

Graduate School

Informational Packet



Academic Success
and Career Center

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

WHY SHOULD I ATTEND GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL?

If you are considering graduate or professional school ask yourself these questions:

- What are your career goals? Does your desired career path require a graduate degree?
- Will your job and salary prospects be enhanced by graduate studies?
- What is the cost of attendance for graduate or professional school?
- Will your employer assist in paying for your graduate education?

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR?

Factors to consider in selecting a program:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Location | • Admission requirements |
| • Similar research interests | • Resources |
| • Well-known faculty | • Cost of tuition |
| • Accreditation | • Career assistance |
| • Ranking | • Placement |

WHERE SHOULD I LOOK?

Resources for finding the right graduate program:

- **Peterson's Guide to Graduate Study**
A comprehensive online and print resource for finding a graduate program. This tool allows you to search by program name, major, location, or other keywords. Peterson's also includes useful articles, scholarship information, test prep, and other helpful services. <https://www.petersons.com/graduate-school>
- **Guide to American Graduate Schools**
A complete, up-to-date graduate school manual. This guide includes over 1,250 accredited institution profiles, admission standards and requirements, tuition costs, and scholarship information.
- **NASPA Graduate Program Directory**
A wide-ranging online directory of graduate schools. Each program listing includes program and curriculum description, admission requirements, learning outcomes, faculty and student information, and institutional contact information.
<https://www.naspa.org/careers/graduate/graduate-program-directory>

Other helpful tips:

- Review graduate catalogs
- Talk with graduate school admissions representatives
- Visit campuses and talk with current students and faculty members
- Check out WSU's graduate school programs online at <https://gradschool.wsu.edu>
- Attend WSU Graduate School Workshops on preparing for Graduate School.
<https://gradschool.wsu.edu/imagine-beyond/>
- Attend "What Comes Next? Applying to Graduate and Professional School" Workshop

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

The application forms should be treated with great care and attention to detail. Your application is the picture of yourself that you want to present to the selection committee. *Remember to tailor your application for each program to which you are applying.*

What you need to do to be a successful applicant:

A. Entrance Examinations

Almost all graduate schools require an entrance exam. Generally, these exams are used as part of the screening process, so take the time to prepare to do well. Some of the most common entrance examinations are listed below.

GRE	GMAT	LSAT	MCAT
<p>The GRE is a very common entrance examination in that it is not area specific. It consists of three sections, analytical writing, verbal reasoning, and quantitative reasoning.</p> <p>In addition to the GRE, there may be a requirement that you complete a subject specific test such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Biology· Chemistry· Literature/English· Mathematics· Physics· Psychology	<p>The GMAT is specific to business and management programs. It consists of four sections; analytical writing, verbal skills, quantitative skills, and integrated reasoning.</p>	<p>The LSAT is designed to measure skills that are considered essential for success in law school: the reading and comprehension of complex texts; the organization and management of information and the ability to draw reasonable inferences from it; the ability to think critically; and the analysis and evaluation of the reasoning and arguments of others.</p>	<p>The MCAT is a standardized, multiple-choice examination designed to assess the examinee's problem solving, critical thinking, and knowledge of science concepts and principles prerequisite to the study of medicine. Scores are reported in four sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Biological and Biochemical Foundations in Living Systems· Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems· Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior· Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills
<p>GRE website: https://www.ets.org/gre</p>	<p>GMAT website: https://www.mba.com/ocp/the-gmat-exam.aspx</p>	<p>LSAT website: https://www.lsac.org/jd/lsat/about-the-lsat</p>	<p>MCAT website: https://www.mba.com/ocp/the-gmat-exam.aspx</p>

B. Personal Statement

The personal statement or autobiographical essay is one of the most important items in the application. This is where you tell the committee about yourself, the attributes that make you a unique individual and how you stand out among the other applicants. On average personal statements will be around 2-3 pages. Your personal statement is where you discuss how well you fit in the program.

What to discuss in a personal statement:

- Future career aspirations
- How the program will help you meet your goal
- What professors you would like to work with and how their research fits with yours
- Any experience or research you have conducted
- Aspects of the program that appeal to you
- How you can grow in the program and what you would contribute back

The Purdue Online Writing Lab is a great resource for writing a comprehensive personal statement <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/969/01/>

C. Letters of Recommendation

Strong letters of recommendation are an essential element of your application. Ask professors, employers, and extra-curricular advisors who know you and your work to write these letters. It is highly recommended to provide them with a copy of your personal statement and career objective statement. Make sure you check to see if the school has preferred recommenders. For example some programs require mostly academic references while others ask for only extra-curricular or work related recommendations. Also be sure to provide clear instructions to your recommenders on how to submit their letters.

