Managing your school search and applications

The application process for graduate school is time consuming; make sure you start early to ensure success. Below is a general checklist and timeline to follow for applying for graduate school, it may vary depending on the specific programs for which you are applying.

Make a list of what you’re looking for in a graduate program and what you’d like to do with a master’s or doctoral degree

Remember that attending graduate school should lead you toward your ultimate career goal. Determine which degree will be most beneficial for you in your career growth. If you are having trouble narrowing down your graduate school options, make an appointment with a career counselor at Career Services.

Look at general information about graduate school online

- [www.princetonreview.com/](http://www.princetonreview.com/)
- [www.gradview.com/articles/graduatestudies/the_right_school.html](http://www.gradview.com/articles/graduatestudies/the_right_school.html)

Create a list of potential schools/programs

Look at graduate school databases online:

- [www.collegejournal.com/toolkit/findgradschool.html](http://www.collegejournal.com/toolkit/findgradschool.html)
- [www.gradschools.com/](http://www.gradschools.com/)
- [www.petersons.com/](http://www.petersons.com/)
- [www.rileyguide.com/train.html#prep](http://www.rileyguide.com/train.html#prep)
- [www.rileyguide.com/train.html#guides](http://www.rileyguide.com/train.html#guides)

Look at graduate school options abroad:

- [international.gradschools.com/](http://international.gradschools.com/)

Research and compare your options

Create a system by which to compare schools and track the application requirements and process

- Time commitment (e.g. 2 year program vs. 4 year program)
- Part-time vs. full-time programs
- Private vs. public institutions
- Entrance requirements including undergraduate prerequisites for specific programs
- Program approaches/specializations
- Faculty and teaching methods
- Program reputation/accreditation
- Placement success of program graduates
- Tuition costs and financial aid available
- Housing/living expenses

Possible Research Criteria

- What have faculty members published recently? (Compare professors’ interests to your own)
- How many faculty members does the department have? (You are checking for faculty to student ratio)
- What characteristics distinguish this program from others in the same field?
- What is the relative importance of admissions test scores, undergraduate grades, recommendations, internships, and research? Is this a safety, mid-range, or reach school for me?
- Does the department prefer applicants immediately out of undergraduate programs or do they prefer some work experience?
- What types of financial aid are offered? Are assistantships or fellowships available? What types?
Choose Possible Programs

- Use your research to choose 5-10 program possibilities, and narrow your list.
- Consult with your professors, UM Alumni, and professionals in the field to discuss program highlights and their experiences in graduate school.
- Plan campus visits, and schedule meetings with program faculty members or current students who can answer your questions.

Application Timeline

**Immediately**

- Maintain highest GPA possible.
- Make sure you have gained experience in the field you want to pursue in graduate school.
- Talk to current faculty members to explore options and access their expertise.

**Spring of your Junior Year:**

- Determine application procedures, graduate exam requirements, and application deadlines.
- Think about additional classes you may need your senior year.
- Schedule time to study for the necessary graduate exam(s) and set an early deadline for taking the tests so that if needed, you still have time to retake.

**August/September of your Senior Year:**

- Take the required admissions tests and have the score sent to the appropriate institutions.
- Request application information or research application processes online (be sure to note deadlines for applying and addresses where supplemental materials should be sent).

**October/November:**

- Submit applications and application fees for each school by its published deadline, or before.
- Request copies of your transcript from the Registrar’s Office (it is usually best to have them sent directly to the addresses where supplemental materials should be sent).
- Approach faculty members, employers, etc. to write recommendation letters. Remember to provide them with any required recommendation forms, your resume, transcripts, a stamped/pre-addressed envelope, and the deadline for submission.
- Compose personal statements or essays for each institution and have your statement/essay reviewed by a faculty member or career counselor at Career Services.
- Revise your resume and submit with supplemental information.

**December:**

- It is always a good idea to have “Plan B”, so begin exploring the world of work. That way if graduate school is not an option for you at this time, you will have already begun a preliminary job search.
- Contact graduate programs about the possibility of visiting the campus during your winter break. Make trips if possible.
- Request scholarship/fellowship/assistantship information from each school where you applied.

**January/February:**

- File your Federal Income Tax Return (required before you can complete the FAFSA).
- Complete the FAFSA Online and submit all completed scholarship application forms.
- Prepare for admission/assistantship interviews by scheduling an appointment with Career Services to participate in a mock interview.
- Attend any preview days/assistantship interview sessions/faculty interview sessions for each institution.

**March/April/May:**

- Follow-up on institutions that you have not heard from and make your final decision.
- Submit commitment forms and/or fees to the institution you have chosen, and register for classes.
- Send thank-you notes to people who wrote your recommendation letters, informing them of your success.