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*Graduate school information is available in the Honors Program Office. Other helpful sources include your academic department, career coaches in the Career Center and the websites listed in this handout.*

## How do I decide if I should go to graduate school?

*Graduate school may be a good idea for you if:*

- An advanced degree is necessary to attain your career goals.
- Graduate school would broaden your skills in ways that other certification and workshops would not.
- You have had internship experiences in the field to support your interest in pursuing further education and a full-time career upon completion of a graduate degree.
- You are highly motivated and desire responsibility; you enjoy and perform well in an academic environment.

*Graduate school may not be a good idea if:*

- You are trying to postpone a career decision or avoid employment.
- You are responding to outside pressures from peers, family or faculty.
- Graduate school seems like a "safe" alternative to looking for a job.
- You are expecting to make more money or be assured job security from a graduate degree.

## How do I evaluate graduate programs?

*Research graduate programs carefully to select the one that fits best with your individual goals and needs. Selected factors to consider when evaluating graduate programs include:*

- Your interests, abilities and values
- Reputation of the institution and/or program
- Location
- Cost/funding
- Size of institution/program
- Opportunities for research
- Likelihood of employment upon graduation

One of the best ways to evaluate a graduate program is to visit the institution and talk with faculty, staff and current students. The following websites may also be helpful in your research:

- [www.graduateguide.com](http://www.graduateguide.com)
- [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)

## Where do I find information about standardized tests?

- *DAT (Dental Admission Test):* [www.ada.org/dat](http://www.ada.org/dat)
- *GRE (Graduate Record Examination):* [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org)
- *GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test):* [www.mba.com](http://www.mba.com)
- *LSAT (Law School Admission Test):* [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org)
- *MCAT (Medical College Admission Test):* [www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/](http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/)

## What is the timeline for applying to graduate schools?

*If you intend to enter graduate school immediately after completing your bachelor's degree, the timeline below provides a general overview for the application process. However, admission requirements vary greatly among institutions, so make sure you read all application materials carefully and meet all stated deadlines.*

### Junior year

- Fall/Spring:
  - Research your areas of interest and graduate programs in your field.
  - Discuss the application process with advisors.
  - Sign up for required standardized tests and prepare by taking practice exams. Free test preparation materials are often provided on the test websites.
- Summer:
  - Visit the institutions you are considering. Meet with faculty, staff and current graduate students in your program of interest.
  - Take any required standardized tests to allow time for a retake, if necessary.
  - Check application deadlines for admission and financial aid.
  - Research financial aid sources, fellowships and assistantships.
  - Create a draft of your personal statement to submit with your applications.

### Senior year

- September: revise your personal statement based on feedback from an advisor or career coach.
- October: apply for fellowships or assistantships if applicable.
- November:
  - Finalize your personal statement/writing sample.
  - Request letters of recommendation from faculty members and provide addressed envelopes and any required forms. (Faculty can find helpful tips for writing letters of recommendation at: [www.calvin.edu/career/faculty](http://www.calvin.edu/career/faculty)).
- December: finish and mail applications; confirm that your letters of recommendation have been completed.
- February-April: make campus visits to schools where you have been admitted, if possible.
- April: make your decision.

## How do I write a personal statement or an application essay?

*Your personal statement/essay serves as a sample of your writing ability and should distinguish you from other applicants. Some institutions provide specific questions for applicants to answer in a personal statement. If institutions do not provide specific questions, your personal statement should cover the following general areas:*

- Goals: How does your education and experience connect with your future career goals? What has influenced your decision to attend graduate school?
- Uniqueness: What makes you unique? How can you contribute to the program's diversity?
- Abilities: What strengths and abilities do you have that will benefit the institution and program while you are a student and after you graduate?

*Other considerations for writing a personal statement:*

- Give direction to your personal statement by using a theme or thesis, which is the main point you want to communicate throughout the essay.
- Make an outline of each paragraph before writing it.
- Use concrete examples from your life to support your thesis.
- Adequately address each component of the question(s) on the application.
- Vary your sentence structure (i.e., don't start all of your sentences with "I").
- Meet with a career coach for assistance if you are not sure how to get started, or if you want feedback on a rough draft.