



Prospective
Graduate Guide

Preparing for Graduate School



Prospective Graduate Guide

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This guide is brought to you by the
Graduate College at Oklahoma State University



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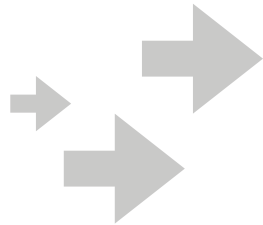
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Introduction

Admission into graduate school is an increasingly competitive process. Thousands of students apply for graduate school each year and well-qualified students face the possibility of not being accepted into graduate programs. Some reasons are: limited number of openings, fewer sources of financial support (such as fellowships or assistantships), or the failure of the applicant to provide a competitive application. Having the right materials, selecting schools wisely, and being accepted involves being well informed about the application and admission processes.

The goal of this booklet is to provide an overview about the competitive graduate school application process. Individuals applying to graduate programs often have similar questions about the process. This document will hopefully answer many of the frequently asked questions.



Eight Quick Steps to Start the Application Process

1. Make a list of what is important to you in a graduate program (e.g. focus of program, financial assistance provided, number of faculty, research facilities, recreation opportunities, etc.).
2. Search the World Wide Web or other resources for programs that match these interests.
3. For each program, compile a list of any required course work, test scores (e.g. GMAT, GRE), GPA requirements, and application deadlines.
4. Set a time line for completing each part of the application process such as writing the statement of purpose, gathering transcripts, and asking for reference letters.
5. Study for and take any required admission tests.
6. Develop your vita (resume). Have it reviewed by a faculty member or advisor.
7. Contact potential reference writers. Ask if they are willing to give you a good, strong, supportive reference. Do not leave this to the last minute.
8. Obtain extra copies of official transcripts or arrange to have them sent to the appropriate schools.

Section 1

So you think you're going to graduate school ...

In this section

WHAT IS GRADUATE SCHOOL?

WHY ATTEND GRADUATE SCHOOL?

WHAT DEGREES ARE OFFERED?

**HOW ARE PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS
DIFFERENT FROM GRADUATE SCHOOLS?**

**WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT
IN GRADUATE SCHOOL?**

**HOW LONG DO GRADUATE PROGRAMS
TAKE TO COMPLETE?**

WHAT DO ALL THE INITIALS STAND FOR?



What is Graduate School?

Graduate school is a place of study that leads to a degree beyond the bachelor's degree. A person admitted to a graduate program focuses his or her knowledge and concentrated study in one area or discipline. In the typical undergraduate programs, the degree is comprised of half liberal arts courses (such as English composition and survey courses in the humanities, social sciences, American history, and sciences) and half major area courses in the major discipline discussing overviews of the theories and ideas associated with the discipline.

In graduate school, typically there are no liberal arts course requirements. You will plunge deeply into the intellectual waters of your chosen major. You will explore in-depth the theories and ideas of the major writers from the discipline. You will be asked to understand and apply the knowledge to real-world situations. To complete the degree, you will have to take courses, critically analyze research performed in the discipline, and perform your own research, whether that is in the library, in a laboratory setting, or in the field.

Why Attend Graduate School?

People of all ages and circumstances attend graduate school to gain opportunities for career advancement, to change careers, to improve their performance in their current job, or sometimes just to improve themselves.



WHAT DEGREES ARE OFFERED?

Graduate schools offer academic degrees such as master's and doctoral degrees. Degrees are offered in virtually every field and area of interest. While often expanding on your undergraduate education, a graduate education can be tailored to your current career or research goals. Many students complete a graduate degree in disciplines unrelated to their undergraduate degree.

HOW ARE PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS DIFFERENT FROM GRADUATE SCHOOLS?

Professional schools offer specific degrees in areas such as law, dentistry, social work, ministry, and medicine. Professional degrees emphasize the practical application of knowledge and skills. Upon completion of the degree, students typically apply for a license to practice that discipline. Although there are many different kinds of lawyers and doctors, a law school graduate will most likely become a lawyer and a medical school graduate will most likely become a doctor. Graduate degree recipients might become professionals, executives, professors, researchers, and more.

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT IN GRADUATE SCHOOL?

Professors at the graduate level assume that you have been prepared for graduate school during your undergraduate program or from your practical experiences.

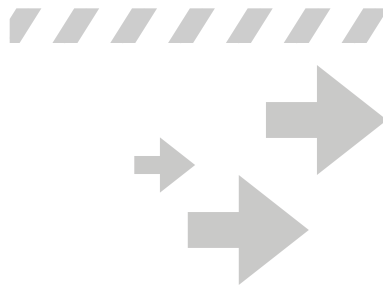
Professors will expect you to **"WALTER"**:

- Write major papers
- Apply material to real-world situations
- Lead discussions and participate in seminars
- Take good lecture notes
- Engage in research
- Read large quantities of material

HOW LONG DO GRADUATE PROGRAMS TAKE TO COMPLETE?

This will vary depending on whether you enroll full-time or part-time in your program and the nature of the program. However, a master's degree generally requires one and a half to four years of study depending on the number of classes you are able to complete each semester. A doctoral degree typically requires three to six years. The Ph.D. or Ed.D. typically involves both course work and a major research project (i.e. writing a dissertation).

