Applying to Graduate School Guide

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Exploring Graduate School

Are you thinking about attending graduate school? This could be an important step in your career development. One that requires time commitment, financial costs, and advanced studies. Before you begin researching graduate programs, take the time to identify your career goals and the reasons why you want to attend graduate school. Make sure not to rush your decision but rather to make a well thought out and informed one.

Here are a few good reasons for attending graduate school:

- You're interested in a career that requires a graduate degree

- You're seeking a promotion that requires an advanced degree

- You're passionate about the subject and want to become a subject matter expert

- You're looking to make a career change and a graduate degree is necessary

Make sure you're not choosing to go to graduate school for the wrong reasons, such as:

- You can't find a job

- You're feeling lost and unsure about your future

- You want to delay the repayment of your student loans

- You want to please your parents or someone else

- You want the prestige of an advanced degree

If you're still feeling unsure as to whether graduate school might be right for you, schedule an appointment with a career counselor on Spartan Connect.

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Types of Graduate Degrees

There are many different types of graduate degrees. Understanding the different types may help you understand what path is right for you.

Master's Degree

A master's degree is typically a two-year program after receiving your bachelor's degree to gain a specialization in a specific area or field. The most common types are *Masters of Arts (M.A.)* or *Masters in Science (M.S.)*, although there are many other acronyms (such as *M.B.A. - Masters of Business Administration*) that may signify a master's degree.

There are generally three different types of designs for the curriculum in a master's program.

- **Research**: Usually for academic or applied research roles (e.g. Masters of Science in Chemistry (M.S. in Chemistry))

- **Professional**: Prepares you with the skills and knowledge required to enter a specific profession (e.g. Masters of Social Work (MSW), Masters of Business Administration (MBA))

- **Terminal**: Highest degree in a field or preparation for PhD program (e.g. Masters in Library Science (MILS))

Doctoral Degree

A doctoral degree can take up to 8+ years after receiving your bachelor's degree to obtain. The number of years will depend on how long you take to complete your coursework, research, and supporting documentation (dissertation). Some doctoral degrees require that you complete a master's first or meet other prerequisite requirements for admission, so make sure to do your research on your schools of interest.

There are generally two different types of designs for the curriculum in a doctoral program.

- **Research**: Provides training to develop original thinking in a specific field. Typically for academic or applied research roles, but can also translate to public or private sector leadership/executive roles.

- **Professional**: Provides advanced skills and knowledge in order to enter a specific profession (e.g, Juris Doctor (J.D.) degree prepares you for a career in law, a Medical Doctor (M.D.) degree prepares you for a career in medicine, etc.)

For more information, check out the Difference Between a Masters and a Doctorate by Idealist.org and What Does it Take to Earn a Master's Degree by ThoughtCo.com.

Post-graduate Certificate Program and Credentials

Certifications and credentials often offer specialized training in a field that is less knowledge-intensive than a full master's program (e.g. Pupil Personnel Services Credential (PPS), Clinical Laboratory Scientist (CLS). Earning a certificate or certification often consists of 3 to 7 courses and provides much deeper knowledge than an individual course. These typically take around one year or less to complete. Graduate degrees, on the other hand, require a longer time and financial commitment. For more information on deciding what is right for you, see Graduate Degrees vs. Certificates: Which is Right for You by Petersons for more information.

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What's the difference between a credential, certificate, and graduate degree?

- Credentials require coursework and completion of an exam in order to be awarded. They typically require continued education in order to renew or maintain the credential.

- Certifications require an educational component and may also have an exam that must be passed for the certificate to be awarded. Some certifications must be renewed, while others are issued after proof of a level of knowledge or skill is obtained.

- Graduate degrees typically cover broader topics and therefore require more courses and longer time to complete than a certificate or credential.

- Graduate degrees are more likely to require admission tests and prerequisite courses.

- Some graduate degrees require applicants to complete a minimum number of years of work experience as part of the admissions requirement.

For more information, check out the Difference between Credentials and Certifications by NEHA.

