



DAVISCONNECTS

Design your future.

Graduate &
Professional School

OVERVIEW OF GRADUATE & PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

Higher than a bachelor's degree, an advanced or graduate degree is generally a master's or doctorate degree. Usually a graduate school degree is research based, especially PhD programs. A professional degree centers on curriculum and experiences that lead to better preparation for a career. An advanced degree is required for certain professions such as allopathic (MD) and osteopathic (DO) doctors and attorneys (JD), which in the US are required doctoral degrees for the respective professions. Popular professional master's degrees include the MBA (business), MSN (nursing), and MSW in Social Work. There are innumerable academic master's and doctoral degrees covering at least as many areas as undergraduate degrees. Typically with a full-time schedule, a master's degree will take one to two years to complete and a doctorate degree will take three to five years (usually more with a research and a dissertation; seven years would not be unusual for completion of an academic PhD).

Considering Graduate or Professional School After Graduation?

Use the Matrix Below to help guide you with your decision:

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	YES	NO
Do you know what career you would like long term?		
Does the career you would like to pursue long term require a higher degree?		
Do you know what you want to study and are you still curious and passionate about that particular field?		
Are you emotionally ready for the rigors of graduate school?		
Are you financially ready (it's an expensive proposition if you're unsure or unready)?		
Do you know why you want to go to graduate school?		
Do you have the necessary requirement(s) to enter the program you desire (major, test score, industry or volunteer experience, research, internship)?		
Do you know the type of graduate program you want to pursue? (1 yr Graduate Degree; 2 year Master; Law; Medical; Allied Health; 5-7 year PhD; Research, Clinical, or Applied		

GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION TIMELINE

Application forms, transcripts, essays, test scores, and letters of recommendation - you'll need to have everything together before your very first graduate school application due date arrives.

JUNIOR YEAR: FALL SEMESTER:

- **Select Graduate Schools.** Hopefully you've already clarified your career and degree goals and are now ready to form a list of criteria you want in a graduate program and identify a list of programs that fit your criteria. Request information from the schools.
- APPLY FOR / PARTICIPATE in research opportunities related to your interests.

JUNIOR YEAR: SPRING SEMESTER

- **Entrance Exams**
 - Take a practice GRE General Test. Your score will help you determine how much preparation you'll need before you take the exam. Start studying intensively on your own or take a prep course on campus, online, or at another facility.
 - Create a study plan and stick to it.
 - **Finances.** Set aside money for the cost of the GRE, application fees, and travel to interviews.
 - Testing locations fill up quickly, so schedule exams well in advance of desired testing dates.

SUMMER BEFORE YOUR SENIOR YEAR: JULY/AUGUST

- **Select Graduate Schools.** Read the information you've collected about the schools paying special attention to their admissions requirements, cost, and options for financing grad school. Consider visiting the schools to talk with admissions personnel, faculty or current graduate students.
- **Entrance Exams.** Continue studying for the GRE General Test or, if you think you are ready, take the exam in August so that you'll have time to study more and retake it if you don't like your first score.
- Continue working on your personal statement
- Create your Resume or CV

SENIOR YEAR: SEPTEMBER

- **Select Graduate Schools.** It is expensive and time-consuming to apply to graduate schools, thus it is a good idea to create your short list of graduate programs (6-12) to which you will apply.
 - Create a spreadsheet of the deadlines and materials needed to apply to each program.
 - To reduce stress, create a timeline for yourself and your letter writers that will allow you to submit materials at least one week before the official deadline for each program.

- Note that schools differ in the way they want materials submitted: Some may want you to collect all the application materials – letters of recommendation, transcripts, application forms, etc – and send them in one packet via snail mail. Other programs want all submitted online.
- ** If you are applying to research-oriented graduate programs, write to faculty members who research interests match yours to express interest in their work.
- **Entrance Exams.** Evaluate your GRE General Score, retake if needed. Register and start studying for the *GRE Subject Test* if it's requested by the graduate schools to which you are applying. This test is offered only in Oct and Nov during the fall.
- **Personal Statement.** Finalize Personal Statement / Statement of Purpose - remember that this is really a “professional statement” not a personal autobiography!
- **Letters of Recommendation.** Find out how many letters you will need. Consider the faculty members who know you best. Visit them to let them know that you are getting ready to apply to grad schools and ask for advice.

OCTOBER

- **Select Graduate Schools.** Contact graduate students and professors at your prospective schools. Visit if you can.
- **Resume / Curriculum Vitae.** Update your resume and/or curriculum vitae. Take it to DavisConnects for help targeting it for submission as part of your graduate school application and polishing your accomplishment statements - qualify and quantify! Contact professionals in the career of interest to you and get their feedback on these documents, too.
- **Personal Statement.** Have professors and professionals who are working in the career field in which you are interested read your personal statement and comment. Visit an Advisor to get help with organizing and expressing your ideas clearly and for a grammar/word usage/spelling check up.
- **Transcripts.** Investigate exactly what you'll need to do to get official transcripts from all of the colleges you've attended and how long it will take for you to receive them or for them to be sent from your undergraduate school(s) to the graduate schools to which you are applying. Be sure to request them so that they arrive earlier than they need to arrive.

