



OFFICE OF CAREER PLANNING

Graduate School Searching



WOOSTER

Advising, Planning, Experiential Learning

Graduate School Searching Overview

This guide serves as general advice for applying to graduate school, use this guidebook in conjunction with Career Planning staff that will offer individual guidance.

Before you begin submitting applications, consider:

- **Scheduling a meeting with the Career Planning** staff through Handshake
- **Exploring Scots Career Hub** for different industry trends
- Researching where other College of Wooster graduated landed after graduation with the resource ***What Do Wooster Graduated Do with Their Major?***
- **Participating in career programing** and graduate school fairs
- **Updating your career materials** such as curriculum vitae and personal statement

As you begin applying to graduate programs, think about if you should attend graduate school. Graduate study requires significant commitments of time and money, not to mention the rigorous academic demands it presents.

REASONS TO GO

- Compelling academic, intellectual, or career interests.
- To advance in a field to which you already have had significant exposure.
- Advanced study is the next logical step to achieving your goals.

REASON NOT TO GO

- You do not know what to do with your Liberal Arts degree.
- To avoid entering the “real world”.
- You did not start a job search.

Begin to reflect on the following questions as you consider pursuing graduate school:

- 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 academic commitment?
- At the present time, do I have other needs that conflict with pursuing a graduate degree?
- Would I benefit more by gaining practical experience before pursuing graduate studies?
- Can I realistically invest the time and money required to pursue another degree?
- What type of value, if any, do I place on attaining a graduate degree?

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.

Meet with a Career Planning staff member to prepare for the graduate school application process.



Planning Timeline

- ▶ **Spring** Prior to Applying
 - Research areas of interest, institutions, and programs.
 - Talk to advisors about application requirements.
 - Register and prepare for appropriate graduate entrance exams.
 - Investigate national scholarships.

- ▶ **Summer** Prior to Applying
 - Take required graduate entrance exams.
 - Download application materials.
 - Visit institutions of interest, if possible.
 - Draft your application essay.
 - Check on application deadlines and rolling admissions policies.

- ▶ **Fall** Application Time
 - Finalize your application essay and have it reviewed for comments by faculty and Career Planning staff.
 - Ask for letters of recommendation before the deadline.
 - Complete applications.
 - Fill out the Free Applications for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) online at www.fafsa.ed.gov.
 - Narrow down graduate programs you will apply to (we suggest 4-6; consider location, funding pathways, program focus, faculty, or experiential learning opportunities).

- ▶ **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.

*If interested in applying for **medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry, or law school** you may need to register for a national application or data assembly service. Pre-Health and Pre-Law advisors can help with the process by scheduling an appointment through Handshake.*



Application Process

Your application is one of the most revealing indications of your motivation towards graduate study and might be the first impression that the institution will receive of you. Organize your search so you are attentive to details and deadlines. Consider applying early.

ORGANIZING YOUR SEARCH

Create a system or way to track graduate schools for:

- Institutions of interest to you
- Application requirements
- Important factors for you like locations, degree type, or funding opportunities

MATERIALS

Below are suggestions for materials you will likely submit with your application:

- Personal Statement or Statement of Purpose
 - Read the question and answer what they are asking.
 - Include specific reasons for your interest in this area of study
 - Highlight your academic achievements (i.e., Independent Study) and future plans.
 - Have your statement reviewed by faculty, Career Planning, or the Writer Center.
 - Refer to your statement in preparation for an interview with graduate school faculty members as many will use the statement as an opener.
- Transcripts
 - For requests and costs related to transcripts, visit the Registrar's Office.
 - Obtain transcripts from other institutions you have attended, as necessary.
- Letters of Recommendation
 - Letters of recommendation are a key component of most application processes.
 - Ask for a positive reference from faculty member, supervisor, or coach.
- Resume or Curriculum Vitae
 - Include relevant information like research experience or academic endeavors.
 - Review the Resume Guidebook in Career Planning on Scots Career Hub.

ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS

Most graduate programs require entrance exams as part of the application for admission.