Here are some common abbreviations you may see for graduate and professional level degrees.



WHAT DO ALL THE INITIALS STAND FOR?

Each degree earned will be abbreviated with initials. For example, when you finished your Bachelor's of Arts degree, you completed a B.A.

Abbreviation	Name
DO	Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine
EdD	Doctor of Education
EdS	Specialist in Education
JD	Juris Doctorate (Law Degree)
MA	Master's of Arts
MAE	Master's of Architecture Engineering
MAG	Master's of Agriculture
MAR	Master's of Architecture
MBA	Master's of Business Administration
MEN	Master's of Engineering
MFA	Master's of Fine Arts
MM	Master's of Music
MS	Master's of Science
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy

Section 2

Are you prepared for graduate school?

In this section

ARE YOU PREPARED?

**WHY SHOULD YOU GO
TO GRADUATE SCHOOL?**

**WHY SHOULD YOU NOT GO TO
GRADUATE SCHOOL?**

**WHAT KIND OF INTROSPECTION
SHOULD YOU DO?**

**CAN YOU WORK AND GO TO SCHOOL
AT THE SAME TIME?**



ARE YOU PREPARED?

There are no easy answers to this question. The best way to start is by asking yourself, "Why graduate school?" Do you have to attend a graduate program to meet your needs? Is there another way to meet the same needs? If you are not sure, spend time doing some self-reflection. Explore why you should or should not attend graduate school.

WHY SHOULD YOU GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL?

There are a lot of reasons that students choose to attend graduate school. Among the most cited reasons:

- A passion to learn and desire to immerse oneself in the study of a particular academic discipline.
- A love of research and/or teaching.
- A craving to increase knowledge. Wanting to become an expert in a particular field of study.
- Aspiring to advance in the workplace.
- Wanting to pursue a new career direction.

WHY SHOULD YOU NOT GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL?

There are many reasons to attend a graduate school; however, there are also reasons why graduate school might not be a good option for you right now:

- You are not ready to decide on an occupation.
- You want to get rich quick.
- You are tired of school.
- You can't sacrifice the time.
- You think, "I can't do everything: be a wife/husband, mother/father, work and go to school."

WHAT KIND OF INTROSPECTION SHOULD YOU DO?

As a prospective graduate student, you should:

1. Ask yourself, "What do I want to accomplish in my lifetime?"
2. Consider your long-term and short-range career goals. Ask yourself, "In my career, where do I want to be five or ten years from now?"
3. Ask if graduate school is necessary to achieve these goals.
4. Contemplate whether the amount of time and money spent on a program will translate into greater career mobility and financial possibilities.
5. Inquire about the minimum requirements for admissions into graduate programs of interest.
6. Discuss your plans to attend graduate school with your professors or other people who have improved themselves.

If you are currently an undergraduate, you should begin your planning during your junior or senior year. Your faculty will be able to suggest courses and activities that will increase your chances of being admitted and to better prepare you for academic performance at the graduate level.

If you have been out of school for a while, also:

- Consider contacting your past instructors. You will be surprised that they will probably remember you. Ask them for advice.
- Go to the web pages of the program that interests you; what is the focus of the program, and does it fit your needs?

- Ask friends and family who have been in a graduate program about their experiences.
- Go to a library and find books on applying to graduate school.

CAN YOU WORK AND GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL AT THE SAME TIME?

If you are concerned about the pressure of work, family, and school, then understand that you are not alone. The fastest growing segment of graduate students is people returning to school. It is not unusual to see students of all ages taking graduate courses. Many employers provide inducements for students to continue their education. Some employers offer tuition reimbursement to employees interested in taking courses at local universities. In some cases, advancement in the company is dependent upon completing an advanced degree. Due to the popularity of adult students returning to school, many graduate programs offer night and evening courses to assist the working student's schedule.

Take it slow

If balancing work, family, and school is one of the major stumbling blocks you face in entering a program, consider taking one course as a "trial run." Many schools allow students to be admitted as a non-degree seeking student. At Oklahoma State University, for example, this non-degree seeking status is called "special student." These students can take a set number of courses that may count toward an advanced degree later.



One student interviewed for this booklet had this to say

“I waited several years after completing a master’s degree to attempt a doctorate program.

I was very concerned that I had forgotten how to learn and how to study. I was also worried that I would not be able to handle my job —which requires 50 to 60 hours a week of my time — and take courses. Finally, I signed up for one course as a non-degree student. When I started the class, I was shocked to see

other students my age in the class. Several of them drove 50 or more miles to get to the night class. I found that my fears were unfounded. I easily got back into good study habits and I completed the class with an ‘A.’ I found balancing work, family, and school commitments difficult at first. It took some shuffling of obligations to be able to juggle it all, but it all worked out. I am quickly approaching the end of my degree program.”

Section 3

Finding the Right Program

In this section

UNIVERSITY ACCREDITATION

WHERE IS THE BEST PROGRAM FOR ME?

**WHAT FACTORS SHOULD YOU CONSIDER
WHEN SELECTING PROGRAMS?**

UNIVERSITY REPUTATION

PROGRAMS OFFERED

PROGRAM FACULTY

ADMISSION CRITERIA

MULTICULTURAL EXPERIENCES

LIBRARY

PHYSICAL FACILITIES

COST

CAREER ASSISTANCE

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

To begin with ...

