

## Timeline & Checklist for Graduate School

### JUNIORS

Top two pieces of advice when considering graduate school:

- 1.) Start early (spring of junior year) and
- 2.) Know your goals and the RIGHT TIME for graduate training.

#### Junior Year - Spring

##### **Identify Important Factors to YOU**

Identify characteristics that are important to you in a graduate school such as:

1. Type, specialization and strength of academic programs
2. Faculty scholars in the program
3. Curriculum or types of courses offered
4. Location
5. Cost
6. Cultural environment
7. Research opportunities and
8. Success of alumni to name a few.

For example, if you want highly specialized academic training in music therapy with autistic children, you need to find institutions that focus on that particular area.

##### **Research institutions**

Once you know what you want, use these resources to research programs.

##### **Online Resources**

Peterson's Guide	<a href="http://www.petersons.com/">http://www.petersons.com/</a>
Grad Schools.com	<a href="http://www.gradschools.com/">http://www.gradschools.com/</a>
Match College	<a href="http://www.matchcollege.com/">http://www.matchcollege.com/</a>
Princeton Review	<a href="http://www.princetonreview.com/graduate-school.aspx">http://www.princetonreview.com/graduate-school.aspx</a>
U.S. News & World Report	<a href="https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools">https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools</a>
Professional Associations	Every career field has a number of professional associations based around that career. These associations provide a variety of resources related to finding a job, preparing for careers and researching graduate programs. Many times these associations will include a list of accredited graduate programs in the field. Simply do a google search on "Professional Associations in ____ (your career field) ____"

##### **Department Faculty**

Faculty within your current department are scholars in the field and will have advice on reputable programs within your area of study. Let your faculty members know what you are seeking and ask them to recommend various programs and characteristics of each.

### **Know deadlines!**

Planning for graduate school begins during your junior year. Application deadlines are generally during the early part of the fall semester of your senior year. Be aware there may be a series of deadlines to track. For example, often the institution admission deadline may be different from the department program deadline which may be different from the deadline to apply for Graduate Assistantships.

### **Research admission exams & STUDY**

Learn about how to prepare and register for entrance exams at these sites.

GMAT <http://www.mba.com/us>

GRE <http://www.ets.org/gre/>

LSAT <https://www.lsac.org/lSAT/register-lsat>

MCAT <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/>

Know if your graduate program requires specific subject exams on the GRE. The GRE is a general entrance exam, but some programs require a specific subject area exam in addition to the general test.

PREPARE for the exam before you take it. There are resources available online to help you prepare for the exams including practice test questions. On average, entrance exams cost several hundred dollars each time you take them, and you want to be prepared!

### **Junior Year - Summer**

#### **Take admission exams**

Register online for entrance exams at the websites listed above.

#### **Write personal statement/essay/cover letter**

It takes time, research, and good writing skills to craft a solid personal statement for each application. Each institution has specific criteria to include in the personal statement. Read this list of criteria very carefully. You need to customize each personal statement for that institution. Ask faculty members and Career Services staff to read drafts of your personal statement.

#### **Key points to address in your personal statement:**

1. Why you are applying to graduate school
2. Why you have selected that particular institution and program (program strengths)
3. Why you are a good fit for this program
4. How you have demonstrated your ability to handle the academic rigor of graduate school
5. Your career goals
6. How this graduate degree will help you reach those goals
7. Your level of understanding of and passion and commitment for the field

### **Senior Year - Fall**

#### **Prepare resume or curriculum vita**

Contact Career Services for assistance and view the sample resumes in the Hire-a-Hornet Resource Library.

#### **Apply for admission, financial aid and graduate assistant positions**

Be sure to complete all required applications for these items. Some institutions have separate applications (and deadlines) for admission and graduate assistant positions.

#### **Verify your application is complete**

Contact institutions to verify they have received your completed application materials.

Too many times candidates don't follow up and miss deadlines and opportunities because materials were missing.

### **Complete practice interview**

Schedule your practice interview with Career Services staff through your Handshake account. If your faculty advisor is willing, invite them to participate in the practice interview with you as well. Faculty serve on selection committees for graduate or professional school and can simulate a typical graduate school interview.

