

FIRST STEPS

- ✓ Consider: are you interested in pursuing an advanced degree in graduate school?
- ✓ Determine if graduate school is necessary for your chosen career.
- ✓ Consider why you want to attend graduate school and what you want to gain.

Is GRADUATE SCHOOL RIGHT FOR YOU?

Is a graduate degree needed for your professional and occupational goals, and are you passionate about the field? What can you do with a bachelor's degree in your chosen field? Talk to professors, advisors, and professionals in your field about career opportunities. Think about where you want to be in five or ten years. Will you need a graduate degree to reach your goals?

Have you decided on a specific career path? Keep in mind, graduate programs are typically very specialized and will not give you an opportunity to explore a variety of options.

How will your personal values and goals fit into graduate school life? Prioritize your values to make sure graduate school is a good fit. Depending on the degree you are working towards, be prepared to spend two or more years after your undergraduate degree working towards your goal.

Is the timing right? Some graduate programs require professional work experience before students are accepted into the program (e.g. MBA programs). Other schools grant acceptance to students who just completed a bachelor's degree. The most important thing would be if the timing is right for you. Do you want to take a few years off before applying to graduate school? Are you ready to commit the additional years required at this point in your life?

Assess yourself! Graduate programs differ greatly in their requirements and amount of faculty supervision. How are your stress management skills? Can you work well in a situation with little structure from professors? Are you self-motivated? What do you hope to gain by continuing your education? Answering these questions will help you determine if graduate school is right for you and which programs are best suited for you.

Online resources for more information:

- <http://www.princetonreview.com>
- <http://www.petersons.com>
- <http://www.kaplan.com>
- <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/grhome.htm>
- <http://www.gradschools.com>
- <http://www.graduateguide.com>

MU CAREER CENTER

Lower Level,
Student Success Center

 (573) 882-6801

 career.missouri.edu

 career@missouri.edu



MASTER'S AND DOCTORAL DEGREES EXPLAINED

The Master's Degree Student

As a master's student, you will typically spend about two years in graduate school, depending on your program of study. The purpose of this program is to give you a solid education in a specialized field of scholarship. Master's students may receive less financial aid than declared doctoral candidates do; it is important to check with each school and program to confirm available financial assistance packages.

Your first year. You will take courses that are similar in structure to your undergraduate classes. These classes are designed to build a foundation for future coursework. The workload is heavier, the course topics are more specific, and much more is expected. You may choose or be assigned an advisor at the beginning of your program. With your advisor's help, you will begin to develop an academic focus.

Your second year. You may take further courses to complete your degree requirements. You will direct more energy toward your concentration. Some programs may require you to complete at least one practicum or internship experience. These positions can be paid or unpaid and allow you to gain hands-on experience in your chosen field. Also, depending on the program, you will probably complete a master's thesis, a portfolio, a manuscript, or sit for comprehensive exams. The purpose of this is to demonstrate mastery in your field. Depending on your chosen field and profession, you may decide to continue your education and begin work on a doctorate.

Your third year. Your master's degree may require a third year of study, which is focused on finishing your thesis, doing an internship, or practical training. Dual master's programs commonly have a third year of study in order to complete the program. Be sure to check whether or not the programs you are applying to require additional years and use this as a factor when deciding on a degree program.

The Doctoral Degree Student

The doctoral candidate typically spends four to seven years at graduate school. The purpose of the program is to give you extensive knowledge of your field, train you to do original and meaningful research, and prepare you to function as a member of a teaching and research faculty.

Your first two to three years. You will take courses to satisfy your degree requirements and gain a broad knowledge of the field. If you are fortunate, you will gain valuable experience by securing a research or teaching assistantship. You will gradually focus your research interests, working with an advisor in your area of interest who is usually appointed at the beginning of your program. At the end of your second or third year, you will take comprehensive exams and possibly start preparing a dissertation topic. The exams will help demonstrate your qualifications to continue with your doctoral work. A previously completed master's degree may replace some of this coursework.

The last two to three years. Coursework becomes a much smaller part of your academic work, and may end altogether as you work at conceptualizing and completing your doctoral dissertation. Your dissertation must constitute a new and meaningful contribution to knowledge in your field. Depending on your focus, you will teach classes, and may even teach a course of your own design. You will collaborate increasingly with faculty members, who may rely on you for research and inform you of their own work. You will probably become closely associated with a single professor who will become your dissertation director. Your program culminates in the completion of your dissertation, which may include an oral defense of your work before a faculty committee.

