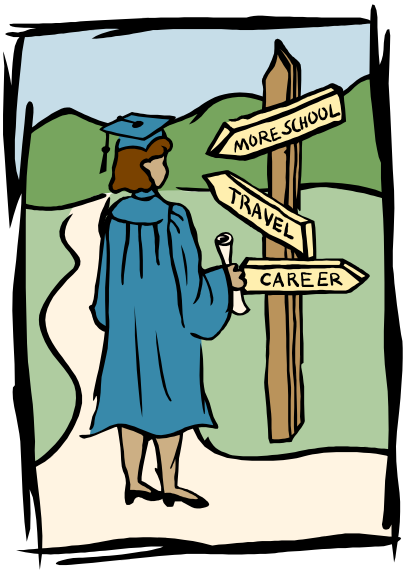
BOSTON UNIVERSITY CAREER SERVICES

Considering Graduate School



19 Deerfield Street, 3rd floor, Boston, MA 02215
617-353-3590
www.bu.edu/careers

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

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MAKING THE DECISION TO ATTEND GRADUATE SCHOOL

It is important to have a clear understanding of what you want to do with your career and how earning a graduate degree will help you reach that goal. At the graduate level, it is expected that you will have developed a specific focus in your area. If you have any doubt at all about your professional goals, consider putting off graduate school and, instead, spend some time working on self-assessment (identifying your skills, interests, values, and personality type) and career planning. *If you go to graduate school without a clear goal, you will probably end up wasting both time and money!!!*

While certain careers definitely require an advanced degree - doctors and lawyers, for example, many other careers offer job opportunities for job-seekers with just an undergraduate degree. *In fact*, *in some situations having an advanced degree can actually hurt you in a job search if you also have little or no job experience!!!!!*

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE MAKING THE DECISION

- What are my short-range and long-term career goals?
- Is graduate school a necessary pre-requisite for achieving my goals?
- Do I have the interest, enthusiasm, motivation, abilities, and personal qualities to succeed in a graduate program?
- Am I prepared to meet the extensive research, course work, and writing demands of an academic program at the graduate level?
- Do I have the financial resources available at this time to cover the costs of graduate school?
- Will the time and money spent in a graduate program translate into the greater career mobility and the financial rewards that I aspire to?
- Are there alternative educational programs that would assist me in attaining my goals; e.g. vocational/technical training, additional course work, professional seminars, and workshops?
- Am I motivated by my desire to postpone entrance into the job market?

"GOOD" REASONS TO GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL:

- You've clarified your career goals and have determined that a graduate degree is necessary to achieve your goal.

- You are interested in pursuing further study in an academic area "for the love of it", and you are in a position to do so without consideration of its connection to a career.

"NOT-SO-GOOD" REASONS TO GO:

- You are not clear about next steps after graduation and you see graduate school as a way to clarify your career goals.

- Your parents, professors, and others are pressuring you to go.

- You aren't ready to "face the real world" and you see graduate school as a way to delay entry into the world of work.

SHOULD I GO NOW OR LATER????

Pros for going now…

- You are accustomed to being a student and remain energized for studying and learning.

- You may find it easier to finance now before assuming other commitments/responsibilities, e.g. family, a house, etc.

- Entrance into your desired profession will be sooner if the graduate degree is a necessity.

Pros for going later:

- You will have time to explore further whether this career path is the right fit for you.

- Gaining additional work experience may help you to clarify your goals.

- Experience may enhance your chances of acceptance into a program of your choice.

- A future employer may be willing to finance your graduate education.

- You will have time to "recharge your academic batteries" after four years of undergraduate education.

TIMELINE FOR APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

Summer before your senior year

- ☐ Research graduate programs; become familiar with faculty research interests, entrance requirements, entrance tests, and application deadlines
- ☐ Contact graduate programs of interest and request admissions information and financial aid applications
- ☐ Take a practice GRE test
- ☐ Review for and take the GRE general test (and/or other required entrance tests)
- ☐ Begin to draft a personal statement of your academic and professional goals

September, senior year

- ☐ Register for the GRE subject test, if required
- ☐ Narrow down your list of prospective schools
- ☐ Identify and contact individuals to request letters of recommendation (agree on a deadline!)
- ☐ Obtain feedback on and continue to refine your personal statement
- ☐ Continue research on financial aid options, including grants, scholarships, fellowships, assistantships, and educational and personal loans