### **Letters of Recommendation**

Request letters of recommendation from faculty members. Keep in mind that you need to give them at least a month to write this letter; some faculty members may want you to give them as much information as possible at the beginning of the semester, so know what they prefer. If you apply to multiple schools, they will need to send multiple letters, though it may include the same content. Give faculty complete instructions for sending the letters including envelopes that are addressed and stamped if needed. Writers are doing you a huge favor in writing these letters—be gracious and conscientious.

## **Senior Year – Spring**

### **Make Selection**

You will hear about admission generally in the spring semester. Review criteria for schools that have accepted you and make your decision. Inform other schools that you have made your selection.

### **Write thank you notes to reference writers**

## Timeline & Checklist for Graduate School

### SENIORS

The most important thing to consider about choosing the right school and program for you is knowing what your goals for graduate training are.

**Step 1: Identify important characteristics** (such as program quality, location, costs, cultural environment, research opportunities, etc.). For example, if you are interested in getting a degree in music therapy with an emphasis on working with autistic children, focus your search on institutions that are recognized in that area and can offer you that experience.

**Step 2: Use online resources** (listed below), **and utilize department faculty.**

Check out

Peterson's Guide	<a href="http://www.petersons.com/">http://www.petersons.com/</a>
GradSchools.com	<a href="http://www.gradschools.com/">http://www.gradschools.com/</a>
GradView.com	<a href="http://www.gradview.com/">http://www.gradview.com/</a>
Match College	<a href="http://www.matchcollege.com/">http://www.matchcollege.com/</a>
Princeton Review	<a href="http://www.princetonreview.com/graduate-school.aspx">http://www.princetonreview.com/graduate-school.aspx</a>
U.S. News & World Report	

<http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools>

Professional Associations Every career field has a number of professional associations based around that career. These associations provide a variety of resources related to finding a job, preparing for careers and researching accredited graduate programs.

**Step 3: Know deadlines**, as most applications are due in the early part of the fall semester. Also, be considerate of faculty members you may ask to write you letters of recommendation and look for deadlines to apply for Assistantships and Fellowships.

**Step 4: Research admission exam requirements and prepare.** Exam registration sites also offer tips on how to prepare for the exams.

GMAT	<a href="http://www.mba.com/us">http://www.mba.com/us</a>
GRE	<a href="http://www.ets.org/gre">http://www.ets.org/gre</a>
LSAT	<a href="http://www.lsac.org/jd/LSAT/about-the-LSAT.asp">http://www.lsac.org/jd/LSAT/about-the-LSAT.asp</a>
MCAT	<a href="https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/">https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/</a>

Additionally, know if you need a subject specific area exam on the GRE. Entrance examinations are expensive, so be sure to give yourself time to prepare for the exam. Since you're a senior, you also may be in a time crunch and not be able to take the exam again before the required date.

**Step 5: Write your personal statement/essay/cover letter and your resume/vita** and tailor it to each institution you are applying to. Each program will have different criteria and it's important to cover everything. Career Services and your department faculty are great resources to assist in making these the best they can be. Upload these documents into your HANDSHAKE account, then schedule a review within HANDSHAKE.

Be sure you address in your personal statement/essay/cover letter:

- Why you are applying for graduate school
- Why this particular institution and program
- Why you are a good fit for the program
- How you will be able to handle the rigor of graduate school
- What your career goals are
- How the degree you will receive will help you reach these goals
- Share your level of understanding and passion and commitment for the field

**Step 6: Request letters of reference:** Identify faculty and other professionals who know you and your abilities well. Ask them if they can write positive letters of reference for you. Make these requests at least 6-8 weeks prior to the due date. Provide your writers information on where you are applying, how to submit their letters, and answer any other questions they might have. REMEMBER: This is a HUGE service they are providing you!

**Step 7: Verify your application is complete** and that the university has received all of your application materials including your letters of recommendation, your personal statement/essay/cover letter, and your resume/vita. Apply for financial aid and assistantships/fellowships once everything has been submitted.

**Step 8: Be prepared for an interview** and set up a practice (mock) interview with Career Services through your Handshake account or ask your faculty advisor if they are willing.

**Step 9: Make your selection** and let the other schools you were accepted into know that you have selected another graduate program. You should know sometime in the spring semester your acceptance status with each program you have applied to.

**Step 10: Thank you notes.** Write thank you notes to your reference writers and any other professionals that have helped you in your pursuit of graduate school.