PREPARING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

Things to Think About and Ask

Where do you want to study? Do you want to be on a coastline or in the Midwest? Geographic location is important because you will be living there for at least two years.

How much does the school cost? What forms of financial aid are available? Are graduate assistantships or fellowships available? How reliable is financial support from year to year?

What types of degrees (e.g. Master of Arts, Master of Science, Doctoral) are offered at the university and through the specific program/department (e.g. Psychology)? For example, if you want a Master of Arts or a Master of Education, are those options available at that institution?

What is the emphasis of the program? Is it on practice or research?

What are the program requirements? Do you have to complete a thesis, dissertation, manuscript, practicum, or exit exams?

What are the professors' interests? Are they similar to your own?

How is your advisor assigned? Do you select your advisor or is that choice made for you?

Talk to current students if possible. Are their interests and experiences similar to your own? Are these people you want to spend a lot of time with? What do they like about the program?

Where are graduates from the program employed? What kind of assistance does the school provide in helping you find a job upon graduation?

Is practical experience possible? Can you gain experience through internships or a practicum?

Visit the school you are applying to. Can you picture yourself at that school and in that city?

Does your experience meet the program requirements? How selective is the program?

FUNDING GRADUATE SCHOOL

Graduate school can be expensive; however, financial aid is available in several forms. Depending on your program and school, you may qualify for scholarships, fellowships, grants, assistantships, loans, and more.

Fellowships are designed to encourage study in your area. Applications are generally available from departments or agencies. Fellowships vary and may include tuition and a stipend. They usually require full-time enrollment.

Assistantships are teaching, research, and other staff positions that usually include tuition, a stipend, and some benefits. At MU, applications can be obtained from your department or you can find these opportunities on HireMizzouTigers.

Scholarships are awarded to incoming graduate students with proven academic records of achievement and typically focus on a specific area of study. Applications are generally available from departments or agencies.

Federal Stafford Loans can be subsidized (the government pays the interest while you're in school) or unsubsidized (you pay all the interest, although the payments can be deferred until after graduation) and have variable interest rates.

Federal Perkins Loans are subsidized loans with low interest rates.

Private or Alternative Loans are made by private lenders and have variable interest rates. They generally cost more than federal loans.

To apply for federal aid, you must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Your school may also require this to apply for scholarships and other forms of aid.

Many students have to borrow money, but remember that it is an investment in your future. For more information on your financial aid options, visit:

- <https://fafsa.ed.gov/>
- <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sites/default/files/graduate-professional-funding-info.pdf>
- <http://financialaid.missouri.edu/graduate-students/index.php>
- <http://www.finaid.org>
- <http://www.fastweb.com>

Program Specific Sites

Business/MBA programs

US News & World Report

<https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-business-schools>

Provides a comprehensive ranking of graduate law programs by discipline.

Poets&Quants

<http://poetsandquants.com/>

Offers comprehensive information about rankings, schools, admission, and many other resources.

Law Schools

Business Insider

<http://www.businessinsider.com/best-law-schools-us-2016-7>

Ranks top 50 law schools and provides information on location, job placement, bar pass rate, and median LSAT scores.

Best Law Schools - U.S. News & World Report

<http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools>

Ranks schools by law specialties and gives information on applying.

Medical School/Healthcare Programs

FindTheBest

<http://medical-schools.findthebest.com/>

Compare medical schools based on ranking, tuition, admission, academics, size, and location.

Health Care & Public Health Graduate Programs

<http://www.gradschools.com/programs/healthcare-public-health>

Provides grad programs based on subject, program type, and location.

TIMETABLE FOR APPLYING

Before junior year

- Gain experience in your interest area through involvement in research, organizations, internships, jobs, etc.
- Get to know faculty members and think about who would be willing to write letters of recommendation for you.

During junior year

- Begin researching graduate programs and deciding where you would like to apply.
- Look up information for each program through the university's catalog often listed on the university website, including the suggested course of study and required classes.
- Determine program admission requirements, test requirements and dates, application deadlines, etc.

Summer before senior year

- Meet with advisors, faculty members, and career counselors to discuss programs.
- Sign up for required standardized tests and practice for them.
- Take the necessary standardized tests for your programs.

September and October of senior year

- Write a draft of your statement of purpose including qualifications, career goals, and areas of interest within the field of study.
- Research financial aid sources, fellowships, and assistantships.
- Request letters of recommendation from faculty members and former employers from related jobs. Make sure they are individuals who know you well and will be able to write a strong, positive letter for you. Provide these people with your personal statement and résumé.