- Register for the Entrance Exams online
 - Most exams are arranged on an individual basis at testing centers on computers.
 - Pay attention to the entrance requirements of each graduate school – some may require more than one exam (i.e., GRE subject tests and the general GRE).
 - Be aware test registration deadlines, many are earlier than you might expect.
 - Arrive to test on time to avoid paying extra or risk the chance of taking the exam.
- Prepare for the Exams
 - Familiarize yourself with the content of the exam before the last minute.
 - Study guides are available online and books can be purchased in the bookstore.
 - Some external organizations, such as Kaplan, offer preparatory courses.

INTERVIEWING

Most schools do not conduct interviews, however; you may be invited for an interview. For details on interviewing, review the Interviewing Guide in Career Planning or Scots Career Hub.

- Consider scheduling a practice interview with Career Planning.



Selecting a Graduate School

SpringIt is important to assess your interests, skills, and values. Consider reviewing the *What Wooster Grads Do with Their Majors* to learn what graduate schools alumni have attended.

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL SCHOOLS

- Use Gradschools.com or Petersons.com.
- 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.

RESEARCHING SCHOOLS

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

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.

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 have at 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.

Letters of Recommendation

Adopted from Dr. Amburgey-Peters

Letters of recommendation are a key component of most application processes and can often be a deciding factor in the process. Reflect on your experiences to create a list of potential recommenders that would best describe your accomplishments and strengths. Consider taking the following steps.

Ask your recommender for a positive reference. Choose professors and professionals who know your capabilities and academic strengths. Vary your references from different departments and someone outside the classroom. Never give a person's name as a reference without asking the person first and giving them ample time to write it.

Clarify with you recommender how much time they will need to write a positive recommendation. Make sure you share the deadline for submitting letters of recommendation. Ask at least 4-6 weeks or more before the deadline.

Provide your recommender with relevant information to help them write the best letter. Below are suggestions to include when your recommender confirms they will write you a positive reference:

- Schedule an appointment to discuss your plans and career goals with your reference
- Brief overview of what you are applying for and why
- Resume or Curriculum Vitae
- Personal statement if not required for the application, describe your short-term goals
- Restate the deadline that the recommendation is due
- Include a link, if one exists, or the email for submission directly to your recommender
- Unofficial copy of your most recent transcript
- Experiences you have had together, like course work or research, with the dates in the experience, grades you received, and notable projects or accomplishments you accomplished
- Personal growth or connection they have witnessed with you like a challenging semester and how you recovered, advising or research meetings, or informal meetings over coffee
- Specific qualities or experiences that you want the recommender to discuss like specific tools or methodologies you used, attending departmental seminars, or teaching assistant

Follow up with your recommender a week before the deadline. Reach out to offer any additional information they may need from you and ensure they can still meet the reference deadline.

Send a thank you to your recommender within 48 hours after they submit their reference. This could be an email, handwritten note, or in-person thank you. Writing a positive reference letter takes a considerable amount time, so thank your recommender for their time. The thank you could also be included during the follow up, if you do not get notice that your reference has been submitted.

Consider using the Letter of Recommendation planning tool on the next page.

Letter of Recommendation

Name _____ Graduation Date _____

I.S. _____ Advisor Major _____

Minor _____ Pathway _____

Campus Box # _____ Phone Number _____

Please provide the following information, check them off as you complete the sections:

- List of schools to which you are applying and deadline for each school

School and Deadline

School and Deadline

- Recommendation Form
(We strongly recommend that you waive your right to read the letter, if given the option.)

- Unofficial copy of The College of Wooster transcript

- Resume or curriculum vitae

- Personal statement (most recent draft)

- List of courses you have taken with recommender

Course

Semester

Year

Grade

- Standardized test scores GRE: _____ LSAT: _____ MCAT: _____ GMAT: _____

- Activities

- Awards (academic, civil, sports)

- Employment and internships

- Any other topics you would like me to address in the letter



Writing the Graduate School Statement of Purpose

Graduate study is not for slackers. It takes focus and determination to pursue an advanced degree. That's why admissions committees examine your statement of purpose very closely—they want to see whether you have the right stuff to succeed in graduate school.