Other Options

Be aware that there are also a number of free and low-cost live and online courses available through companies such as LinkedIn Learning that can be used to build skills in your field of interest or can serve as a way to continue life-long learning. As careers often change, you might find that even after completing a graduate degree, credential, or certificate you might have to continue to develop new skills in your field.

Through LinkedIn Learning, SJSU students gain access to free online courses to learn marketable skills in any field from digital office skills, software development, project management, data analytics, design, photography, and many more. Log in with your SJSUOne ID and password to get started.

Other free or low-cost live and online course opportunities can be found on the Build Experience Guide.

Now that you understand the different options that are available after completing an undergraduate degree, your next step is to complete additional research on the program that you are applying to and build your application.

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Researching Graduate Schools

Once you've decided you want to go to graduate school, take the time to find the right institution with the program that best matches your interests and career goals. Make sure to allow plenty of time before you apply to review websites, gather information, compare programs, and get any questions answered. Articles such as this one by igrad.com provide lists of considerations to help you choose the graduate school that is right for you:

- Curriculum and class offerings
- Faculty specializations
- Program costs
- Average completion time and rate
- Ranking
- Campus resources for graduate students and more!

Graduate program admissions websites, as well as resources such as Petersons.com, are great places to find information in order to compare and contrast the unique offerings of each school.

Additional questions to get answered while comparing colleges:

- Are there preferred majors or prerequisite classes?
- What is the class format? (online, in-person, or blended)
- What opportunities are available for research or fieldwork?
- Where are graduates being employed?

Researching Specialized Graduate Programs

Once you have narrowed your field of study, start researching institutions by reviewing the website of your industry professional association. Professional associations, such as the ones listed below, typically have a webpage dedicated to prospective students with information about the industry, careers, and tips on selecting an accredited graduate program.

Resources for graduate programs in specialized fields:

- Association of American Medical Colleges
- American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
- Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
- American Dental Association
- Law School Admissions Council

SJSU Resources for Exploring Graduate School

There are a number of campus resources available to SJSU undergraduate students exploring graduate programs including:

- Graduate career advising at the SJSU Career Center
- Science Pre-Professional Academic Advising: For students considering graduate programs in the sciences including pre-dental, pre-medical, pre-optometry, pre-veterinary, etc.
- Graduate School Information Sessions/ Workshops: Provide helpful information about graduate programs and how to prepare application materials.
- McNair Scholars Program: A TRiO program that helps first-generation and low-income or underrepresented undergraduate students apply to doctoral programs and assists them with doing a research project.

Application Requirements

After you've identified the graduate programs you're interested in you want to be clear on what application materials you need to submit. It can typically take several months to complete and gather all necessary documents. Also, it's important to be aware that some programs may require prerequisite courses and/or relevant work experience to be completed prior to applying. Make sure to carefully review the steps to apply, as they can be different for each program.

Some of the most common application materials that are required for graduate school are:

- CV or resume

- Personal statement or statement of purpose

- Letters of recommendation

- Tests (if applicable)

- Admissions interview (if applicable)

Below we will discuss each of these application requirements further.

CV vs. Resume

Depending on the graduate program you apply to, they might request either a CV or a resume. Typically a CV is used for applying to graduate research programs, Ph.D programs, careers in academia, or medical school. You'll find that most other programs prefer a resume. However, please make sure you review the application requirements to determine which document to submit.

What is the difference between a CV and a resume?

A curriculum vitae, or CV, is a detailed record of your education, employment history, research experience, certifications, publications, professional affiliations, etc. It is often two or more pages long.

A resume is a concise document, usually no longer than two pages. It highlights your education, experience, skills, projects, and accomplishments and should be customized.

See examples on the following pages.