D. Official Transcripts

Each school requires official transcripts to be sent directly from your previous University or Institution. For official transcript requests from WSU, stop by the Office of the Registrar at French Administration 346 or visit <https://transcripts.wsu.edu>.

E. The Interview Process

Many graduate and professional schools require a selection interview. The interview is your opportunity to learn more about the program, but more importantly, for the committee to learn more about you! You can prepare by visiting the school's website, examining faculty research, and learning the program's philosophy and training objectives. It may be helpful to practice before the interview. Things to remember:

- Come prepared with any materials that the program requires of you (resume, CV)
- Know where the interview is taking place in advance
- Come with a typed list questions that you have about the program

COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions admission committees ask you:

Why did you choose this field?
Why did you choose this specific program? What attracted you to our program?
What qualities do you have that would make you a good candidate for our program?
How has your prior work experience prepared you for this program?
What faculty would you be interested in working with and why?
What lab do you see yourself working in and why?
What insight do you hope to gain from your chosen research?

Questions to ask faculty:

What are the research interests of individual faculty members?
Do you see the research interest of the program changing?
Can I conduct my own research?
Are students expected to fund their own research?
Are faculty members open and/or available to conduct research with students?
Are graduate assistantships available? If so, what percentage of the assistantships are research assistantships and what percentage are teaching assistantships?
What jobs have recent graduates been able to obtain after leaving the program?
What percentages of graduates gain full-time employment immediately after leaving the program?
What can I do during my time here to increase my chances of becoming employed before graduation?

Questions to ask about the program:

How long does it take the average student to complete this program? What factors would make this timeframe shorter or longer?
How many students have successfully completed this program?
What makes your program stand out from similar programs offering this degree?
How much attention is placed on research, teaching, and prior professional experience?
Is there a part-time or online option available to graduate from this program?
What is the academic reputation of this program?
What specific journals am I expected to publish in as a graduate student?
What percentage of students choose not to complete this program and why?
Are there any questions that I should be asking about graduate programs that I have not asked?

HOW TO PREPARE FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

At school:

- ☐ Build relationships with many faculty members
- ☐ Meet with your advisor for program planning and/or course selection
- ☐ Get involved! Join extracurricular activities including professional student organizations
- ☐ Inquire about and conduct undergraduate research
- ☐ Ask about job opportunities that are available through your school
- ☐ Contact the professors you would like to write your letters of recommendation (target well-respected professors in your field)

Outside of school:

- ☐ Take prep courses for your entrance exam (GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT, etc.)
- ☐ Use the WSU library resources for test prep
- ☐ Gain a relevant summer internship, part- or full-time job, and/or a relevant volunteer experience
- ☐ Contact the most highly-ranked person in your academic department or industry who knows your professional caliber for a recommendation letter
- ☐ Contact ALL schools to which you are interested in applying, to network and find out what makes applicants stand out
- ☐ Talk to students in ALL schools that you are interested in applying for their perspectives
- ☐ Conduct informational interviews with people who have the job you want
- ☐ Develop your personal statement
- ☐ Find out how to order a transcript

Things to keep in mind:

- ☐ Keep your GPA as high as possible
- ☐ You may have to take the entrance exam more than once. Start test prep early!
- ☐ Start the application process during the summer
- ☐ Take note of all application deadlines
- ☐ Review program requirements
- ☐ Find out what would make you stand out from other applicants.
- ☐ Volunteer to do a campus visit before the decision
- ☐ Complete the optional interview
- ☐ Were former graduates of the program able to get the type of position you would like?
- ☐ Review the cost of living where the school is located
- ☐ Do you have enough personal savings to live the lifestyle you desire in graduate school?
- ☐ Determine the full cost of attending graduate school in different areas of the country (i.e., housing, travel, food, lifestyle changes, etc.)
- ☐ Keep hidden costs in mind (i.e., cost of conferences, professional membership fees, etc.)