This section is presented to stimulate questions to ask yourself about programs you find of interest. The goal of your program search is to formulate a list of five to twenty schools offering the program you want. In the appendix is an example of a worksheet to help evaluate each of the chosen programs.



UNIVERSITY ACCREDITATION

To be a legitimate university or college, it should be accredited by an accrediting agency. Accreditation, simply put, is certification that a school meets minimum academic standards as set by the accrediting agency. In the U.S., there is no one entity that accredits educational institutions and/or programs. However, the U.S. Department of Education is required by law to publish a list of nationally recognized accrediting agencies which are deemed as reliable authorities on the quality of education or training provided by the schools they accredit.

You should always verify the accreditation of all universities before you submit an application. You can find the agencies and lists of the schools they accredit on the U.S. Department of Education's website at www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html.

Universities accredited by appropriate agencies will offer degree programs that carry additional accreditation from professional organizations. These professional organizations establish curricular and program standards for programs of study. For example:

- The American Psychological Association (APA) accredits doctoral programs in counseling, clinical and school psychology.

- The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accredits MBA programs.
- The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) accredits speech therapy programs.

In some career fields, you must have earned a degree from a program which is accredited by a specific professional organization in order to obtain licensure.

WHERE IS THE BEST PROGRAM FOR ME?

When trying to find a program, one of the first things students ask is, "Where is the best program?" Students often refer to popular reports written by various agencies and magazines listing top universities. While these list good schools, will the listed schools meet your needs?

The first step (and perhaps the biggest one) to find the right program is determining which type of program you want. Do you want a specific kind of program such as Forensics, Dairy Science, or Nanotechnology? What schools offer the program you want? How do you find out? Most schools have websites with their degrees and programs listed. Also, there are many reference books available in bookstores or university libraries and many websites to help you locate programs including:

Peterson's Annual Guides to Graduate Study

Peterson's publishes many guides to graduate programs. They also provide information online at petersons.com.

Hobson's Guides to Graduate Study

This is another company producing guides listing a variety of graduate program areas. You may view graduate program information online at gradview.com.

Gradschools.com

Offers on-line resources which provide a comprehensive listing of graduate programs. The website listings contain basic descriptions and contact information. The web page allows students to locate schools by discipline and subject area in the discipline: gradschools.com.

Professional Societies

Many disciplines' professional societies will offer lists of graduate programs they accredit. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) annually prints the Graduate Study in Psychology listing all the psychology programs throughout the U.S. and Canada with an index of sub-disciplines. Check with the professional society within your subject area to see if they have a graduate school guide.

WHAT FACTORS SHOULD YOU CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING PROGRAMS?

You have a list of schools offering the program you want, and you need to shorten your list. Do this by evaluating whether each program meets your educational needs and goals. Below are some criteria to consider and questions to ask when reviewing programs. To narrow your program list, select three to five criteria that you want in any program. Evaluate each program in terms of meeting those criteria.

University Reputation

You do not necessarily have to consider a program in terms of the University in which it is set. Graduate programs are contained within departments of universities. The reputation of a program may be far more positive or negative than the reputation of the university. Look specifically at the program and what it offers that you will not get from another program. Also ask if the

university is appropriately accredited and if the program qualifies for accreditation from a professional society.

Programs Offered

What specializations are offered in the program? Does the program emphasize theory, original research, or practical application of knowledge? Does the program provide or require experiences such as practicums or internships? Is the curriculum structured or flexible? Does the program encourage or require students to work on research projects? What resources such as computers and laboratories are available? Is the program just starting or has it been long established? What is the graduation rate? How long does it take students to complete the program?

The Program Faculty

What have they published? Where have their latest publications appeared? From what schools did they graduate, and was it in the field they are teaching? What are their areas of expertise? Are they actively pursuing their research areas? Does the department include nationally or internationally known scholars? Is there ethnic/cultural diversity in the faculty? What is the faculty-to-student ratio?

Admission Criteria

When is the application deadline? What are the requirements to be admitted? What criteria are used to evaluate applicants? Are standardized tests (e.g. the GRE, MAT, or GMAT) required for admission and what are the required or suggested minimum scores? How important are grade point averages (GPAs) in the admission decision? How many applications does the program receive, and how many students are accepted? What background of students does the program attract? (Admission criteria are covered in-depth later in this document.)

Cost

What are the costs for tuition and fees per credit hour? What are the tuition rates for nonresidents, if you will be coming from out-of-state? What financial aid is available to students in the form of assistantships, scholarships, or internships?

Physical Facilities

Are there adequate facilities available for faculty to perform research? Are there areas for students in the program to gather and interact such as a student lounge? Are there sufficient classrooms and seminar rooms to hold classes? Are programs housed in relatively modern space with relatively new computers and equipment?

Multicultural Experiences

Will you have an opportunity to work with students from other backgrounds, cultures, and countries? What is the faculty and student composition? What multicultural experiences do the faculty bring to the classroom? What is the atmosphere on campus?

Library

Are there comprehensive reference collections in your area of specialization? To which journals in your area of interest does the library subscribe? How many volumes does the library hold? Are the materials accessible by a computerized system? To which electronic databases does the library subscribe?

