Considering Graduate School?

A presentation by
Presentation Outline

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• Choosing schools
• The application process
• Career Services resources
Introduction

Deciding to attend graduate school is a major commitment of time and money; a decision not to be taken lightly!

Graduate school is much different than your years spent as an undergraduate in that it is:

• Subject material is more specialized (no Gen Eds!)
• Classes are smaller
• More demanding
• You typically develop closer relationships with faculty
Before Applying: Questions To Ask Yourself

• Are you committed enough to your subject to pursue an advanced degree?

It could take two to three years to complete a Master's program and four to eight years to earn a doctorate (Ph.D., Ed.D, M.D.). Without strong interest in a particular subject, completing the program requirements and enduring the length of the program may be difficult.

• Is an advanced degree required for entry into your desired field? Which degree? Specializations? Licenses? Certification?

Do your homework and find out as much as you can about particular career fields, including the type and amount of education/training required. If licensure or certification is required, be sure to check with individual state's or credentialing bodies' requirements based upon the geographic area in which you choose to work after graduation. For some fields, a Bachelor's degree is sufficient for employment. However, some people choose advanced study for the love of learning or for personal fulfillment.
Before Applying: Questions To Ask Yourself (cont.)

• Would it be in your best interest to work & gain experience first and then apply?

Some graduate programs (especially MBA programs) place a high value upon work experience. This gives you "real world" knowledge upon which to apply your coursework. In some cases, having significant experience can enhance your application by supplementing low test scores or GPAs. If you are unsure of the exact field you'd like to study, work experience can also help you learn more about occupations and narrow down a particular area.

• Do you have the financial resources to cover costs?

You may already know that private universities are usually more expensive than public institutions and that Master's programs will generally cost less than earning a Doctoral degree because of the fewer number of years involved. However, there are often more financial aid resources available to Doctoral students than Master's level students. Be sure to research scholarship & financial aid opportunities and consider your own contributions, family contributions, and the advantages and disadvantages of taking out loans. You may want to consider taking a year or more to work and save money before beginning your studies.
Before Applying: Questions To Ask Yourself (cont.)

• Are you “burned out” academically & need to take some time off? Do you have what it takes?

  Most likely you've been in school continuously since Kindergarten. Each person is different - some may prefer to attend graduate school immediately after graduation without taking a break and sampling the "real world" first (including a paycheck); others may need a break to "charge their batteries" to be able to tackle the books again.

• Are you pursuing graduate school for the right reasons rather than avoiding “real life?”

  Pursuing graduate school with the idea of putting off "real life" and hoping to miraculously find the answer to "what do I want to do with my life?" is not the best investment of your time and money. As already mentioned, at the graduate level, you are expected to have and be able to communicate focused career interests. Take advantage of career counseling and assessment tools at the Career Services office to assist you in making a sound decision to pursue graduate study.
Finding Programs

There are many resources you can check with to help you learn about good programs:

- UM faculty in your department -- what programs/universities do they recommend?
- Speak to faculty, graduate students, and alumni in programs at the universities you are considering
- Admissions offices
- Professional organizations may accredit various programs and will often include a list of programs on their web sites.
- School viewbooks, catalogs, and web sites.
Finding Programs (cont.)

• Directories & Web Sites:
  ♦ www.GradSchools.com
  ♦ Peterson’s Graduate and Professional Programs or www.petersons.com
  ♦ *US News & World Reports: America’s Best Graduate Schools*

**Caution:** Do not too rely heavily on rankings because the criteria used may not match with your particular criteria. Plus, to understand rankings at all, it is important to analyze the criteria that went into the ranking.
What You Can Do Now

• Clarify your interests

• Obtain relevant experience through internships, volunteer work, or college activities

• Get to know faculty and ask for letters of reference

• Work on raising your GPA

• Think ahead: save your money!
What You Can Do Now (Cont.)

• Prepare for admissions tests (STUDY!)

♦ **Study Guides** for the GRE, GMAT, LSAT, and MCAT can be purchased at any major bookstore. The major publishers of these study guides are *Peterson’s* and the *Princeton Review*. Free downloadable study guides are available for:

  • GRE – www.gre.org
  
  • GMAT – www.mba.com

♦ **Formal prep programs/classes** are offered by Kaplan and the Princeton Review, for example, and sometimes by other qualified individuals (i.e., college faculty). Be prepared to pay a significant fee for this service, depending on whether you take a one-day power class or a year long course.
Choosing Schools: What To Consider

• Admissions criteria

• Reputation, quality of program, & accreditation

• Curriculum/Program requirements
  ◆ Foreign language requirement
  ◆ Internship or thesis
  ◆ Dissertation
  ◆ Comprehensive exam
Choosing Schools: What To Consider (cont.)

- Employment statistics upon graduation
  - How many students “land” jobs before graduation?
  - What types of organizations typically hire graduates?
  - What are some of the specific names of organizations that have hired program alumni?

- Faculty
  - Research interests
  - Academic focus
  - Ratio of faculty to students
Choosing Schools: What To Consider (cont.)

- Geographic location & size of program
- Degrees offered
- Cost/Financial aid (in-state vs. out-of-state tuition)
  - Loans
  - Grants, scholarships, fellowships
  - Tuition assistance programs, i.e., assistantships
  - External sources
The Application Process

- TIMETABLE
  - Junior Year (Summer)
    - Clarify interests & start researching programs
    - Meet with faculty members & Career Services counselors to discuss interests
Senior Year (September/October):

- Research financial aid sources, fellowships, and assistantships
- Take admissions test/s
- Draft personal statements
- Request recommendation letters
  - Career Services offers a credential file service, where we will maintain your recommendation letters and mail them at your request. Visit our website for more information.
The Application Process (cont.)

♦ Senior Year (November/December):
  • Order official transcripts to send to schools
  • Finalize personal statements/essays
  • Mail applications (EARLY!) Proofread!!
  • Apply for financial aid
  • Follow-up on all applications sent
Application Components:

- Application and fees
- Test scores
  - GRE (arts & sciences), GMAT (business), LSAT (law), MCAT (medicine)
  - Determine which test is necessary BEFORE taking it.
- Official transcripts
The Application Process (cont.)

- Letters of recommendation which address your skills and abilities, such as:
  - Academic & analytical ability
  - Oral/written communication skills
  - Character & initiative
  - Intelligence
  - Maturity
  - Responsibility & integrity
  - Interpersonal relations
  - Leadership ability
The Application Process (cont.)

• Personal Statement/Essay:
  ♦ How does this program match with your interests?
  ♦ Why should we accept you?
  ♦ A quality statement is ESSENTIAL. Have it critiqued by at least two people.

• Interview
  ♦ Consider mock interview at Career Services

• Other
  ♦ Portfolio of your writing, art, etc.
Career Services Resources

- Credential file service (transcripts/letters)
- Mock interviews
- Resume/essay critiquing
- Admissions test information
- Career counseling appointments
- Visit the Career Services web site for more information at:
  www.umt.edu/career
Explore the possibilities...
University of Montana Graduate School
www.umt.edu/grad

Career Services Graduate School Resources
life.umt.edu/career/JobSearch/GraduateResources.php

Petersons Graduate School Resource
www.petersons.com/

Grad Source Grad School Search
www.gradsource.com

$$ for Graduate School
www.finaid.org/scholarships/