



APPLYING TO GRADUATE/ PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

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WHAT DEGREES ARE THERE?

Graduate Degrees include:

- M.S. = Master of Science
- M.A. = Master of Arts
- M.B.A. = Master of Business Administration
- Ph.D. = Doctor of Philosophy
- Sc.D. = Doctor of Science
- M.D. = Doctor of Medicine
- D.D.S = Doctor of Dental Surgery
- D.V.M. = Doctor of Veterinary Medicine
- J.D. = Juris Doctor
- L.L.M. = Master of Laws
- J.S.D. = Doctor of the Science of Law
- And others!

STEPS TO GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

Step 1: What is graduate school like and do I really want to go? Some things to consider:

- Does your career field require an advanced degree?
 - Do you have a strong interest in the field of study and in obtaining an increased knowledge base?
 - Are you enthusiastic about continuing your education?
 - Are faculty encouraging you to pursue advanced education based on your academic abilities?
 - Will an advanced degree improve your chances for a better salary & job opportunities?
- OR
- Are you considering graduate school because you feel you will have no job opportunities with your undergraduate major?
 - Are you postponing a difficult job market? Don't feel ready to enter the working world? Will you be academically overqualified without experience for a first job?

Keep in mind: Are your reasons sound ones? Do you really want/need to go to graduate school? These are good questions to be thinking about and discussing. You may make an appointment with a Villanova career counselor as a sounding board as well as professors and targeted industry professionals as you research your options.

Step 2: Research & Discuss Options

- Discuss possible programs with your advisor, professors, deans, counselors etc. It isn't only the name of the school that matters; it is the department's reputation and often research that matters too.
- Decide on what type of program you are interested in (see list of questions to ask schools to get an idea of what kinds of options there are).
- Utilize graduate school reference books and catalogues (at the Villanova Career Services Office, Falvey Library, online, as well as your local book store.)
- Check into accreditation, assistantships (teaching/research/administrative), fellowships and financial aid.
- Contact schools directly for additional information and answers to specific questions.
- Apply to a workable number of programs (average: approximately 6)
- Applying to graduate school is much like applying to colleges in this way: you want to apply to a few 'reach' schools, a few schools you will be relatively competitive to get into, and a few schools you feel you have a good chance of getting into.
- Specific resources when researching:
 - Professors – they know the departmental reputations!
 - Peterson's Guides (Career Services Office)
 - Searching online through professional associations
 - Other students and Alumni
 - Academic Journals in your field – the best programs are usually producing the most articles – find a research focus that interests you.
 - Graduate School Open Houses/Fairs – ask programs about these – and sometimes they'll waive your application fee if you attend!
 - For more tips, see Don Asher's Book: "Graduate Admissions Essays: Write Your Way Into The Graduate School of Your Choice" available in the Career Services Office.

Step 3: Check Admissions Requirements

- Confirm undergraduate course requirements/proper prerequisites.
- Determine the required graduate test (will be noted in Peterson's Graduate Guide as well as at the academic institutions online site).
 - **GRE** (Graduate Record Examination): primarily required by arts & science, engineering, nursing programs, etc.
 - **GMAT** (Graduate Management Admission Test): primarily required by business and management programs.
 - **MAT** (Miller Analogy Test): accepted by some social science/humanities programs; given by VU's Counseling Center.
 - Please note that some programs may require other exams, so check the admissions requirements of the schools you are interested in.
- Identify number and types of references needed.
 - Open credentials file, which will hold and send your letters of recommendation for you, at the CSO; your transcript can be added to your file by contacting Registrar's Office.
- Meet deadline and registration dates.

Step 4: Compile and Submit Applications (see excel spread sheet addendum)

- FOLLOW EACH SCHOOL'S DIRECTIONS!
- Your admissions essay or personal statement (if required) should meet all of the specific parameters such as length and set-up. It will probably be revised a few times before you send it. Have someone proofread your essay.
- Double check all your application materials before sending; including letters of recommendation, transcripts, written statements, and any other additional forms.
- Photocopy what you send and date them (for your records.)
- Attempt to send all materials together.
- Contact the school to verify that your application has arrived.