Career Assistance

Does the program offer students job search assistance? Does the school have a career center offering job fairs, employment leads, and job search resources? Where are students employed who have recently graduated? What are the average annual salaries of recent graduates from the program?

Additional Activities

What recreational facilities are offered on campus? What housing opportunities are offered on campus? What is the cost of living in the area? What cultural activities does the school attract? If you have children, how good are the public schools?

Geographic Location

This is one of the most limiting factors to use when choosing a program but is often one of the first people consider. Generally, location should be the last criteria used for choosing a program. Judge programs based on matching your interests not necessarily the location. Consider that this might be your one chance to travel to a new town, state, or country. Ponder the possibilities of what a new location will mean. Do you have family that will come with you? If no, then the world is really open to you. If yes, then location considerations will need to be a collaborative discussion. Items to consider include:

- Will I be happier in a small town or a large urban area?
- Is this where I want to live for several years?
- What impact will the move have on my family and friends?
- What are the employment opportunities in the area to support me (or my spouse) during school and after I graduate?

Remember that once you complete the degree, your employment opportunities might be in a completely different part of the country prompting another move.

Section 4

Getting In

In this section

WHAT TIME TABLE SHOULD I FOLLOW?

WHAT IF I'M A NONTRADITIONAL APPLICANT?

**WHAT DOES THE
APPLICATION PROCEDURE INVOLVE?**

APPLICATION

TRANSCRIPTS

APPLICATION FEES

ADMISSION TESTS

DEVELOPING A VITA

WRITING A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

**WHAT IF I DON'T MEET ALL OF A
GRADUATE SCHOOL'S REQUIREMENTS?**

CHECKLIST OF ACTIVITIES



WHAT TIME TABLE SHOULD I FOLLOW?

If you have identified programs of interest to you, then you hopefully have discovered the programs' application deadlines. Start from those dates and work backward. Set deadlines of when to assemble each part of the application material. Generally, you should give yourself a minimum of six months to a year in your planning. Most professionals recommend planning for one to two years to allow time to practice for and take required admission tests.

WHAT IF I'M A NONTRADITIONAL APPLICANT?

A nontraditional applicant is a person who has not been in college for a while. An example of a nontraditional applicant is a person with a family, over the age of 35, who has been or will continue to be in the workplace, and/or who has been out of school for three years or more.

Graduate programs appreciate the diversity nontraditional students bring to the classroom. Many admissions boards recognize that older students have proven to be particularly successful graduate students with exceptionally strong commitments to their education. A large number of graduate schools even offer part-time programs and night/weekend courses to accommodate students with jobs and/or families.

Nontraditional applicants may face potential barriers in the application process. Examples of how nontraditional applicants should approach the application are included.

WHAT DOES THE APPLICATION PROCEDURE INVOLVE?

The graduate program application process generally consists of an application form, an application fee, transcript(s), and support documents such as an admission test score, transcript(s), a vita, a statement of purpose, and letters of recommendation.

Application

Every graduate school will have its own application, and some graduate programs might have supplemental application forms that are requested or required. The graduate school's application will ask you to provide basic demographic information such as your name, contact information, citizenship, and educational background. Many schools have applications on the web for you to apply on-line or to download and mail to the schools. If a program requires supplements, they generally ask additional information such as: the faculty in the program with whom you are interested in working, the courses in the subject area you have taken and the grades you made in those courses, and the references you plan to use for the application. Some schools also require specific forms for the reference writers to complete.

Transcripts

The transcript is typically considered the most important of the support documents. It provides a valuable indication of your ability to succeed in a specific field of study. It is important to note, however, that some graduate programs consider professional development equally with undergraduate grades.

Nontraditional students with a low undergraduate GPA should understand that low GPAs may not be viewed as ancient history and could be a hindrance. The best strategy is to explain any

shortfalls in your statement of purpose. Emphasize the quality activities and the successes that you have had since leaving school.

Application Fees

Each school will charge a fee for processing the application. Application fees range from \$15 to \$150 or more depending on the school. Depending on the number of programs to which you apply, budget to spend around \$300 in application, mailing, and transcript fees.

Admissions Tests

Admissions tests commonly used include the GRE (Graduate Record Examination), the GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test), and the MAT (Miller Analogies Test). It is important to review the admission requirements of the school(s) of interest and determine if an admission test will be required. Not all programs require admission tests, and those that do may require a specific test.

The **GRE** is the most commonly required test (if one is required). It consists of a General test and Subject tests. The General test measures verbal and quantitative reasoning along with analytical writing abilities. Subject tests (in areas such as psychology, biology, computer sciences, and others) measure knowledge of a specific academic field. Testing center locations, practice tests, and other information may be found on the GRE website at ets.org/gre.

The **GMAT** is generally required for admission into business programs such as a Master's of Business Administration (MBA). The GMAT measures general verbal and mathematical skills thought to be associated with success in the first year of study at graduate schools of management and business. For more information, view the GMAT website at mba.com/mba/thegmat.

The **MAT**, used for admission to some education and psychology programs, measures scholastic aptitude using verbal analogies. For more information, see their website at **milleranalogies.com**.

You can improve your test scores and reduce your anxiety by preparing for the test. Most bookstores sell preparation guides. Some tests have downloadable versions of practice tests. Computerized testing is available for most tests on the campus of many universities or colleges. Generally, test scores are valid for two to five years.