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SAMMY S. SPARTAN

San Jose, CA 95008
(888) 888-8888
sammyspartan@gmail.com

EDUCATION:
San Jose State University, San Jose CA
Bachelor of Arts Political Science, 3.85 GPA Spring 2017
Global Politics Concentration, Minor in Economics
Study Abroad, Barcelona, Spain Summer 2016

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE:
Senior Project: Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, SJSU, Spring 2017
- Conducted a comparative case study analysis of the public policy implementation in Malawi, Kenya, and Ghana as a response to the 2015 Millennium Development Goals
- Compiled and synthesized research into a 25-page research paper and presented research in a campus-wide poster presentation to over 40 faculty members and political science students

Nuclear Disarmament in the Post-Cold War Era, SJSU, Fall 2015
- Researched the history and progress of nuclear disarmament and compiled over 30 primary sources into a 15-page research paper
- Created a PowerPoint presentation and presented research findings to a class of 30 students

Research Assistant, Professor X, SJSU, Fall 2016 - Spring 2017
- Developed a 20-page Literature Review Guide for Professor X's Senior Project students
- Assisted in Literature Review research for Dr. X's publications on World Food Politics

Research Assistant, Professor Y, SJSU, Fall 2015 - Spring 2016
- Conducted database research on comparative factors that influence democracy amongst nations

TEACHING EXPERIENCE
Teaching Assistant (Intro to International Relations), SJSU, Spring 2015
- Assisted professor in leading discussions and in classroom management, creating an inclusive and productive learning environment for students
- Graded over 50 midterms and final exams and provided constructive feedback to students to help them learn and improve in the course
- Held office hours for 2 hours weekly to answer student questions and provide guidance on assignments and developing research topics

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE:
Intern California Senate Caucus, Communications Department, Summer 2014
- Wrote press briefings and articles for the Caucus website on recent events and policy achievements
- Conducted research for California State Senators to inform their policy decisions
- Monitored social media accounts and made weekly posts to increase user base
- Collaborated with campaign team to do precinct walks and make phone calls to potential voters

Model United Nations, September 2014 - May 2015
- Served as the Kuwaiti delegate for the OPEC Oil Crisis Historical Committee at the 2015 UC Berkeley Model United Nations Conference
- Sponsored the passing resolution on cholera containment as the Venezuelan representative in the World Health Organization at the 2014 UC Berkeley Model United Nations Conference

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Resident Advisor, San Jose State University Housing 2014-2015
- Developed a community of over 70 residents, serving as a role model and student leader in charge of student education, safety and well-being, resource referral, and social justice engagement
- Planned and facilitated weekly programming activities to increase student engagement and enhance the student experience

WORK EXPERIENCE
Waitress, Cheesecake Factory, San Jose, CA, 2016-2017
Barista, Starbucks Coffee, San Jose CA, 2013-2014

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE
House Building in Tijuana, Mexico, Summer 2015
- Travelled with a group of 40 church members to assemble over 5 houses for low-income families

Food Pantry, SJSU, San Jose, CA, 2014-2016
- Volunteered bi-monthly to organize food donations and serve meals to the homeless

AFFILIATIONS
Member, American Political Science Association 2016-2017
Member, Pi Sigma Alpha, San Jose State University 2015-2017
Member, AIESEC, San Jose State University 2016-2017

CONFERENCES
Social Justice Conference, San Jose State University Spring 2016
Women in Leadership Conference, San Jose, CA Fall 2016

TRAININGS
Introduction to Stata, San Jose State University Fall 2015
Social Inclusion and Diversity Training, San Jose State University Fall 2014
Sexual Assault Advocate Training, San Jose State University Fall 2014

HONORS and AWARDS:
Outstanding Senior Award for San Jose State Political Science Department Spring 2017
RA of the year Spring 2015
XYZ Scholarship 2014-2015

SKILLS
Computer: Stata, SPSS, Microsoft Office, Google Drive, Wordpress, Adobe Illustrator
Language: Fluent in English, Intermediate speaking and writing ability in Spanish

RESEARCH INTERESTS
International Security/ Terrorism
International Development
Regions: Middle East/North Africa and Eastern Europe

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Im A. Spartan
San Jose, CA 95192 | (408) 555-5555 | ima.spartan@gmail.com | linkedin.com/in/imaspartan

OBJECTIVE: Innovative and passionate business professional with 4 years of business management experience, training, and development skills. Experience working for mid and large sized corporations, looking to gain the necessary education and training at ABC University to further my expertise as a manager.