INTERVIEWS:

Some schools interview potential candidates as a part of their admissions process. To prepare, a practice interview can help to develop your interviewing skills. Practice interviews with a counselor in CSO will help you to better discuss and sell your skills and abilities.

APPLYING TO PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

The procedure for applying to professional schools (law and medicine, pharmacy, etc.) is relatively similar to those for applying to graduate school. Provided below is additional information specific to law and medical schools.

LAW SCHOOL

- **Make an appointment with Dave Leibig, the Pre-Law Advisor in CSO by calling 610-519-4060.**
- The LSAT (Law School Admission Test) is required by most law schools. LSAT information, application materials and the LSDAS (Law School Data Assembly Service) is found in the Law Services Information Book (LSIB). Instructions in this handbook need to be followed thoroughly. Students need to register with LSDAS.
- Utilize the law literature in the CSO library.
- Join the student run Pre-Law Society.
- Sit in on a class at Villanova's Law School.

MEDICAL SCHOOL

- **Students interested in medical school should speak with Dr. John Friede, Biology Professor/Pre-Med Advisor (118 Mendel, 610-519-4833)**
- Begin the process as early as possible!!
- Most programs in medicine require the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test.)
- Consult the medical school information found in the CSO's library.

GRADUATE SCHOOL CHECKLIST

It is important to start gathering information early in order to be able to complete your applications on time. Most people should start the process a full year and a half before their anticipated date of matriculation. There are, however, some exceptions to this rule.

- Application deadlines may range from August (before your senior year) to later Spring/Summer (during your senior year). *Most deadlines for the fall's entering class are between December and March.* You should, in all cases, plan to meet formal deadlines; beyond this, you should be aware of the fact that many schools with rolling admissions encourage and act upon early applications.

SIX MONTHS PRIOR TO APPLYING:

- Research areas of interest, institutions and programs.
- Talk to your advisor and professors about interests and application requirements.
- Register and prepare for appropriate graduate admission tests.
- Investigate national scholarships.
- If appropriate, obtain letters of recommendation.
- Contact school for application materials.

THREE MONTHS PRIOR TO APPLYING:

- Take required admissions tests.
- Visit institutions of interest, if possible.
- Write your application essay.
- Check on application deadlines and rolling admission policies.
- Register for the national application or data assembly service most programs use, if needed for medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry, or law school.

FALL, ONE YEAR BEFORE BEGINNING YOUR GRADUATE PROGRAM:

- Obtain letters of recommendation.
- Take graduate admission tests if you have not already done so.
- Send in completed applications.

JANUARY, BEFORE MATRICULATING IN THE FALL:

- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the CSS Financial Aid PROFILE, if required. Do this as early in January if possible!

SPRING, BEFORE MATRICULATING IN THE FALL:

- Check with all institutions before the deadline to make sure your file is complete.
- Visit the institutions that accept you.
- Send a deposit to your institution of choice.
- Notify other colleges and universities that accepted you of your decision so that they may admit students on their waiting list.
- Send thank-you notes to people who wrote your recommendation letters, informing them of your success.

Note: You may not be able to adhere to this timetable if your application deadlines are very early, as is the case with medical schools, or if you decided to attend graduate school at the last minute. In any case, keep in mind the various application requirements and be sure to meet all deadlines. If deadlines are impossible for you to meet, call the institution to determine if a late application will be considered.

(Adapted from Peterson's Graduate & Professional Programs: An Overview 1996)

ADDITIONAL TIPS:

There is no one general rule that applies to all graduate programs; program details should be checked out on a case-by-case basis. Begin the graduate and professional school search and application process early! (junior year or early senior year).

- Stay organized... maintain a log of your activities by institution/program....plan ahead....give yourself time.
- Attend graduate school fairs and other activities at which program information is readily available.
- Do not hesitate to contact graduate and professional programs, directly, if you have any questions.
- Gather your letters of recommendation early (you should have at least one faculty member); give your references sufficient time to write your letters. You may need to be persistent in following up with references to ensure they have written your letter. If a school sends their own form, ask them if your letters may be on Villanova stationery.
- Have other people proofread your written essay (i.e. faculty member, Writing Center staff member, CSO Counselor, etc.)