October

- ☐ Retake the GRE, if necessary
- ☐ Order official transcripts
- ☐ Begin to tailor your personal statement to the graduate programs to which you are applying
- ☐ Make contact with students, professors, administrators, and/or alumni at your prospective schools

November

- ☐ Follow up on letters of recommendation to make sure they are completed
- ☐ Secure official transcripts
- ☐ Finalize your personal statements; have them reviewed by appropriate faculty, staff, and professionals in the field
- ☐ Complete application and begin sending out packets
- ☐ Begin preparing financial aid applications

TIMELINE FOR APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL (continued)

December

- ☐ Finish sending out all applications, keeping copies for your records
- ☐ Check with each school to ensure that all materials have been received, including transcripts, letters of recommendations, and test scores

January

- ☐ Focus on financial aid: complete the FAFSA online and apply for private and educational loans, grants, fellowships, and assistantships

February/March

- ☐ Visit your prospective programs, if possible
- ☐ Continue to make contact with program representatives to check on the status of your application
- ☐ See a Career Counselor to talk about a contingency plan in the event that you are not accepted or choose not to go to graduate school
- ☐ Relax and wait to see if you are selected as a potential candidate. This will probably be the most relaxing time you'll have for the next several years, so enjoy it!

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING PROGRAMS

- ✓ Admission requirements
  - How competitive?
  - GPA requirements
  - Prerequisites?
  - Test scores required

- ✓ Curriculum/academic focus
  - Orientation: theoretical/research or practical?
  - Thesis or final exam?
  - Internship?
  - # of credits?
  - Length of program/part-time options?

- ✓ Reputation/quality
  - School/program
  - Accredited? by whom?

- ✓ Career assistance
  - # of students completed?
  - # of students employed? type of positions? salaries?
  - Types of assistance?
  - Network of alumni?

- ✓ Faculty
  - Faculty/student ratio
  - Accessibility
  - Focus: teaching or research
  - Philosophy
  - Reputation
  - Publications/research interests
  - Diversity

- ✓ Location/size
  - Urban, suburban, rural?
  - Community: housing, transportation…

- ✓ Cost/financial aid
  - Tuition, room and board, fees?
  - $$ available? forms of financial aid?

- ✓ Multicultural opportunities
  - Diversity: faculty? students?
  - Reflected in curriculum?

- ✓ Facilities
  - Library: collection in field
  - Study facilities? Classrooms? Social interaction?
  - Technology support?

TESTING INFORMATION

REQUIREMENTS

When preparing to take any standardized test, you may want to consider either preparing on your own with testing guides written to give you sample test questions or you can sign up for a commercial test preparation course which gives you strategies on how to approach a standardized test.

The first step is to research which test or tests will be required for admission into your chosen program of study. Depending on the program, there may be more than one testing option to choose from.

Below is the contact information for the various testing sites to introduce you to the various tests and their basic contact information.

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Listing of Graduate School Testing Options:

- GRE - Graduate Record Examination
  This test includes a quantitative section, a verbal section and an analytical section. Tests are offered year round; computer- based testing is available at test centers worldwide.
  www.takethegre.com 1-866-473-4373

- GMAT – Graduate Management Admissions Test
  For applying to management programs, this test is offered on-line throughout the year and around the world. Visit their website and find a test center closest to you.
  http://www.mba.com/mba/thegmat 1-800-717-4628

- MCAT – Medical College Admissions Test
  For applying to medical school, this test is offered multiple times from January through September at hundreds of test site locations around the world.
  http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat/start.htm 202-828-0690

- LSAT – Law School Admissions Test
  For applying to law school, this test is offered worldwide with test registration information available on their website.
  http://www.lsat.org/ 215-968-1001

TESTING INFORMATION (continued)

- MAT – Miller Analogies Test
  A standardized test of verbal abilities can be submitted in place of the GRE for certain schools. Dates are available by calling or visiting:
  www.milleranalogies.com
  1-800-622-3231

- DAT – Dental Admissions Test
  http://www.ada.org/prof/ed/testing/dat/

- OAT – Optometry Admissions Test
  https://www.ada.org/oat/index.html

- TOEFL – Test of English as a Foreign Language
  www.toeflgoanywhere.com

PREPARATION OPTIONS

Self-Preparation

Choosing to practice for a standardized test through self-preparation is a good choice if you are self-motivated and disciplined in your study habits.