NOVEMBER

- **Entrance Exams.** Retake the GRE General or Subject Test if you were disappointed with your initial scores.
 - *Consider.* If you don't have time to invest in serious studying before you retake the exam then your chances of improving your original score are about 50/50 or worse.
 - Double-check that you've had your GRE scores sent to all the graduate programs to which you are applying.
- **Letters of Recommendation.** If you haven't already done it, early November is the time to ask faculty for letters of recommendation.

- *Provide each faculty member with:* A packet with a copy of your unofficial college transcript on which you indicate class(s) you took with them, your resume and/or curriculum vitae, your GRE scores and your personal statement.
- **Brief, clear instructions listing the schools** to which you are applying and the name of the degree program for each school, how the applications are to be submitted, and the deadlines by which the letters must be submitted (if online) or put in the mail in order to arrive on time.
- A brief letter letting each faculty member know - honestly, without exaggeration -- what you've gotten from working with them as a research assistant or taking their classes. *Remind them of any notable papers or projects you completed and let them know what kind of a positive impact the experience had for you.*
- *If the letters are to be printed and mailed directly to the school or returned to you:* Provide fully addressed envelopes. Include any additional forms that must be completed by the faculty member. Typically, there is one form that includes a waiver statement and rating form that the professor must complete and submit with their letter. You must complete and sign the waiver form and give that form to your letter writers.
- If the letters of recommendation are to be submitted online: Email the faculty member the link to the form that needs to be completed.
- **Important - emphasize the first deadline in your communications with your letter writers!** If you're going to give the faculty member printed materials, put all of them in a 9" x 11" or larger envelope, put your name and the deadline by which the very first letter must be put in the mail or submitted online on the front of the envelope. If you are submitting all of your materials to the professor via email, then highlight the deadline by which the very first letter must be submitted online in an email to the professor.
- **Application Forms.** Try to complete and submit all application forms at least one week before they are due, keeping copies for your own records. Check and double-check for typing, spelling, and grammatical errors. If you fill the applications out online, download them, proofread, and make corrections before you submit.
- **Finances.** Submit all financial aid forms appropriate for the programs
- **Personal Statement & Resume/Curriculum Vitae.** Do a final polish on these documents. Remember – these documents should be targeted to fit each individual program to which you are applying. If you're applying to research-oriented graduate programs you'll want to specifically indicate your interest in the research topics of 2 or 3 faculty members with whom you might like to work in graduate school.

As the application deadlines approach:

- **Letters of Recommendation.** About one week before the deadline by which your first letters of recommendation must be mailed/submitted, send your letter writers a pleasant email reminding them of the deadline and asking if there is any additional information you can provide that would be helpful.
- **Verify** that your application materials (and letters) were received by the graduate programs within one week after each program's deadline.

DECEMBER-FEBRUARY:

- **Gratitude.** Winter break is a nice time to send thank you emails to letter writers and advisers and professionals who helped you with this entire process.
- **Interviews.** Some schools require interviews, some request them and others don't. Some programs are fine with phone interviews and others prefer or require on site interviews. Most schools that request interviews rate them as being very important in determining whether students will be accepted. Interviews are typically held in February, March & April. You can start preparing for them early.
- **Finances.**
- **FOR US STUDENTS:** Fill out the FAFSA (if needed).
 - To qualify for federal aid and for many loans you'll fill out the FAFSA. Get it in as soon as possible after January 1. Keep in mind that all grad students are considered independent for federal aid calculations.
 - Look into private loans, grants, and fellowships.
- **Rejections.** Almost all students who apply to graduate schools will receive at least one rejection letter. Develop backup plans if not accepted to any programs.

MARCH/APRIL/MAY:

- **Score!** If you were accepted by your most preferred school, accept their admission and promptly, politely, turn down other offers.
- **Check your status.** If other programs make early offers, contact your top choices to determine the current status of your application.
- **Decisions?** Did you get accepted by more than one program that you really like? Did you get passed over by the one you really wanted and accepted to one that was way down on your list? Talk with advisers, professors and professionals to get help making these final, important decisions about which program you will accept or whether it is worth waiting and reapplying next year. If you were rejected by a program, call the appropriate person in that department and politely express your regret. Ask if they can suggest what you could do to strengthen your candidacy during the next year if you wanted to apply to the program in future.
- **Network.** Email your letter writers, advisers, and professionals who helped you with this process to let them know the outcome.
- **Finances.** Appeal the aid package or apply for alternative loans if the amount the school offers isn't adequate.
- **Final materials.** Send your final transcripts and any other materials they need to the program you will be attending.