Graduate School Application Checklist



Program Name											
1.		Request Application Fee Waivers									
2.		Application Deadline									
3.		Application Fee Paid									
4.		Transcripts Sent									
5.		Letters of Recommendation Sent (3)									
		Thank You Letters Sent									
		Date Application Submitted									
		Deadline for Selection									

GRADUATE SCHOOL SELECTION AND DECISION CHART

Personal Criteria may include: Assistantship opportunities, research opportunities, faculty, location, etc. In the columns below list your top 10 criteria and then rank each program on a 1 (does not meet your need at all) to 10 (fully meets your need) scale. After you have made additional inquiries and have ascertained what the program offers and its fit with your personal criteria, add up all of the numbers and give each school a final ranking.

	PERSONAL CRITERIA										Final Ranking
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	
School Name											

GRADUATE SCHOOL GLOSSARY

Assistantship:	A form of financial aid in which the graduate student is paid for work performance. This work is often related to the student's studies or area of specialization. Two types of assistantships are normally offered, a research assistantship or "RA" pays a student to assist a professor on an experiment or research project and a teaching assistantship or "TA" pays a student to teach or to help grade papers and examinations.
Committees:	<p>(1) Admissions Committee: This committee considers applications for graduate school.</p> <p>(2) Thesis/Dissertation or Examination Committee: This committee, usually chosen by the graduate student, helps the student plan the thesis/dissertation or determines the general content of the qualifying examination for the final thesis/dissertation defense.</p>
Defense:	This is the final examination on a graduate student's dissertation, and the final requirement for the Ph.D.
Director of Graduate Study or Graduate Advisor:	The faculty member in a department who is responsible for disseminating information about the graduate program, answering questions from the applicants, and advising graduate students who have not yet selected a dissertation topic.
Discipline:	A broad field of study such as psychology, physics, or English.
Dissertation:	The independent project conducted by a graduate student after completing coursework and general examinations. The dissertation will vary in form and length depending on the discipline and nature of the research project; it usually requires one to three years to complete. The dissertation is supposed to show mastery of knowledge and research tools, and should contribute something new to the discipline in which it is written.
Doctorate:	Another word for the Ph.D. or Doctor of Philosophy degree. Those who earn the Ph.D. are entitled to use the title "Doctor."
(GAPSFAS):	The Graduate and Professional School Financial Aid Service. The GAPSFAS form is a standardized, detailed financial aid form many graduate schools ask applicants to complete if they apply for financial aid.

General Examination:	This is also called the preliminary (“prelims”) or qualifying (“quals”). Another exam known as the comprehensive examination (“comps”) may be taken as a preliminary examination or before the preliminary examination, depending upon the field. The general exams test the depth and the breadth of a graduate student’s knowledge in his or her discipline. It may be written or oral or both, is often divided into sections corresponding to the specific fields within the discipline, and is usually taken after the completion of coursework. After passing the general examination, the student begins work on the dissertation.
Master’s Degree:	The degree of professional certification in the field, following the Bachelor’s. A master’s curriculum usually rests on one to three years of course work and may involve a thesis or limited research project as the final requirement. <i>Many programs do <u>not</u> require a master’s degree for admission to a Ph.D. program.</i>
(MGSLS):	Minority Graduate Student Locator Service: A service offered free to minority students by Educational Testing Service’s GRED Department. Students who sign up for the Locator Service make themselves available for recruitment by graduate schools which offer an appropriate program.
(NDSL):	A federal program through which loans are available to eligible graduate students.
Outside Fellowship:	A fellowship awarded by a source outside the student’s university or graduate department such as a corporation, government program, or foundation.
Ph.D.:	The Doctor of Philosophy degree, a research degree which usually involves coursework, special and general examinations, a major research project leading to the writing of a dissertation, and defense of the dissertation. The Ph.D. can require anywhere between three to seven years to complete depending on the discipline, institutional policies, and the student’s preparedness.
Postdoctoral Position:	A position which allows individuals who have completed a Ph.D. to gain additional experience in their chosen field. Also known as a “post-doc”.
Principal Investigator:	The primary individual responsible for the preparation, conduct, and administration of a research grant.

Proposal:	A statement or paper in which the graduate student proposes to his or her department committee a dissertation topic with details on what the dissertation will accomplish, and how research will be conducted.
Research Degree:	A degree, like the Ph.D., which prepares the student for a career in research, scholarship, and college or university teaching. The program of study requires substantial independent research and presentation of the results in a dissertation.
Stipend:	A grant of money to a graduate student for expenses beyond tuition and fees. Graduate fellowships sometimes pay both tuition and a stipend.
Thesis:	A research paper presented as a major, and usually the final, requirement of a degree program. The thesis is sometimes used interchangeably with "dissertation," in Ph.D. research. More often it refers to a project more limited in scope.