Developing a Vita

A vita is similar to a resume. While a resume lists work experiences relevant to the job to which you are applying, a vita lists academic experiences applicable to a graduate program. It should summarize your academic and pertinent employment history in a structured form.

There are many guides and opinions regarding what categories to use and what items from your past to list. Categories of suggested information and an explanation are provided in the appendix, which also includes a vita worksheet and an example of a vita.

Just like a resume, list relevant work and academic experiences. Bear in mind that you once worked at a donut store might be a great thing for a resume, but it may not have any academic merit. List instead the activities related to school work, professional or research experiences, and relevant work experiences.

If you start early, you will have plenty of time to develop an accurate and informative vita. A continuously growing vita is an important asset. Your vita should be continuously updated. It should be typed, errorless, and very neat. Remember, if you are qualified, there are a dozen others who are also well qualified. The slightest little stimulus could be reason enough to weed out your application. Poor attention to form, detail, or content could be the stimulus. Most importantly, you should start to assemble your vita early. Have faculty or friends review it with you. It may not be long (most students have only a one page vita), and you may choose whether or not to use some of the suggested categories.

Writing a Statement of Purpose

The statement of purpose is a written essay that communicates your educational and professional goals, background and past experiences related to your goals, and motivation and commitment to pursue a graduate degree. Remember that the reviewers will use the statement of purpose to judge your writing and communication abilities. Be clear, concise, and organized. Try to keep the length of the statement to one or two pages. See the Appendix for an example.

In developing your statement of purpose:

- Summarize your experiences both in and out of the classroom that have had an impact on your life and career choices
- Describe factors that inspired you in your decision to pursue graduate study (including research, internships, interest in teaching, etc.)
- Map out your plans for graduate work
- Define your career objectives and their relationship to graduate school

Conclude your statement of purpose by describing your reasons for applying to the particular school or program. This is your chance to communicate to the admissions board that your goals are a match for their program and that you will be an asset to their program.

Be attentive to what each program wants. If a program stresses research, field work, or work experience, then address those issues in your statement. It is wise to apply to schools that have faculty with interests that fit your own, so perhaps include names of those faculty in your statement. If you are interested in specific areas of research, do your homework. Go to the library and look up the publications of the faculty; make sure they have completed recent research.

Nontraditional students should distinguish their statements of purpose by sharing unique experiences and abilities from their professional experiences. Admissions committees want to know who you are, where you've been, and what your goals are. Your professional and life experiences can enhance your statement of purpose. For the nontraditional student, a clear, well-organized statement of purpose should:

- Outline strengths in your educational and professional background
- Define your educational goals and professional goals
- Explain how and why you came to set these goals
- Describe how your educational goals will fit into your professional life
- Draw from life experiences and professional experiences that are significant in your decision to return to school
- Explain your career objectives



Letters of Recommendation

One of the biggest mistakes a graduate applicant can make is to submit letters of recommendation that are weak or from sources who are not credible.

With this in mind, select three or four persons, such as professors, advisors, or supervisors, who will communicate positively about your work habits, your academic ability, and your character.

As soon as possible, provide your chosen references with:

1. A copy of your statement of purpose (it lets them understand why you are interested in the program),
2. A list of the schools and addresses to send the references.
3. Your vita (it provides background information to assist them in knowing you better)
4. Forms or guidelines for the letters or recommendation if provided by the program
5. Stamped envelopes addressed to the program's admission committee
6. Deadline for submitting the letters

Request all recommendations no less than two months in advance of the deadline. A few weeks prior to the deadline, confirm that the reference writer mailed the letter.

For the nontraditional student, academic letters of recommendation may be hard to come by if you haven't recently been in school. Many admissions committees understand this and will give as much or more weight to letters from people who have observed your professional work. Whether or not you have held jobs in your area of interest, professional references and letters of recommendation can highlight your potential for success in graduate school and/or a specific area. Transferable skills and positive attributes demonstrated on the job can greatly influence an admissions committee toward accepting you.

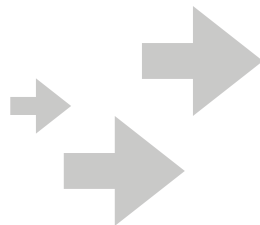
Skills and attributes to include in a strong letter of recommendation include:

- Character
- Responsibility/dependability
- Enthusiasm for work
- Ability to work independently
- Strong communication skills (e.g. oral and written communication skills)
- Ease in working with and for people

WHAT IF I DON'T MEET ALL OF A GRADUATE SCHOOL'S REQUIREMENTS?

If a low GPA or admissions test score is not a true indicator of your potential, use other parts of your application to correct the false impression. Some ways to accomplish this:

- Request additional letters from faculty or supervisors to stress your academic abilities and other professional attributes.
- Build on your research skills.
- Seek out professional development opportunities related to your field of interest.
- You may also have the option to take a limited number of graduate level courses on a non-degree basis. You could then be reassessed as an applicant based on the grades received in those classes as well as the usual criteria. While no guarantee of admission, this option is commonly used to showcase student abilities.



Median yearly earnings for full-time workers age 25 and older by educational attainment in 2003.

