

# CONSIDERING GRAD SCHOOL



FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

THE CAREER CENTER

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# What You'll Find in this Guide

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Are you thinking about going to graduate school? Let's explore why!

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Learn what steps you can take now to make yourself a strong candidate for your future applications.

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Where should I apply? Keep your research organized as you evaluate how graduate programs fit your personal criteria.

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You have submitted your applications and have begun hearing back... Now what?



# Should You Consider Grad School?

## Should you go to Grad School?

Carefully consider the **reasons why** you want to go to grad school. These might include:

- Satisfying intellectual curiosity
- Seeking employment in the academic environment
- Preparing/positioning for career advancement
- Specializing in a particular area or interest
- Adding depth to an academic background

## Have you Considered...

- Will an advanced degree help you attain your professional or personal goals?
- How will attending graduate school affect your family or relationships?
- How will you finance it?
- Do the programs require or recommend related experience before entry?
- What is your timeline for attending?
- Have you reviewed program deadlines?



## DEGREE OPTIONS



### Master's Degree:

- **Course-type program:** Students satisfactorily complete a required program of study that consists of coursework only.
- **Comprehensive exam program:** Student completes required coursework and passes a comprehensive examination to receive the degree.
- **Thesis-type program:** Students complete required coursework and must submit a thesis (original piece of research).
- **Proficiency program requirements:** Many of the creative disciplines (music, dance, theatre, art) offer programs that require the student to demonstrate proficiency in order to graduate.

### Advanced Master's and Specialist Degree:

- Students complete **coursework beyond the master's degree** but less extensive than the doctoral degree. They are most often offered in education.

### Professional Degree:

- Professional degrees are awarded upon completion of **programs that prepare individuals to enter certain professions**. Though the word "Doctor" is usually found in the degree title (e.g., "Juris Doctorate" for a law degree), the degrees in this category are referred to as professional degrees rather than doctorates.

### Doctoral Degree:

- These are the **highest degrees awarded**. In addition to completion of an academic program of study and a comprehensive examination, the majority require a dissertation, which is a significant work of original research.

# Preparing to go to Grad School



## What do grad programs look for?

While different programs have different criteria, most graduate programs are looking for strong **academic background**, **research** skill sets and a **connection** to your field. You should be able to clarify your short and long term goals, as well as how your intended program will help you in reaching those goals.

### GPA

Most graduate schools will look at your undergraduate GPA as part of the application process. They may be concerned with your cumulative GPA, subject-specific GPA, or both. Additionally, there may be prerequisite classes that are required with specific grades for admission.

#### Maintain a competitive GPA:

- Be intentional with your schedule
- Build strong time management skills
- Utilize ACE and campus tutoring services

### Test Preparation

- Know what exam you will need to take and the score ranges needed for admission
- Take a practice exam to determine what areas you need to focus on
- Use campus resources to study and prepare

#### Resources:

- [Peterson's.com](http://Peterson's.com)
- Test Specific Webpages (GRE, GMAT, etc.)
- [ace.fsu.edu/workshops](http://ace.fsu.edu/workshops)
- Test Prep Companies

### Gaining Experience

To grow your skills and experiences think about what you are interested in and explore options for getting involved.

**Research** – Get involved with undergraduate research to show your interest in your field and build your research skill sets.

**Experiential Learning** – Grow your experience by participating in shadowing and holding internships or part-time jobs that will help you showcase skills you bring to their grad program.

**Service** – Participate in activities within your community and provide a service to demonstrate your service orientation and grow your relevant skill sets.

**Leadership** – Hold leadership positions on executive boards for clubs, in the community, or other spaces.

**International** – Develop your global fluency by studying abroad, traveling, or participating in events at the Center for Global Engagement.

However you choose to get involved, think about how these experiences have shaped your career journey and have prepared you for graduate school.

# FSUshadow

ONE DAY TO EXPLORE YOUR FUTURE

# Preparation Milestones



## Applying to graduate school

This page contains a suggested **checklist of action items** to support you during the graduate school application process. While following this timeline may be helpful in organizing a timely and effective application experience, you may complete activities according to your needs and the requirements of your desired programs.

### 2-3 years before applications

- Explore campus resources and services
- Determine graduation timeline
- Connect with The Career Center to explore your career interests
- Attend faculty office hours
- Explore options to get involved
- Meet with Career Liaison regarding graduate school options

### 1 year before applications

- Attend The Career Center's Graduate and Professional School fairs
- Research graduate programs and schools
- Create an application action plan
- Cultivate a list of recommenders
- Continue gaining experience
- Explore funding options
- Begin crafting application materials and preparing for entrance exams

### Know your graduation timeline:

Graduating in three years? Explore your eligibility for the **Degree in Three** and **More in Four** Programs

### Application Year

Below are steps to take to stay on top of the process. Make sure you have identified any application deadlines to prepare in advance.

#### Prepare for/take graduate school admissions examinations:

- Keep in mind that each examination has different timelines for sitting for and receiving results.

#### Refine list of programs to apply to:

- Narrow down list and rank your options as you move through your applications

#### Create application documents:

- Write your personal statements, develop your resume, and collect any portfolio items

#### Reach out to your Recommenders:

- Ask if they will be willing to serve as your reference and give several weeks to craft and submit their recommendation letters

#### Apply for funding opportunities:

- Connect with each school you are applying to regarding scholarship and funding awards

**Submit your applications prior to the school and program deadlines.**



# Researching Grad Programs



## Where to begin

Like any important decision, selecting a graduate program is complex. **Start early** to give yourself a year or more to **explore** and **choose** which programs you will apply to.

### Explore Careers & Degree Programs

Determine what type of graduate degree you need for careers of interest.

