presentation Skills
- Writing Skills
- Creativity
- Stress Management

B. Utilizing Independent Study as an Example of your Work

- Personal Statement: You can mention Independent Study in your application for admission as a reason why you are interested in continuing your studies in specific areas.
- Formal and Informal Interviews: In conversations with professors at graduate programs of interest, it can be helpful to discuss your Independent Study project and the extent of involvement required of Wooster students to complete this requirement.

C. Tips for Explaining Your Independent Study to Others

- For people who are not familiar with Independent Study they might be surprised at the scope of this academic requirement.
- Explain your project in a logical fashion: start at the beginning and explain your activities sequentially. Emphasize specific skills gained and results found during the process.

For example:

Independent Study is required of all seniors at The College of Wooster for graduation. I chose _____ as my topic of study and proposed my ideas to faculty members for approval. Realizing I needed funding to complete this study, I wrote a grant proposal explaining my interests and was awarded \$_____ toward my efforts. I then utilized _____ to conduct research relevant to this topic and designed a series of experiments to test my hypothesis. I conducted the experiments and recorded the results. In analyzing my findings, I noted that _____ and I wrote a _____ page thesis describing my Independent Study and presented the results to the department. I've also been asked to present my study at _____ conference and/or submit an abstract for publication to _____ journal.

Financial Aid

Contrary to popular belief, financial aid is not readily available for all graduate students. Therefore, it is important for you to become aware of the sources of aid which are available. To determine the availability of financial aid at the graduate school to which you are applying, you should request information from the graduate school financial aid office and the academic department of your interest. Ask questions early and meet all deadlines!

A. Outright Assistance

- Grants, Fellowships, Traineeships, Scholarships
- Usually granted by the dean of the graduate school or departments
- No services are required of the student
- Awards range in monetary amounts
- A stipend may be awarded in addition to a tuition waiver
- Only full-time students are eligible

B. Aid in Return for Service

- These awards usually carry full or partial tuition remission plus a stipend. Number of hours worked per week varies
- Research Assistantships: Resembles a job, assisting a professor with a research project
- Teaching Assistantships: Lecturing, supervising labs, and/or grading papers
- Residence hall Assistantships: Living in a residence hall with responsibilities ranging from supervision and programming to handling disciplinary matters
- Graduate Assistantship: May include teaching a class, research and/or other work for the department

C. Loans

- Usually available if vital to continuation of program and must be repaid with interest within a certain amount of time
- Available through university or local banks

D. Additional Sources

- Board of Regents in your state of residence
- Professional organizations. For contact information, check the National Trade and Professional Association Directory in the Career Services Library
- Fraternal, religious, and community organizations
- The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) online at www.fafsa.ed.gov

Good Luck!!

Career Services Library Resources

Check it out!! Did you find something that you want to know more about? You can check items out of our Career Services Library. Please see a Career Services staff member to check out resources. Some items may be check out and others are for use in the library only.

Identifying Graduate Schools:

- Peterson's Graduate Schools in the U.S.
- Peterson's Guide to Graduate Programs
- ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA approved Law Schools
- Health Professionals Career & Educational Directory
- NAAHP Health Professionals Admissions Guides
- AAMC Medical School Admissions Requirements
- U.S. News & World Report America's Best Graduate Schools

Application to Graduate Schools:

- Peterson's How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School
- Perfect Personal Statements
- Graduate Admissions Essays
- The Princeton Review Law School Essays
- NAAHP Interviewing for Health Professions Schools
- The Complete Q & A Job Interview Book

Preparing for Entrance Exams:

- Kaplan's Free Practice Tests (GRE, LSAT, MCAT, GMAT) and Results Hand Back
- The Princeton Review Cracking the LSAT, GRE & GMAT
- Peterson's Score Higher GRE and MCAT
- BARRON'S How to Prepare for the MCAT

Financial Aid:

- Peterson's Scholarships, Grants, and Prizes
- Paying for Graduate School Without Going Broke
- Foundation Grants to Individuals
- The Graduate Student's Complete Scholarship Good