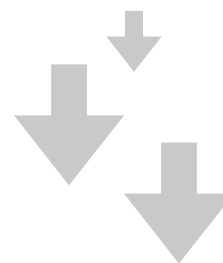


- \$64,752 with a doctoral degree
- \$51,072 with a master's degree
- \$43,200 with a bachelors degree
- \$26,592 with a high school diploma

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics 2005

Checklist of Activities

After deciding what program you want to pursue, you can begin the graduate application process. The following is a checklist of activities to complete. For each activity, set a deadline of when you want to complete it.



Pre-application Preparations

- Read the materials identifying various graduate schools; list the ones of interest (see Appendices for a worksheet)

deadline: _____

- Request program information from the graduate programs of interest

- Finalize the list of programs of interest to you

- Study for the admission test (GRE, GMAT, or MAT) (if a test is required)

- Write a draft copy of your statement of purpose

- Write a draft copy of your vita

- Request official transcripts from all schools you have previously attended

Prepare Application Materials

- Register for and take any required admission tests

deadline: _____

- Write the final version of your vita

- Write the final version of your statement of purpose

- Ask professional personnel whether they will serve as references

Provide information about each program to which you are applying

Inform them when the letter is due

Supply them with an addressed, stamped envelope

Sending the Application

- Send the following at this time:

Application(s) for admissions

Application fee

Statement of purpose

Transcripts from all institutions attended

Vita

Any other information required by the program

deadline: _____

- Request test scores to be sent to the school(s)

- Verify that letters of recommendations have been sent by your reference writers

- Call the department to confirm that all parts of your application have arrived and ask when admissions decisions will be announced

- Wait patiently for the admission decision

Section 5

Making the Decision

In this section

HOW IS THE APPLICATION PROCESSED?

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON REASONS FOR NON-ADMISSION?

WHAT ABOUT INTERVIEWS?

WHAT STEPS DO I TAKE UPON BEING ACCEPTED?

HOW CAN I FINANCE MY GRADUATE EDUCATION?

CAN I EXPECT TO RECEIVE A TEACHING OR RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIP?

HOW IS THE APPLICATION PROCESSED?

At many schools, the graduate school will act as the central processing point for your application while at others, the academic program will be the point of contact. When your application is received by the graduate school or program:

- Your file is created
- Your file is reviewed by the school after all materials have been received
- Your application is reviewed by the program of interest
- The program makes a recommendation to the admissions board regarding your admission

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON REASONS FOR NON-ADMISSION?

Common reasons for non-admission to graduate programs are as follows:

- Applying after the program deadline
- Failure to complete the application process
- Limited space in the specified graduate department
- Failure to meet minimum requirements

WHAT ABOUT INTERVIEWS?

Some graduate programs require applicants to visit with the department chair or members of the faculty for a personal interview. The interview is an avenue for the program to get to know more about you. Interviewers will be interested in observing how you approach problems, articulate ideas, and formulate answers to their questions. Here are some tips for making a great impression:

- Research and enhance your knowledge of the program, university, and faculty prior to the interview
- Prepare questions for them in advance
- Dress professionally, as though for a job interview
- Arrive early
- Supporting yourself in and out of school
- Relevant work and life experiences
- Raising a family
- Traveling to different places
- Observing and learning from the world

The interview is a two-way process. It is a chance for the program to have a look at you, but it is also a chance for you to look at the program. Show interest in the program by asking questions about the department that the catalog or admissions bulletin did not address. Refer to the section on “Finding the Right Program” for possible questions to ask in the interview.

A nontraditional applicant can use the interview to stand out from the rest of the admissions pool. Life experiences, which a traditional undergraduate may not have, can work to your advantage. In answering the interviewers' questions, draw from such experiences as:

Older students raise classroom standards and enhance the learning experiences of other students in their classes. Admissions committees are responding to this by recruiting nontraditional students and looking beyond their GPA and test scores in making admissions decisions. Realize that your chances for admission are not as dependent upon high academic performance as those for traditional undergraduates. Your experiences are valuable and relevant. Sharing relevant experiences during the interview with them will greatly increase your chances for acceptance into graduate school.]





WHAT STEPS DO I TAKE UPON BEING ACCEPTED?

Make an informed decision about whether or not you are still considering the particular school. As a successful applicant, you will be given a set time period to notify the school as to whether or not you will be attending. This may be a difficult choice since you may not have yet heard from a more preferred institution. Sometimes it is possible to ask a school for an extension. This can buy you some time if you're still waiting to hear from other schools.

Once you have made your decision:

- Immediately notify your chosen school in writing and by phone that you will be attending that particular institution.
- Notify, as soon as possible, schools you have decided not to attend so they can fill your space with another applicant.
- Solidify financial aid arrangements.

HOW CAN I FINANCE MY GRADUATE EDUCATION?

Several types of financial assistance are available to graduate students. These include:

- Tuition waivers
- Teaching and research assistantships
- Student loans
- Scholarships (departmental, minority, etc.)
- Fellowships
- Full or part-time jobs

At most institutions, an assessment of financial status is performed prior to allocating funds to students for academic support. You should complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form each year to help determine the aid available to you. You can complete the form online at **fafsa.ed.gov**.

Your financial status is determined based on information provided by you on the FAFSA. For additional information on financial assistance programs for graduate study, contact the financial aid offices of the schools to which you are applying.