### Establish Your Criteria

Create list of traits important to you.

### Identify Program Options

Research options and rank them to determine top priorities.

### Choose Where to Apply

From your research, identify top programs to apply to. Include a wide range of programs based on your likelihood of acceptance.

For more resources, visit the **Graduate School Exploration** page on the Career Center website.



## How will you pay for grad school?

It is important to begin researching sources of **financial support** early in the process. This is because many funding organizations have applications due in the fall for the following year. Types of **awards/assistance** available:



### Fellowships

Prestigious awards, often quite substantial. They are competitive, based on academic achievement, and do not usually require work. For more information, see FSU's Office of National Fellowships, [onf.fsu.edu](http://onf.fsu.edu).



### Assistantships

Paid, part-time employment that may include a full or partial tuition waiver (often of the out-of-state portion of tuition). Those with this type of award often teach, conduct research, or work in student affairs. These are often available via your academic department.



### Loans

Low-interest loans are available to most graduate students. Contact the institution's financial aid for more information.



### Grants and Scholarships

These are gifts of money. They may be "free scholarship money" with no obligation for work or repayment, or they may be for a specific purpose.



### Academic Common Market

A program that helps students obtain in-state tuition at out-of-state institutions for programs that are unavailable in a student's home state. For more information on the Academic Common Market, visit [www.sreb.org/academic-common-market](http://www.sreb.org/academic-common-market).

# Graduate Program Exploration

Below is a table to help you explore and compare the graduate school programs you are interested in.

<b>Graduate Program Exploration Chart</b> <i>Use these sites to help you explore:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="http://gradschools.com">gradschools.com</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="http://graduateguide.com">graduateguide.com</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="http://petersons.com/gradchannel">petersons.com/gradchannel</a></li> </ul>	<b>Program #1</b>  <b>University:</b>  <b>Type of Degree:</b>	<b>Program #2</b>  <b>University:</b>  <b>Type of Degree:</b>	<b>Program #3</b>  <b>University:</b>  <b>Type of Degree:</b>
Application <b>Deadline?</b> <b>Acceptance Rate?</b> <b>GPA</b> Requirement?			
Required <b>Application Documents?</b> Ex. Personal Statement, CV/Resume, Letters of Recommendation			
Required <b>Test Scores?</b>			
Program <b>Duration?</b> Number of <b>Credit Hours?</b>			
<b>Cost</b> to Earn Degree?			
<b>Faculty member</b> you are interested in working with? What do they study?			
Comprehensive <b>Exams or Thesis</b> Required?			
<b>In-State</b> or <b>Out-of-State?</b>			
<b>Class Size?</b>			
Matches Values, Skills, & Interests? <b>(Good Fit?)</b>			
<b>Still interested</b> in the program? Why or why not?			

# Building Application Materials

Below is a list of the most **commonly requested items** used for evaluation of a candidate's application for graduate school. Check with the schools you are applying to make sure you have submitted all necessary materials by established deadlines, as each school may require materials or actions not included here.



## APPLICATION MATERIALS



### General Application

- Fill out a general application form that includes identifying information and asks you to indicate the program to which you are applying.

### Graduate Examination Scores

- Many programs require you to take specific admissions tests and submit scores for review.

### Letters of Recommendation

- Graduate applications often require recommendation letters and/or rating forms. Generally, 2-3 recommendations are expected by individuals who can vouch for your ability to succeed in graduate school.
- Graduate programs prefer your recommenders be faculty members you have worked with/learned from academically or managers/supervisors who have overseen your professional work.
- Set up a meeting with any faculty you are thinking about asking to discuss with them.

### Transcripts

- Graduate schools typically require candidates to submit transcripts from all colleges attended, regardless of whether or not a degree was obtained. If you are allowed to submit unofficial transcripts with your original application, you may need to provide official transcripts upon acceptance into the program.

## APPLICATION DOCUMENTS

Get your application documents critiqued prior to submitting:

Visit **drop-in career advising**  
Meet with you **Career Liaison**  
Use **Career Docs**

For more information, head to  
[career.fsu.edu/careeradvising](https://career.fsu.edu/careeradvising)



### Resume or Curriculum Vitae

Showcase your relevant experiences.



### Personal Statement

Demonstrate your background and interest in a field.



### Writing/Work Samples or Portfolio

Samples will vary depending on program.

# Making a Decision

Once you hear back from the graduate schools you applied to, it is time to make a decision. Below are **steps to take** depending on if you were admitted, if you were not admitted, or if you were waitlisted.

## If you were admitted...

- Review your acceptances and financial aid offers.
- Compare programs back to your criteria
- Make a decision and send an acceptance letter. Then follow up with other programs to decline their offers.
- Send thank you notes to your recommenders and update them on your decision.
- Reach out to the graduate department to inquire about any additional questions about funding your degree.
- Make arrangements to move, secure housing, prepare for orientation, etc.

## If you were not admitted at this time...

- Meet with a Career Advisor or your Career Liaison to discuss alternative plans.
- Consider ways to improve your application for the next round.
- Research GAP Year options.
- Reach out to the graduate departments to seek feedback on ways to become more competitive for their school/program if still a school of interest for you.

## If you were waitlisted...

- Send a letter of continued interest to the program, and include any updated materials you may have (more experiences to your resume, additional letters of recommendation, etc.)
- Determine when you are likely to hear a response from a program.
- Create a plan of action in the meantime, pending future rejection or acceptance.

Follow-up with your Career Liaison to update them and to ask any questions you have regarding moving forward with solidifying your post-graduation plans.



**Scan for more information and to find your career liaison at The Career Center.**





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