
Grad School

Tips, Techniques
& Timelines

Career Center
for Vocation & Development



Is Graduate School for Me?

It's important to evaluate your reasons for wanting to go to graduate school. Unlike most undergraduate experiences, graduate programs require that you have clear direction toward a certain career path. Ask yourself the following questions: Do my career goals require an advanced degree? Am I looking for a specialized degree only obtainable through graduate school? Do I have the motivation and desire to commit myself to the time and effort demanded by graduate school programs? Is it better for me to go part-time or get some work experience first?



To assist you in your decision-making, it may be beneficial to seek out a professional in the field you are considering and ask them to do an informational interview. How did they decide to go to graduate school? How did they select a program? What was it like? Consider taking advantage of our [Alumni Career Network](#) to speak with an alum who has taken a similar path. Also, make an appointment with a Career Counselor to discuss your questions and formulate a plan.

How do I choose a graduate program?

Finding a program that fits your goals and professional interests is essential to a successful graduate school experience. Keep in mind that just because a program is in the top rankings by *U.S. News & World Report* doesn't mean it's a guaranteed best fit for you. Consider the following criterion when selecting a program:

- **Admissions Requirements:** do your qualifications (i.e. GPA, co-curricular experiences, coursework, test scores) meet the minimum requirements?
- **Program Characteristics:** what is the faculty to student ratio? How long does it take to complete the curriculum? What is the reputation of the program, and how does it measure with comparable programs? Does the philosophy/emphasis of the program fit with my interests and values? What are the facilities like? Will I be required to do research, internships, or a thesis?
- **Faculty:** what are faculty specialty areas or research interests? What kind of involvement have they had in their respective fields? Are they well known in their areas of expertise? Have they been active in research or publishing (tip: read some of their publications!)? What are their distinguished achievements?
- **Alumni:** what are graduates of the program currently doing? What was their experience like in the program? What are the statistics on finding employment after graduation?
- **Financial Aid:** what kind of financial aid is available? How many students secure graduate, research, or teaching assistantships? What percentage of the tuition is covered through these opportunities? Are their scholarships available?

What do I need to apply?

Different programs have different admissions requirements. It's important to keep track of what each program requires as well as the deadline dates for each. You may want to keep a spreadsheet for each school you are researching. Below are some of the common requirements, depending on the type of program:

- **Official Transcript:** this can be obtained through the Registrar's Office in Old Main.
- **Exam Scores:** check to see what, if any, tests scores are required (i.e. GRE, MCAT, LSAT, GMAT).
- **Portfolio:** some programs, such as those in the arts, require a portfolio which showcases your work.
- **Essays & Personal Statements:** these writing samples should be taken very seriously. Your essays should be tailored to the specific schools to which you're applying. For advice on writing your essays

or to have them critiqued, contact the Career Center. Check out resources for writing effective essays on the Career Center website: www.messiah.edu/offices/career/grad/index/html (books on grad school essays are also available in the Career Center library for check out).

- **References:** choose individuals (i.e. professors, advisors, internship supervisors) who have seen your best work and recognize your potential. Talk with them about your goals, and ask if they would be comfortable serving as a reference for you. Provide them with a resume, unofficial transcript, and work sample so they can see the extent of your achievements. Be sure to give them plenty of time (at least 1 month) to complete their references for you, and provide reasonable deadlines. Also, include stamped, addressed envelopes for them to mail their recommendation forms. Remember to send your references a thank you note!
- **Interview:** some programs require an in-person interview before they make their final decision. It's critical that you take time to practice! Take advantage of a practice interview session available through the Career Center.

GRADUATE SCHOOL SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

BACKGROUND

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why do you want to pursue graduate school for _____?
3. What impacted your decision to go to graduate school?
4. Why did you select this program/school?
5. What do you hope to do with a graduate degree in this field? What are your future goals?

EDUCATION

1. Tell me about your undergraduate experience at Messiah College. How did it prepare you for this next step?
2. What was your involvement like outside of the classroom?
3. Tell me about a time when you worked on a project as part of team. What role did you play? What were the outcomes?
4. How would your faculty describe you?
5. What would contribute to our program?

