

Applying to Graduate School

Should I go to graduate school?

Graduate school is a big investment of time and money, so carefully consider your motivations and options before determining your next steps. While many professional graduate programs prepare students for a particular career path, other graduate programs do not. Some important questions to think through include:

- What do I hope to accomplish with a graduate degree? Can I accomplish these goals with or without a graduate degree?
- Do I want a graduate program to advance my career?
- Have I talked to people who completed similar graduate programs about their experiences both in the program and after graduation?
- What would be my back-up plan if I do not get into a graduate program?

Researching and selecting graduate programs

Develop a list of criteria to analyze possible graduate programs. Some possible questions to consider as you conduct research:

- What academic programs fit best or are you most attracted to?
- What is the overall structure of the program (duration, class schedule, research opportunities, etc.)? Will this structure work for me?
- What are areas of expertise of the faculty?
- What kinds of support does the program provide for professional development, including assistance finding a job after I graduate?
- Where do alumni of the program go? Could I talk to a graduate of the program?
- What kinds of financial or academic support is offered? Will I be able to work or have an internship during the program?
- What is the culture of the school and the program? What are the program's values—how do they relate to my own values?
- Does the program's curriculum meet requirements needed for licensure or certification in my field?
- How much financial aid will I need? What is my expected starting salary in my first job after graduate school?

Mindful planning

Most graduate programs require multiple application components. Applications may be due as far out as 12 months before a program begins. Familiarize yourself with what is common for your target field of study. Develop a system for tracking and completing specific parts of the application to ensure timely and accurate completion. Be sure to check for:

- Standardized tests or exams (GRE, MCAT, LSAT, DAT, GMAT, OAT, PCAT, etc.)

- Letters of recommendation (one or multiple recommenders)
- Personal statement (one or multiple essays)
- Official or unofficial academic transcripts
- Resume or Curriculum Vitae
- Other information, depending on program and field

Some programs also require an interview after initial review of applications—interviews are very common in health fields, doctoral programs in biology and genetics, and business schools among others. The Career Center offers mock interviews—submit your personal resume and application materials at least two days before your appointment to ensure customized mock interview questions.

A note on letters of recommendation

Start by developing professional relationships with work supervisors, faculty members and others before beginning the application process. Some specific ways to demonstrate your interest include working hard, attending office hours, asking questions, and working well on group projects and work teams. Plan to have at least three different recommenders. Select recommenders based on how well they know you and feel comfortable speaking to your ability to succeed in a graduate program. When you ask recommenders, provide supporting materials and information to assist the letter writing process (resume, samples of work, personal statement, goals, etc.). Be sure to outline how many letters will be needed and their respective due dates. Send a sincere thank you note to each recommender at the end of the process. Consider using an online tool or system (for example: interfolio.com) for collecting and storing these important letters.

Personal statement writing assistance

Writing an effective personal statement means knowing yourself and telling your story well. Many places on campus offer assistance with crafting a strong statement including:

- The Office of Merit Scholarships, Fellowships & Awards for personal statement writing workshops
- The Odegaard Writing and Research Center for personal statement reviews
- Husky Futures: Career and Internship Center for personal statement reviews

If I know I want to go to graduate school at some point, but not next year, what should I do?

Some suggestions include: maintain relationships with faculty members and others you would like to have as recommenders and mentors. Find ways to stay involved in your field of interest through lectures, events, volunteering, research, travel or other pursuits. Practice writing and engage in regular self-reflection. Conduct informational interviews with graduate level alumni from programs of interest. Read scholarly writing (journal articles, books) in your field of interest. Consider preparing for and taking necessary standardized tests—some exam scores are good for multiple years.