KNOW WHAT THEY ARE REALLY ASKING FOR

Different schools have different prompts. Nonetheless, they're all asking for the same four pieces of information:

- What you want to study at graduate school?
- Why you want to study it?
- What experience you have in your field?
- What you plan to do with your degree once you have it?

Admissions committees look for candidates with clear, well-defined research interests that arise from experience. With that in mind, your statement should reveal that you care deeply about your chosen discipline and that you have the background to support your ideas and sentiments. It should also demonstrate that you're a diligent student who will remain committed for the long haul. Always answer the question asked of you. Being substantive and direct is much better than being creative or flashy.

BE SELECTIVE

Grad schools don't care that you make a great chicken casserole or play intramural bocce ball. They do care about those activities that speak to your suitability for graduate work. As a graduate student, you'll be called upon to do difficult coursework and research. You may have to teach undergraduate classes within your field and conceivably even design a course. And you'll have to get along with a diverse group of colleagues who will sometimes work very closely with you. Any experience in school, work, or your extracurricular life that speaks to those abilities is worth talking about.

MAKE YOUR STATEMENT OF PURPOSE UNIQUE

While it's important to be focused, there's no need to be boring. To distinguish your essay, add unique (yet relevant) information. One of the best ways to do this is to discuss—briefly—an idea in your field that turns you on intellectually. It's an effective essay-opener, and it lets you write about something besides yourself for a bit.

INTERVIEWING

Most schools do not conduct interviews, however; you may be invited for an interview. For details on interviewing, review the Interviewing Guide in Career Planning or Scots Career Hub.

Remember, the idea you choose to talk about can tell an admissions committee a lot about you. And it demonstrates your interest in your field, rather than just describing it.

ASK FOR FEEDBACK

Be sure to show your statement of purpose to someone you respect, preferably the professors who are writing your recommendations, and get some feedback on the content before you send it in. Have someone else proofread your essay for spelling and grammar. A fresh set of eyes often picks up something you missed.

Finally, don't just reuse the same statement of purpose for each school to which you apply. You can recycle the same information, but make sure you change the presentation to fit each school's individual program.



The Value of Independent Study

SKILLS GAINED THROUGH INDEPENDENT STUDY

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

UTILIZING INDEPENDENT STUDY AS AN EXAMPLE OF YOUR WORK

- **Personal Statement:** Mention Independent Study in your application for admission as a reason why you are interested in continuing your studies.
- **Interviews:** Discuss Independent Study with employers and graduate schools utilizing the S.T.A.R. method.
- **Resume:** List Independent Study on your resume in education or experience.
- **Cover Letter:** Write how Independent Study prepared you for the duties of a position.

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, emphasizing specific skills gained and results found during the process.

REVIEW EXAMPLES ON WAYS TO DISCUSS YOUR INDEPENDENT STUDY

- “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 and defended 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.”
- “Independent Study is a yearlong, self-designed, faculty mentor research project that all College of Wooster students complete before graduation. I chose _____ as my topic of study and prepared a detailed outline planning my project that included targeted completion dates for each phase of the project. Realizing that I would need monetary support to travel to New Mexico to interview members of the Indigenous population I connected to my topic, I contacted various professional organizations and submitted grant proposals to secure \$_____ of funding toward my efforts. I then conducted research databases to identify sources for additional information relevant to the topic. I prepared a draft of interview questions to be used and discussed my strategies for interviews with participants. Upon my return, I transcribed the qualitative portion of the interviews and entered the quantitative data into _____ statistical program to complete an analysis. Once the findings had been determined, I wrote an 80-page thesis describing my study and used Microsoft Excel to create a variety of graphs for presenting the numerical results. I then defended my Independent Study to members of my academic department.”



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.

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

AID IN RETURN FOR SERVICE

- These awards usually carry full or partial tuition remission plus a stipend; the 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

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

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

- Board of Regents in your state of residence
- Professional organizations.
- Fraternal, religious, and community organizations
- The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) online at fafsa.ed.gov

MISSION STATEMENT

Career Planning provides guidance and resources for students to integrate their values and strengths, liberal arts education, and experiences into purposeful career paths.



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