EDUCATION
Master of Business Administration, GPA: 3.9/4.0   May 20xx
San Jose State University, San Jose, CA

Bachelor of Science, Advertising, GPA: 3.6/4.0   20xx
San Jose State University, San Jose, CA

RELATED EXPERIENCE
Marketing Manager, Spike Software Inc., Palo Alto, CA   11/20xx-present
- Manage strategic marketing programs that support third-party partners, including VARS, solution
- providers, software developers, and trainers.
- Supervise staff of 25; department received award for efficiency and ingenuity.
- Collaborate with product sales managers to identify key partners needing focused support.
- Oversee and maintain product website to provide a core communication site to promote partner program and key partners.

Product Marketing Manager, Spike Software Inc., Palo Alto, CA   12/20xx-11/20xx
- Managed $15 million budget and direct mail lead generation program resulting in a five percent
- response rate.
- Developed innovative sales techniques to promote company products at tradeshows through direct mail campaigns and corporate sales.
- Implemented vertical marketing program to support the sales cycle in key markets.

Associate Product Manager, Spike Software Inc., Palo Alto, CA   6/20xx-12/20xx
- Performed the product release management function for tracking international launches.
- Collaborated and interfaced with manufacturing, marketing, engineering, and sales to
- track product releases.
- Managed BOM and SKU listing to ensure accuracy, reducing count by 40 percent.

Product Coordinator, Spike Software Inc., Palo Alto, CA   12/20xx-6/20x
- Supported a 20-person marketing group by organizing meetings and coordinating projects.
- Assured team members produced deliverables on time.
- Compiled weekly progress reports for product manager.

Marketing Specialist Contractor, XYZ Communications, Inc., San Jose, CA   4/20xx-12/20xx
- Managed five marketing projects related to sales tool development to support product launches, field sales efforts, and to educate customer base.
- Increased clients' sales by an average of 30%.

SKILLS
Technical: Microsoft Office Suite, Google Suite, Tableau
Languages: Bilingual, Spanish and English

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Personal Statement vs. Statement of Purpose

Aside from GPA and possibly an entrance exam, the personal statement or statement of purpose is a crucial element of the application. This is the only place where a candidate can explain their reasons for pursuing graduate studies and showcase who they are as a person to the admissions committee. It's important to write a personal statement or statement of purpose that reflects you in the most authentic way.

Although the purpose of both essays is to provide information about you to the admission's committee, there are a few differences between the two.

Personal Statement	Statement of Purpose
• Broader statement that allows the committee to get to know you by learning about your past	• Concise statement that allows the committee to get to know you by learning about your future
• Showcases your personality	• Showcases you as a suitable candidate for the school and program
• Shares your personal background and life experience	• Shares your academic or professional achievements and abilities
• Illuminates your personal challenges and goals	• Illuminates your career goals
• Explains what your reasons to pursue graduate studies are	• Explains how graduate studies will help you meet your future goals

Make sure to thoroughly read the prompt provided by your school and answer all items requested in your response. Below are a few do's and don'ts for personal statements & statements of purpose that will help guide you during this process.
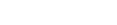
Do:	Avoid:
• Demonstrate your interest in the program by sharing personal experiences and providing specific examples.	• Using gimmicks, such as overpraising the school or using too much jargon (acronyms)
• Show you have the commitment and motivation to successfully complete the program.	• Generic introductory sentences, such as "I have always wanted to be a doctor" or "My only goals in life is..."
• Demonstrate that you are a well-rounded person.	• Discussing controversial or sensitive topics such as religion or politics
• Research the specific program you are applying to and understand the qualities that make this program unique and helpful to your career goals.	• Repeating accomplishment statements word-for-word from your resume
• Be confident and write about positive accomplishments.	• Overexaggerating your qualifications for the program

For additional help with your personal statement or statement of purpose, please see:

- Statementofpurpose.com
- EssayEdge.com
- Accepted.com
- "How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School"- Richard J. Stelzer, 1997 (PDF)
- Writing a Winning Personal Statement for Grad School - GoGrad

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Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are an important part of your graduate school application. They can serve as a testimonial of your work experience, motivation, and potential. Most schools require that you submit anywhere between two to four letters of recommendation.