EXPERIENCE

1. What related experience have you had? What did you learn from these experiences?
2. Tell me about a particular experience which has helped you recognize your interests and strengths.

PERSONAL

1. What motivates you to do your best work?
2. What do you see as the biggest challenges you will face in graduate school?
3. What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
4. How do you handle stress?
5. What is your favorite book?
6. What is your proudest accomplishment?
7. What do you like to do in your spare time?

CONCLUSION

1. Why should you be accepted into this program?
2. What questions do you have for us?

Graduate School Timeline

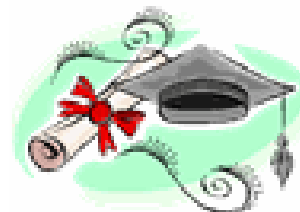
YEAR	TASKS
Sophomore Year	Discuss your interest in grad/professional school with faculty members, your advisor, and a career counselor; become familiar with grad school resources in the Career Center; become involved in co-curricular activities, and work to develop leadership skills.
Junior Year (fall)	Meet with a career counselor to discuss programs you might like to pursue, along with questions you have about the application process; take note of admissions requirements on websites of programs that appeal to you; sign up for the practice grad school test drive through the Career Center.
Junior Year (spring)	Register and prepare for the appropriate graduate school admissions test (i.e., GRE, LSAT, etc.); sign up for the practice test drive through the Career Center if you haven't already done so; request catalogs and materials for schools you plan to pursue.
Junior/Senior (summer)	Study and sign up for the grad school admissions exam. Visit schools and request application materials. Begin working on the required essays. Set deadlines for yourself for each step of the application.
Senior Year (fall)	Request and collect recommendation letters as well as copies of your official transcript. Take grad school admissions exam. Have essays reviewed by career counselor and at the Writing Center. Mail completed application package well in advance of the deadline date.
Senior Year (spring)	Follow up with schools to ensure your file is complete. Send fall transcripts if necessary. Visit schools you've been granted acceptance to and evaluate offers. Apply for assistantship positions. Notify all accepted schools and references of your decision.
Summer after graduation	Take time to relax! Consider taking one grad class to get your feet wet. Thank all those who supported you in the process.

**Please keep in mind that this timeline is "ideal." Timing may change based on your decision-making.*

Graduate School Resources available at the Career Center

Stop by the Career Center for information on...

- Choosing a graduate program
- Discussing whether graduate school is right for you
- Starting the application process
- Assistance with essays and personal statements
- Choosing references
- Portfolio reviews
- Graduate admissions exams
- Practice interviews
- Graduate school fairs and info sessions



Recommended Resources

General Websites on Grad School

- www.gradschools.com
- www.petersons.com
- www.usnews.com (U.S. News)
- <http://international.gradschools.com> (International Programs)
- <http://messiah.myplan.com> (My Plan)
(*must create a free account)
- www.graduateguide.com
- www.messiah.edu/offices/career/index/grad/html
- <http://international.gradschools.com>

Law School

- www.lsac.org

Medical School

- www.aamc.org
- www.messiah.edu/departments/premedhealth/
(Pre-Health Advising @ Messiah)

Essays & Personal Statements

- www.essayedge.com
- www.admissionsessays.com ("Writing Tips" section)
- http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p_perstate.html (Purdue University Writing Lab)

Testing

- www.gre.org (GRE)
- www.lsac.org (LSAT)
- www.aamc.org (MCAT)
- www.gmac.com (GMAT)
- www.ada.org (DAT)
- www.milleranalogies.com (MAT)

Financial Aid

- www.finaid.com
- www.fastweb.com
- www.gradview.com/finaid/paying.html
- www.graduateguide.com
- www.gradschools.com/info/financial.html
- www.gradloans.com
- www.princetonreview.com/grad/finance/

Career Center for Vocation & Development

Eisenhower Campus Center

691.6016 (x. 6016) ✦ career@messiah.edu ✦ www.messiah.edu/offices/career