CAN I EXPECT TO RECEIVE A TEACHING OR RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIP?

The awarding of an assistantship is not always automatic. Some programs are able to fund assistantships while others are not. There are different possible assistantships that can be awarded and jobs performed are varied. A student could work in a lab (generally called a research assistant or RA), teach courses (generally called a teaching assistant or TA), or be employed by an office or program (generally given the generic title of graduate assistant or GA) to do a variety of tasks.

Assistantships are generally awarded by the major program although other units on campus also employ assistants. Stipend levels and terms of appointments vary by program and by the rules of the university. For nonresident domestic and international students, typically a waiver of the nonresident portion of the tuition is included in the award.

It is important for you to ask the program if they offer assistantships, the number of assistantships awarded, and the conditions for receiving an assistantship.

To complete a FAFSA form visit fafsa.ed.gov



Appendices

In this section

WORKSHEET FOR ASSESSING PROGRAMS

EXPLANATION OF VITA HEADINGS

VITA WORKSHEET

VITA EXAMPLE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE EXAMPLE

Worksheet for Assessing Programs



School Name

Self-Rating:
Application Deadline:
Admissions Test:
Score Needed:
Courses Needed or Required:
Minimum Required GPA:
of Faculty with Research Interest:
Financial Assistance Provided:
Diversity:

School Name

Self-Rating:
Application Deadline:
Admissions Test:
Score Needed:
Courses Needed or Required:
Minimum Required GPA:
of Faculty with Research Interest:
Financial Assistance Provided:
Diversity:

School Name

Self-Rating:
Application Deadline:
Admissions Test:
Score Needed:
Courses Needed or Required:
Minimum Required GPA:
of Faculty with Research Interest:
Financial Assistance Provided:
Diversity:

School Name

Self-Rating:
Application Deadline:
Admissions Test:
Score Needed:
Courses Needed or Required:
Minimum Required GPA:
of Faculty with Research Interest:
Financial Assistance Provided:
Diversity:

School Name

Self-Rating:
Application Deadline:
Admissions Test:
Score Needed:
Courses Needed or Required:
Minimum Required GPA:
of Faculty with Research Interest:
Financial Assistance Provided:
Diversity:

School Name

Self-Rating:
Application Deadline:
Admissions Test:
Score Needed:
Courses Needed or Required:
Minimum Required GPA:
of Faculty with Research Interest:
Financial Assistance Provided:
Diversity:

School Name

Self-Rating:
Application Deadline:
Admissions Test:
Score Needed:
Courses Needed or Required:
Minimum Required GPA:
of Faculty with Research Interest:
Financial Assistance Provided:
Diversity:

School Name

Self-Rating:
Application Deadline:
Admissions Test:
Score Needed:
Courses Needed or Required:
Minimum Required GPA:
of Faculty with Research Interest:
Financial Assistance Provided:
Diversity:

Explanation of Vita Headings

A vita is an academic resume. Where a resume is a listing of your job experience, your vita is a listing of your academic experiences. A continuously growing vita is an important asset. There are many guides on formats to use; select a format that is attractive and easy to read. Your vita should be continuously updated. It should be typed, errorless, and neat. Typical categories of information that may be included on the vita are listed below:

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name, address, and other relevant contact information. Include your home, work, and school phone numbers if applicable. Don't forget to include an email address.

ACADEMIC HISTORY

All degrees awarded and expected, institution names and location, major, GPA (optional). List all institutions of higher education you have attended.

HONORS OR AWARDS

Academic honors should be listed, but other nonacademic honors may be included as well.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES/MEMBERSHIPS

List any professional memberships (for example, membership in the American Psychological Association).

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE/RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE/RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

List relevant experiences in your professional life, work life, or academic pursuits.
List research projects you have conducted or with which you have been involved.

OTHER RELEVANT TRAINING

List other training that you believe important for an admission committee to know.
This may include any related work or committee experience.

PUBLICATIONS (Papers or Posters Presented)

List any published articles, and research papers or posters presented at professional meetings.

REFERENCES (List at least three with their titles, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses.)

Choose at least three people who will comment positively about your academic ability, professional experience, and/or work ethic. Include their names, phone numbers and addresses (mail and email), and make sure your referees have agreed to serve as references.



Vita Worksheet

Use this page as a template to write down the information you want to appear on your vita.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name:
Address:
City, State, Zip:
Phone Number:
Email Address:

ACADEMIC HISTORY

Schools:
Places:
Dates of attendance:
Degrees earned:

HONORS OR AWARDS

Name of honor:
Year earned:

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES/MEMBERSHIPS

Number of years:
Offices held:

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE/RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE/RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Title:
Department:
City:
State:
Years:

OTHER RELEVANT TRAINING

PUBLICATIONS (Papers or Posters Presented)

REFERENCES (List at least three with their titles, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses.)



Vita Example

Shelly B. Richards

3895 North Adams

Oklahoma City, OK 73013

(555) 555-9247

email: shelrich@hotmail.com

Education

Arandom University, St. Louis, Missouri, 2009–2013

B.S. in Psychology, May 2013

Minor: Philosophy, GPA: 3.45

Overall GPA (4.00 scale): 3.67, Major GPA: 3.85

Honors

Dean's Excellence Award, 2010

Dean's List (all but one semester), 2009–2013

Psi Chi

Professional Affiliations

Missouri Psychological Association — Student Affiliate

American Psychological Association — Student Affiliate

Research Experience

Brain Function and Handedness — Arandom University, 2010.