Who to Request Letters of Recommendation from?

You want to request letters of recommendation from people who are familiar with your work ethic and with whom you've established a positive relationship with. Typically people you'd want to request a recommendation from are: professors, employers, advisors, or mentors. You want to choose individuals that know you well and who are able to write a strong letter that provides an evaluation of your academic/work performance, as well as your ability to succeed. Make sure to review your schools requirements, as some schools might specify which contacts you must submit a recommendation from.

Build Relationships Early

It's important that you begin building relationships with professors, employers, and advisors early on. Get to know your professors by attending their office hours, participate and ask questions during class, seek their guidance about your career path, or collaborate with them to do independent research. Set regular monthly check-ins with supervisors and advisors so that that they are up to date with your goals and accomplishments.

Requesting Letters of Recommendation

Below are some guidelines and tips to keep in mind when requesting letters of recommendation:

- Select a date you would like all letters to be completed and be clear on communicating the due date. It's helpful to give them a date before the actual deadline.

- Contact the people you would like to ask for letters of recommendation at least 1-2 months prior to your deadline to see if they're comfortable completing this task.

- Make sure to ask an extra person, in case one of the individuals you selected is not able to meet the deadline.

- Provide your letter writers with an overview of your experience and interest in the graduate program by providing a copy of your resume or CV, personal statement or statement of purpose, and a list of your career goals.

- Provide clear instructions on how to submit the letter of recommendation. If the writer needs to mail the letter directly to the school, make sure to provide them with a stamped and addressed envelope.

- Send a reminder 1-2 weeks from the selected date to those who have yet to submit.

- Write a thank you letter or email to all the individuals who completed a recommendation for you.

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Admissions Tests

Some graduate schools require applicants complete an admissions test as a part of the application process because it can be a good predictor of future success in graduate school. However, it is very important to check the admissions page of each school you are considering as the admission exams and other pre-requisites can vary.

Common admissions exams include:

- Graduate Records Exam (GRE): used by many social sciences graduate programs.
- Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT): for people looking to earn an MBA or other business-related graduate degree.
- Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)
- Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT)
- Pharmacy College Admissions Test (PCAT)
- Dental Admissions Test (DAT)

Exam Preparation Resources

Preparation for a graduate admissions exam can be very time-intensive.

1. Visit the admissions pages of your top schools to determine which test is required and the average scores earned by admitted students.
2. Familiarize yourself with the testing schedule, content, and possible retake policies.

Before you dive in and start studying every subject covered on the admissions test, it is best to seek out and take a practice exam.

- Free placement exams can often be found online or through the library. A practice test will allow you to identify areas of strength and weaknesses so that you can determine how much time you need to prepare and which subjects will require extra attention in order to earn the best possible score.

- Test preparation resources are available in many formats and price points. Whether or not you choose to use exam preparation books, in-person courses, or self-directed online materials, such as flashcards and apps, depends on your budget, motivation, time availability, and learning style.

Exam Preparation Timeline

How much time you should spend studying depends on many factors including:

- Your original practice test score
- Your target score
- How much improvement you hope to make

Admissions Interviews

Not all graduate programs require applicants to complete an admissions interview. However, it is valuable to know what to expect in case an interview is part of your application process.

There are a number of great online resources to utilize including Preparing for the Graduate Schools Interview by Idealist.

The following questions sum up the common themes that come up during admissions interviews:

- Why are you interested in this school vs others?
- What interests and experiences do you have that will make you a great addition to our school?
- What are your short and long term goals in the field?

For more information on common admissions interview questions and tips on how to best answer them, check out the Top 10 Graduate School Interview Questions from GradSchools.com.

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