BE AN EDUCATED CONSUMER: QUESTIONS TO ASK GRADUATE PROGRAMS

(Adapted from works by Don Asher, *Graduate Admission Essays*, and the University of Pennsylvania website.)

Program Details:

- Is your program accredited? (depends on what you are studying)
- What is the most typical class size for your graduating class? Are classes restricted to graduates or are undergraduates common in your graduate classes?
- What is the % of the class that comes to you with prior work/life experience beyond their undergraduate degree?
- Are students expected to work on a professor's research or pursue their own?
- What is your attrition rate?
- What does one need to be considered a strong candidate for admission *and* success in your program?
- May I contact a currently enrolled student?

Educational Philosophy:

- What theoretical framework does your program follow?
- Is your approach more theory-based or applied?
- How much interaction with faculty can I expect?
- Would I be able to download a syllabus to see how a typical class is constructed?

Graduation Requirements:

- How long of a program is this? How many credits?
- Are there opportunities to complete this program part-time? What % of your student body completes their degree part-time?
- Does the program require a practicum or experiential learning? How many hours? Are students expected to find their own placement site?
- Does the program require a thesis or a comprehensive exam?

Student Life:

- Is there a sense of cohort amongst your program?
- What is the demographic make-up of your program's student body?
- What is the cost of living in this area?
- What are your housing options?
- What is a day in the life of a student like? When are classes scheduled and how do students typically manage their time?

Career Development:

- What is the breakdown of where students go from your program?
- Where do students take these jobs?
- What opportunities exist for networking?

Financial Aid:

- How do your students typically fund their education?
- Will I automatically be considered for financial aid? Are there any important deadlines that I should be aware of in your financial aid process?
- What types of aid are available? Are there any particular grants that students in this program seek?
- What is the stipend range?
- What is the process for applying for assistantships and fellowships?
- Do students have to compete for funding? What are the criteria for how it is given?

Specific Questions for a PhD Candidate:

- Do you offer full funding via assistantships to all admitted students?
- What is the average time frame for completing the PhD program?
- What percentage of students in the program complete the PhD?
- Explain the dissertation process and how professors support students on this major project?
- What percentage of students find opportunities in academia?
- What are some examples of non-traditional careers where your students find opportunities?

DON ASHER'S ADVICE ON APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL**Applying to Schools**

- Identify 20 Schools and group them into 3 categories – Safe, Probably/Maybe, and Reach.
- Apply to Grad Schools 30 to 90 days before the application deadline
- Most schools respond to applicants before April 15th. If come April 7th you haven't heard anything, call to say you're still interested.

Preparing to write Statement of Purpose

- Review your background
- Make a list of things that are unusual or unique about yourself
- Recall the moment you decided to go to Graduate school: where were you and who was there
- Recall the time you realized what would be involved.

What to include in the Statement of Purpose

- Use Grad level language and working titles of undergraduate work
- Name academic advisors and individuals who have supervised you as well as major thinkers in the field.
- Talk about how your interests align with the work of faculty at the school
- Mention any special activities or work you will be completing during your Senior Year
- In closing, assume you will be admitted (predict success!) and talk about your mission for the future.

How to obtain Letters of Recommendation

- As a Senior, don't seek just a letter, seek advice and counsel.
- Ask a professor if he/she would be comfortable making a strong recommendation for you and what they will be able to say about you.
- When meeting with the professor, bring transcripts, graded papers or labs, a resume, list of schools of interest, rough draft of statement, and have a list of talking points for the recommendation.

3 Ways to Standout

- Write to faculty at schools of interest
- Visit the Department of interest
- Submit an outstanding work sample

From Don Asher's Book "Graduate Admissions Essays – Write Your Way into the Graduate School of Your Choice" available for review in the Career Services Office.

Additional Tips and Resources

Additional grad school Internet links are available on the Villanova Career Services website:
careers.villanova.edu