Purchase a printed book with many practice questions. Several include a cd-rom to practice on-line.

Be sure to visit the test website to take practice tests on-line and get more detailed information on strategies for approaching the test.

Commercial Test Preparation

(Disclaimer: The following list does not constitute an endorsement of these programs.)

There are several programs that offer test review courses. Some of them include:

BC Continuing Education 617-552-4256
www.bc.edu/schools/son/ce/testprep.html

The Olin Center 617-247-3033
www.olincenter.com/gre

TESTING INFORMATION (continued)

The Princeton Review 1-800-2Review
www.testprep.princetonreview.com

Kaplan 1-800-Kap-Test
www.kaptest/gre

These programs teach you a more structured and systematic approach to answering the questions; they are supportive and help identify weaknesses in your study methods.

The programs cost much more than the self-study method, but may be worth it for those who benefit from structure and a systematic approach.

Some questions to consider in choosing a test preparation course are:

- How thorough are they in teaching you strategies to use when taking the test?
- What is the reputation of the test preparation course?
- What is the cost? Do they offer any discounts?
- Will they let you retake the course if you are not satisfied?

You might also consider hiring a private tutor to help you individually with your test preparation.

APPLICATION PACKAGE

Consists of:

- Application Form

- Personal Essay (more information available on page 10).

- Non-refundable Fee

- Financial Aid Application

- Official transcripts/samples
    - Transcripts should include:
        - registrar's signature and seal
        - all grades
        - credit hours
        - course titles
    - can send mid-year transcripts; follow with final
    - submit transcripts with application, if possible; if not, have school send them directly
    - sample projects/research papers assist admissions

- Letters of Recommendation
    - forms are included in the application package
    - 3 to 5 letters of recommendation are customary
    - consider asking faculty and/or employers
    - request letters early fall prior to graduation
    - assist your references by providing them with a resume, cover letter, and transcript
    - agree on a deadline and follow up

- Test Scores
    - stay on track with required dates for submitting test scores for each school you are applying to
    - check the "Listing of Graduate School Testing Options" (available on page 6) for the particular website address you need to see how long tests take to be scored and information posted

    - Note: You can retake the GRE and the results are recorded and are valid for five years. If you decide to take the GRE more than once, your most recent three scores will be sent to the schools you apply to.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE/PERSONAL ESSAY

Think of your essay statement as a concise summary of your career goals and a way to communicate your enthusiasm to a prospective college admissions office. It is a chance to market yourself and make a strong connection between your focus and the program's goals. There are 2 different types of personal essay statements:

1) A general essay statement
2) A specific essay involving actual questions to respond to

Consider the following when responding;

- When did you become interested in this field and what has it taught you about yourself?
- What people or experiences have influenced your career goals and choices?
- Describe an accomplishment that you are proud of.
- List one experience where you were working under stress or taught a specific lesson.
- Describe an experience that demonstrates your commitment to a cause; what have been your unique contributions?
- What makes you unique? Include influences from books, film or other media that relate to your career goals.

Admission committees are looking at the following:

- What is your overall writing ability?
- What are your goals relating to your career?
- Why did you choose this program or field?
- What is your level of academic knowledge and maturity?
- How well do you know yourself in relation to the program you have chosen and is it a compelling story?
- Back up your statements with specific examples that show your relevant experience.
- Don't list any potentially controversial subjects such as religion or politics.

GRADUATE SCHOOL INTERVIEW

Questions for you to ask:

- How many people complete the program?
- Are faculty easily accessible to students?
- How many years does it take to complete the program, on average?
- Where are former students now? What percentage are in academic jobs?
- Do people get Teaching Assistantships?
- What is the culture of the graduate school community? Social? Isolationist?
- Where do people live? Do graduate students tend to live together or by themselves?
- Is there public transportation available?

Questions Admission Officers may ask:

- Please tell me about yourself?
- What are your career goals?
- Why do you want a degree in _____?
- Why would you be an asset to our department?
- What appeals to you about our program?
- Why do you want to be in the profession?
- In what kind of setting would you like to practice, work, or teach?
- How do you plan to finance your education?
- How would you be described by family, friends, and teachers?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in your profession?