Have been studying research design and background, participating in research meetings, scoring questionnaires, running subjects, and helping with data workup.

Treatment Acceptability of Child Behavioral Management Techniques in Abusive and Nonabusive Parents — Arandom University, 2011.

Recruited subjects, collected and analyzed data, and participated in weekly research discussion meetings.

Chemoil Petroleum Research Center — St. Louis, Missouri, 2009–2011.

Designed, supervised, and reported research on hydrotreatment of different oils with various catalysts. Presented results in a branch talk and a division talk with 40 and 200 professionals, respectively.

Work History

Child Development, Inc. — Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 2011.

Day Care Worker: Interacted with preschoolers. Supervised activities, play hour, and discipline.

The Faith Family Shelter — Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 2010–2011.

Assistant: Major responsibilities at residential setting for homeless families included interviewing, facilitating group-living decisions, providing listening support and encouragement, helping residents make plans for action, giving tours, accepting donations, supervising volunteers, purchasing, and supervising preparation of food.



Volunteer Experience

Parents Assistance Center — Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 2012.

Observed several parent therapy groups. Assisted a psychologist in a six-week parent-child interaction group.

Augustine Peace House — Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 2010–2012.

Trained volunteers to use computer for word processing and database maintenance.

Designed and helped build tables for computers and printers. Phonebanking. Crisis-line worker and office volunteer. Assisted in child play therapy while mothers were in weekly group therapy.

Other Training

Parents Assistance Center — Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 2012

Four-week (20-hour) volunteer training on child abuse.

Changing, Inc. — Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 2011.

Six-week (12-hour) education series on chemical dependency.

Oklahoma Coalition on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, 2010.

One-day (6-hour) training on child molestation, incest, and sexual assault.

References

Courtney M. Freedman, Ph.D.

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(555) 555-1234

email: freedmanc@auni.edu

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email: john.smith@auni.edu

Janice Willham

Department of Psychology

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Arandom University

St. Louis, Missouri 87714

(555) 555-1234

email: janwil@auni.edu

Statement of Purpose Example

The work, school, and research experience that I have gained while striving to achieve my Bachelor of Science in experimental psychology at Wake Forest University has prepared me to achieve success not only in graduate school, but also in my future career as a child psychologist. I am committed to pursuing a master's degree in school psychology at Arandom University.

My interest in psychology stems from a summer job I had several years ago at the Center for Child Development at the Wake Forest University. This position led me to a full-time position as a mental health technician during my senior year. The experience I gained from this position demonstrated two things to me. The first is that I can effectively manage a large and complex research program, and the second is I am able to interact with patients in a way that is both beneficial to the client and enjoyable to me. I feel confident that my decision to pursue a career in mental health is a correct one. Although my career plans are not definite, my goal is to work with children and adolescents, possibly in a juvenile justice, school, or applied research setting.

While my grades are not poor (B average), I believe a true understanding of my abilities can be found through my work and research experience. My vita reflects that all my positions have been ones of great responsibility. I often worked unsupervised, met deadlines, and maintained patient safety. Through my work, I have exhibited a strong work ethic along with the ability to interact well with others. I have also been involved in a number of community and campus organizations. At Wake Forest University I was vice president of the Wake Forest Honor Society. As vice president I helped organize events to benefit the community surrounding the university, I recruited students of high academic standing to be part of the society, and I helped set up a peer tutoring group comprised of society members. In the psychology department I served as chapter president of Psi Chi, the national honor society of psychology. As president I conducted and managed the affairs of the local chapter and organized monthly colloquia. I believe this involvement in extracurricular activities provided me the opportunity to build necessary organizational and leadership skills.

I am particularly attracted to Arandom University due to the large number of faculty who are interested in child and adolescent issues. During my undergraduate work, I was presented with the opportunity to participate in a research study examining the cognitive and motoric impulsivity of children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and techniques to improve their visual search strategies. At Arandom University, I would like to continue my research to determine successful treatments for children with learning disabilities and other developmental delays. With my research and work background in this area, I believe I would be an asset to your program. I am particularly interested in learning about family therapies for borderline and identity-disordered adolescents. In reviewing the research interests of your faculty, I believe Dr. Craighead and Dr. Lochman would be particularly helpful, considering their research interests in adolescents and parent training, respectively.

After completing my Ph.D., I would like to teach at a research-oriented university where I can practice clinical techniques, conduct research, and instill in students my enthusiasm for research and the study of clinical psychology. In the long term, I would especially be interested in the development of educational software for parents of hyperactive children. I envision a career in school psychology as a culmination of my varied interests and would appreciate the opportunity to pursue this at Arandom University.

I feel I have received excellent preparation from this bachelor's program to complete the requirements for the master's degree at Arandom University. I believe my strong background in child psychology and my outstanding work ethic would be beneficial to your program, and with the guidance of your excellent faculty, I would be able to cultivate my research skills.



Graduate College

Oklahoma State University
202 Whitehurst
Stillwater, OK 74078-1019