

Lesson 01: Getting into Grad School

Part 1: What Structure Fits You Best?

Direction: Be sure to answer each question in red authentically, your responses should be 3-4 sentences per question.

STRUCTURE IS CRITICAL

Many students will initially reject a structured classroom, but ultimately they will come to enjoy it and even crave it when it is not there. A structured classroom is a safe classroom where teaching and learning are maximized. Providing students with a structured learning environment can show students that having structure in their life is a positive aspect that they need more of.

- *Are you the type of person that needs structure or are you a more “go with the flow” type of individual? Why is structure important as an adult? How will structure help you plan your Graduate school education?*

How is Graduate School Different from Undergraduate Education?

Compared to undergraduate studies, graduate school is a more concentrated course of study and expectations regarding the quality and quantity of your academic work are greater.

Graduate programs also entail:

- focused studies in a specific discipline with fewer elective possibilities
 - rigorous evaluation of your work by professors and peers
 - smaller classes (often 15 students or less) with much student interaction
 - work experience via internships, teaching, or research
 - production of original research is often required
-
- *How small is small (research how large the average graduate school classroom is). How does class size change the dynamics of an education?*
-
- *What do they mean above by original research?*

What Graduate Degrees are available?

Graduate degrees are available in almost any subject and come in three levels-Master, Specialist, and Doctorate. Depending on the graduate school program and degree level you desire, your program requirements and length will vary.

- **Specialist degrees** are usually earned in addition to a master's degree and will require additional coursework, training, or internship experience. This type of degree usually prepares students for professional certification or licensing requirements (e.g., Ed.S. for school principal or credential for becoming a teacher).
- **Master's degrees** are offered in many fields of study. Some are designed to lead to a doctoral degree while others are the "terminal" degree for a profession (e.g., Master of Library Science; Master of Business Administration). For full-time students, completing a master's degree usually takes 2 years.
- **Doctoral degrees** are the highest degrees possible. They usually require the creation of new knowledge via independent research - be it basic or applied. Including the time it takes to write and defend a dissertation, this degree may take anywhere from 5-7 years to complete.
- *How might a Master's Degree or Doctoral Degree benefit you?*
- *How old would you be if you achieved one of these degrees? Does that intimidate you? Explain why?*
- *Will you get an advanced degree? Explain why or why not?*

Part 2: Tips to Get into Grad School

5 Tips for Getting into the Best Graduate Schools

OCTOBER 10, 2014

DANA KAVRE GAO

Previously, we talked about how it's never too early to start putting together your graduate school application. You might have pinned that post, thinking, "Wow, this is really going to come in handy when I am a junior or senior in college!" But even as a freshman or sophomore in undergrad, you can already start taking steps toward becoming a competitive applicant and getting into the best graduate schools.

Here are five ways to start building up the credentials that will ultimately help you gain admission to a top-ranked program in your field.

1. Do your research

First, research graduate schools themselves. What types of programs interest you? Which grad schools are strong in your field? Where do you want to live? Depending on what you want to study, your graduate education will typically last between two and five years of your life, so make sure you aim to live somewhere you will feel happy and fulfilled.

Second, start building up your research experience in your academic projects. An article on Education Portal points out, "Undergraduate research experience is one of the most important elements of any graduate school application."

In addition to developing your research skills through your undergraduate classes, you can seek out opportunities to do independent study courses with professors, present at academic conferences, and even publish papers.

2. Maintain a strong GPA

Your GPA is one of the first things that high-ranking programs in your field will look at in your graduate school application. Make sure you keep that GPA as high as possible, especially in classes related to your major.

As you'll see when you start researching programs, many of them require at least a 3.0 GPA for admission, and it goes up from there. Some of the best graduate schools want to see at least a 3.5 GPA. The time to start building the foundation for a strong transcript starts in your very first years of college.

3. Secure strong recommendations

As part of your application, many graduate programs will ask for two or three letters of recommendation from your undergraduate professors. In order for your application to stand out to the admissions committee, you need to make sure that you stand out to the college professors who will be writing those recommendations.

Attend office hours (and, it should go without saying, class!). Seek out those independent study courses mentioned above, and get advice on the best graduate school programs for you. You may find that professors are happy to help—remember, many of them were in your shoes not so long ago!

4. Extracurricular is extra special

The Career Center at the University of Illinois stresses the importance of getting involved in extracurricular activities. These activities “all help develop transferable skills that graduate programs and eventually employers will value—initiative, teamwork, communication, leadership, responsibility, perseverance, etc. You will also likely reflect on these extracurricular experiences when preparing your personal statement and giving interviews.”

Moreover, getting involved with professional organizations as an undergraduate can help you network with mentors in your field. Some of these organizations even provide scholarships for their members to go to grad school.

There is a professional organization for just about every profession that you can think of. Want to go to grad school to be a physics teacher? Join the American Association of Physics Teachers. A social worker? Join the National Association of Social Workers. An economist? Join the American Economic Association. You get the idea.

5. Earn a high GRE score

The GRE is the SAT of grad school: it's a standardized test that most programs require for admission. The good news is, like the SAT, the GRE is predictable and beatable. With some study and practice, you can achieve a high score.

It's never too early to begin prepping. Start by familiarizing yourself with the test. You can utilize the resources provided by ETS, the test maker. Build your vocabulary by reading the New York Times or listening to NPR on your commute. Take a Kaplan GRE class. Your GRE scores are good for up to five years, so there is no harm in taking the test sooner rather than later.

Think of it like this—you're already on your way! By reading this blog post, you've taken the first steps toward becoming a competitive applicant for the top graduate schools in your field.

Activity 1--Office Hours

Research: **How do I approach my professor during Office Hours?** Develop a script, minimum of 3-4 minutes with a partner or group. This is incredibly important because if a professor doesn't know you, they will NOT write you a letter of recommendation. Remember, YOU ARE SOMEBODY, you just need to show this to the world. You're no longer stuck in one building, you're in the bigger pond.

Script:

- Jessica (student): Hi, I'm Jessica, I'm in your Psychology 101 class on Thursday
- Professor: Hi, nice to meet you
- Jessica (student):
- Professor:

Activity 2--Maintaining Your GPA

The only way to maintain your GPA is to know how and where to get help. CSUN for example has a 63% fail rate in undergraduate math (like College level Algebra and Statistics) and a 35% fail rate in biology.

List 3 resources that you can go to get help from your future college. I need specifics, what's the name of the program? Where are they located on campus? What are their hours? What's their phone number? How specifically is this program going to help maintain your GPA?

Activity 3--Extracurricular Activities

Unfortunately, the hard work is not over. Even if you're not planning on going to Grad School, you need extracurriculars to help you network, build a resume, and get your future job.

I need you to make a commitment **NOW** to join a club. So, based on your future college, pick 3 clubs that you will join at your future college.

What are their names? What is their intent/objective? Where are they located on campus? When do they meet? Is it open enrollment? How will this club benefit your Resume?