FINANCING GRADUATE SCHOOL

Financial Aid Key Points

- Visit the institution's website for financial aid information.
- Inquire and apply early for financial aid, meeting all priority dates and deadlines.
- Application procedures and available aid programs vary from school to school. Ask about the financial aid opportunities and application requirements at the school/s to which you are applying.
- Investigate external funding opportunities and carefully complete scholarship applications.
- Research professional associations affiliated with your program of study and ask if they provide financial advice or scholarships.

Questions to Ask Admission Officers Regarding Financial Aid

- What proportion of students receive funding and how are they funded?
- What are the stipend levels and benefits provided by departmental assistantships?
- Is tuition waived with an assistantship or is the student responsible for some portion of the tuition costs?
- How long does the average student take to complete the degree?

Types of Financial Assistance For Graduate Study

- Assistantships:
    - Generally provide monthly stipend, plus tuition and health care
    - Have a service requirement: teaching, research, resident assistant, or administrative duties
    - Have a time commitment; typically 20-hours /week for full tuition
    - Provide training, experience, and networking opportunities

FINANCING GRADUATE SCHOOL - (continued)

- Grants/Fellowships/Scholarships
  - Generally based on academic achievement
  - Generally provide monthly stipend, plus tuition and health care
  - Generally do not have a service requirement
  - May come from the academic department, the graduate school/university, or external sources, e.g. government agencies, professional organizations, private foundations
- Specialized funding
  - Through service programs, e.g. AmeriCorps
  - Military branches (often geared towards health professions)
  - Loan repayment in exchange for work in a particular type, location, with a specific population, or in a particular field upon degree completion
- Federal loans
  - Stafford (subsidized and unsubsidized)
  - Perkins (availability depends on graduate program)
  - PLUS loan
- Private loans
  - Non-need-based; unsubsidized
  - Credit history is considered; may require co-signer
- Employer-financed or partially funded tuition

Terms to Consider Regarding Loans

- Cost of the guarantee fee (insurance against your default)
- Cost of the origination fee ("administrative fee")
- Rate/time frame for loan capitalization
- Fixed vs. variable interest rates
- Time frame for first payment/guidelines
- Possible interest rate deduction if set up for direct payment?

** See "Financing Graduate School" section on Resource List for print and web resources (http://www.bu.edu/careers/grad-schl/websites.html#financing-options-web)

RESOURCES FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

The following is a list of books that are available in the Career Resource Library at 19 Deerfield Street, 3rd floor.

Arts/Humanities/Other:

Complete Book of Graduate Programs in the Arts and Sciences
Graduate Programs in Psychology 2004
Graduate Programs in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences
Prospects Postgraduate Directory: Arts and Humanities for Intake 2003-04, Vol 1

Business:

Best 143 Business Schools
The Business School Buzz Book
Complete Book of Business Schools
Directory of Graduate Programs in Human Resource Management
Graduate Programs in Business, Education, Health, Information Studies, Law and Social Work
The Hobson's MBA Guide
Prospects Postgraduate Directory: Business and Social Science for Intake 2003-04, Vol 2

Law:

Best 117 Law Schools
Complete Book of Law Schools
The Law School Buzz Book

Medical/Science:

Best 162 Medical Schools
Complete Book of Medical Schools
Graduate Programs in Engineering and Applied Sciences
Graduate Programs in the Biological Sciences
Graduate Programs in the Physical Sciences, Mathematics, Agricultural Sciences, the Environment and Natural Resources
Prospects Postgraduate Directory: Science and Engineering for Intake 2003-04 Vol 3

Financing Options:

Free Money for Graduate School
The Graduate School Funding Handbook

RESOURCES FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL – (continued)

Test Preparation/ Applying:

Cracking the GRE
Cracking the GMAT
Cracking the GMAT CAT
Cracking the MCAT
Get into Graduate School: A Strategic Approach
Graduate Admission Essays: Write Your Way Into The Graduate School of Your Choice
How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School
LSAT 2006 Premier Program
Manhattan GMAT Prep: Critical Reasoning and Reading Comprehension
Manhattan GMAT Prep: Equations, Inequalities and VIC's
Manhattan GMAT Prep: Fractions, Decimals, and Percents
Manhattan GMAT Prep: Geometry
Manhattan GMAT Prep: Number Properties
Manhattan GMAT Prep: Sentence Correction
Manhattan GMAT Prep: Word Translations

General:

Distance and Supported Open Learning: Worldwide Edition
Graduate and Professional Programs: An Overview
The Vault College Career Bible
Graduate Schools in the U.S. 2004
Getting What You Came For: The Smart Student's Guide to Earning a Masters or Ph.D.