November and December of senior year

- Order official transcripts from the Registrar's Office. Be sure to request transcripts from all of the schools from which you have earned college credit, including hours obtained while in high school.
- Finalize your statement of purpose according to the question(s) asked on the applications.
- Submit all application materials to ensure all due dates are met (e.g. if you need to mail a reference letter or transcript)
- Apply for fellowships and assistantships.

January through March of senior year

- Contact the schools about the possibility of visiting or scheduling an interview.
- Fill out the FAFSA form.

April of senior year

- Discuss acceptances, rejections, and other career options with a faculty member, advisor, or a member of your college's career services office.
- Notify schools as to your decision to accept or decline admission.

GRADUATE EXAMS

Although not all graduate programs require applicants to take entrance exams, many do. The main exams for graduate and professional programs are:

GRE (Graduate Records Examination). Used for admittance into a variety of graduate programs. It has three parts: verbal, quantitative, and analytical writing. Each part is used to measure your ability in different areas. The GRE also offers subject tests. Visit <http://www.ets.org/gre/> for more information.

GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test). Used by business schools to assess the qualifications of applicants for advanced study in business and management. It measures verbal, quantitative, analytical writing, and integrated reasoning. Visit <http://www.gmac.com> for more information.

LSAT (Law School Admissions Test). Required for admittance into law school. It tests verbal and reasoning skills. Visit <http://www.lsac.org> for more information.

MCAT (Medical College Admission Test). Required for admission into medical school. It assesses problem-solving, critical thinking, and writing skills in addition to knowledge of scientific concepts and principles. Visit <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/> for more information.

PCAT (Pharmacy College Admission Test). Identifies qualified applicants for admission into pharmacy school. It measures general academic ability and scientific knowledge necessary for pharmaceutical education. Visit <http://www.pcatweb.info> for more information.

DAT (Dental Admission Test). Required when applying to dental schools. It measures knowledge in natural science, perceptual ability, reading comprehension, and quantitative reasoning. Visit <http://www.ada.org/en/education-careers/dental-admission-test/> for more information.

MAT (Miller Analogies Test). Used by some graduate programs to assist in their admission process. It is a standardized test of verbal analogies. Visit <http://www.milleranalogies.com> for more information.

OAT (Optometry Admission Test). The OAT is a battery consisting of the following four individual tests: the Survey of the Natural Sciences, Reading Comprehension Test, Physics Test, and Quantitative Reasoning Test. Visit <http://www.ada.org/en/OAT> for more information.

How do I pick a test date? Determine the application deadlines for the schools to which you are applying and then work backwards from your earliest deadline. Some exams can be taken at any time of the year while other exams are only offered a few times per year or have restrictions as to how many times they can be taken. To determine when and where a particular test is offered, visit its website and talk with the professionals at Testing Services.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

There are numerous resources available to help you prepare for graduate school entrance exams. For professional help, companies such as Kaplan and The Princeton Review offer classes and personal tutoring sessions. If you would rather study on your own, these companies, as well as others, have books and computer programs available for purchase. Moreover, many companies guarantee that their classes and products will improve your score, so take advantage of what is available!

The following resources are available to help you prepare for and take graduate exams:

Off-Campus Resources

The Princeton Review

Phone: 1-866-877-7737

Website: <https://www.princetonreview.com/>

Small classes are offered in person, online, or with personal tutorials. Free online course demos are also available.

Kaplan

Phone: 1-800-KAPTEST Website:

<https://kaplan.com/>

Classes are offered in person, online, or with a personal tutor. Practice exams are available online. Kaplan exam preparation software is available for purchase.

Educational Testing Services

Phone: (609) 921-9000 Website:

<http://www.ets.org/>

Information about tests is available online.

Peterson's

<https://www.petersons.com/>

Practice questions and general test information on the website. You can also search for schools and get information about how to get into school and how to finance school.

Writing Personal Statements

<https://www.e-education.psu.edu/writingpersonalstatementsonline/node/1984>

Personal statements and application essays are among the most difficult and most important documents that will ever be written. You can count on this website to help you grow and thrive in the process.

NEXT STEPS

- ✓ Come to the MU Career Center to talk with someone about your career planning and to get more information about advanced degrees.
- ✓ Visit <https://career.missouri.edu> and click on the "Resources" Tab to visit [Mizzou Career Tools](#), where you can search our site for career guides, videos, links, infographics, and more!