Additional Suggested Books for Graduate School:

(Not located in our Career Resource Library)
America's Best Graduate Schools by U.S. News and World Report
Graduate School: Winning Strategies for Getting In by Dave G. Mumby, Ph.D.
The Grad School Handbook by Richard Jerrard
Real Life Guide to Graduate and Professional School by Cindy Rold
The Real Guide to Grad School by Robert L. Clark, John Patattella and Lingua Franca

(Adapted from www.about.com: Graduate School)

RESOURCES FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL – (continued)

Graduate School Websites

(Also available on our website at www.bu.edu/careers under Graduate Schools, then click on Websites)

General Web Resources

- College Source Online www.bu.edu/library/index.shtml
  This resource is available as an online database through the Boston University Libraries. Click on "eJournals " -> "Databases A to Z" -> "C" for "College Source Online"
- GradProfiles.com www.gradprofiles.com
- GradSchools.com www.gradschools.com
- GradSource.com www.gradsource.com
- GraduateGuide.com www.graduateguide.com
- GradView.com www.gradview.com
- Grandes Ecoles www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grandes_%C3%A9coles
- InternationalGraduate.net - Graduate Programs & Postgraduate Courses www.internationalgraduate.net
- LawSchoolCompanion.com www.lawschoolcompanion.com
- Law School Minority Report www.lsmr.org/main
- Peterson's Graduate Planner www.petersons.com/graduate_home.asp?path=gr.home
- Princeton Review Grad Schools & Careers www.princetonreview.com/grad/default.asp

Making the Decision

- Considering Graduate School? www.quintcareers.com/considering_graduate_school.html
- The Grad School Handbook www.gradschools.com/feedback/hbk1.html
- GradSchoolTips.com www.gradschooltips.com
- Jobweb - Grad School: Things to Think About www.jobweb..org/studentarticles.aspx?id=814

Financing Options

- Boston University Office of Fellowships and Scholarships www.bu.edu/bufellow/
- Campus Compact: Opportunities: Grants and Fellowships www.compact.org/category/events-jobs-grants-more//by_category/grants_and_fellowships

RESOURCES FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL – (continued)

- Council of Graduate Schools - Fellowships and Financial Aid www.cgsnet.org/Default.aspx?tabid=163
- Federal Student Aid - Graduate and Professional Students http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/gradstudent.jsp
- FinAid www.finaid.org
- GradSchools.com - Financial Aid Information www.gradschools.com/info/financial.html
- Grants.Gov www.grants.gov
- Peterson's - Pay for School www.petersons.com/finaid/file.asp?id=1080&path=gr.pfs.overview
- Princeton Review Scholarships & Aid www.princetonreview.com/grad/finance/

Additional Graduate School Websites

Program Rankings

- www.PhDs.org/rankings
- www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/rankindex_brief.php

Financing Options

- www.accessgroup.org
- https://Studentaid.ed.gov/students/attachments/siteresources/gradguide.pdf
- www.teri.org/college-access

Scholarships and Loans

- www.college-scholarships.com
- www.fastweb.com
- www.collegenet.com/mach25/app
- www.gmsp.org

RESOURCES FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL – (continued)

Fellowships

- www.gradschool.cornell.edu/index.php?p=105
- www.fordfound.org
- www.iie.org/fulbright
- www.gradberkeley.edu/financial/fellowships_resources.shtml

Next Steps:

- Remember to talk with faculty, mentors, alumni and others to gain a clearer perspective on a potential graduate program or school.

- Be sure to stay in touch with Career Services by visiting www.bu.edu/careers or make an appointment to speak with a Career Counselor by calling us at 617-353-3590

Good luck as you explore graduate school possibilities!!