

CAREER PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

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This guidebook is designed to give Drury students a successful start on their graduate school career.

If you have questions or need resources not addressed here, contact us!

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Considering Graduate School

Your undergraduate years are nearly over, and everyone's been asking you what you'll be doing next and if you've considered graduate school. Have you? Maybe you feel like you need more experience, or maybe the career you have in mind requires more training. Whatever your reasons for considering it, the decision to go to graduate school is a big one that can affect the direction of your life pretty drastically. So before you get too far into searching for and applying to graduate schools, take some time to sit down and really think about your decision.

There are several questions you ought to ask yourself. You may want to sit down and write out your answers, or take a long walk to have quiet time while you think. First, you need to ask yourself why, exactly, you want to attend graduate school. Is it the best path to your career? Or do you simply not know what to do with yourself? Has everyone told you to go?

Once you get it nailed down,

take some time to think about the degree you want to pursue. Again, consider what your motivation is for choosing such a degree. Money? Time with family? Opportunities for travel? Does it fit with your passions, and will it sustain you emotionally as well as physically in the long run?

Now that these more philosophical questions have been given careful consideration, there are a few practical aspects to ponder before you actually start looking for schools. For one, you should decide if there are any places that you're simply not willing to move for graduate school. That can eliminate several schools for you right off the bat. You should think about whether you want to do a full or part-time program, depending on if you'll need to work during grad school or not. Another important consideration is your learning style; make certain you're clear about how you learn best so you can choose a school that will meet your needs.

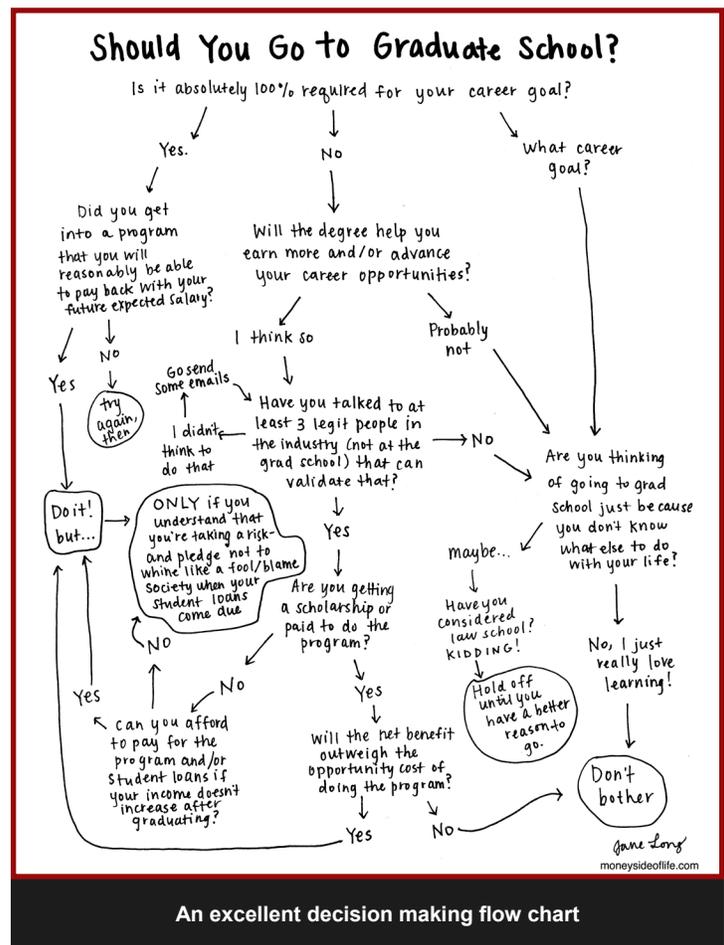
Save your self a lot of trouble

by knowing your own mind before you start your graduate school search. Years down the road, you want to know that you gave this decision the careful consideration it deserved.

7 REASONS TO GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

1. Necessity
2. Stand Out From Your Peers
3. Ability to Earn a Higher Salary
4. Ability to Climb the Corporate Ladder
5. Service Oriented Programs
6. Option of Writing a Thesis or Dissertation
7. You Want To

Image Credit: <http://www.gradschools.com/get-informed/why-grad-school/7-reasons-go-graduate-school>



An excellent decision making flow chart

Don't Panic!

The idea of applying to grad school can be completely overwhelming. Just remember, you have plenty of time. Many people choose to attend graduate school after a few years in the work force, while others have always known they were going to go. Whichever category you fall into, you can start researching schools you want to attend and considering your options.

“Consideration” doesn’t mean “decision.” Don’t be afraid to at least look, even if you’re not sure graduate school is for you.

Quick Tip: Gap Year

If you plan on taking a gap year (or two or three) before grad school, *take your entrance exams right after you finish undergraduate school.* Those scores are usually viable for five years, so take the test while you're still in a school and test mindset.

Quick Tip: Campus Visits

Make sure to hit these highlights when you visit potential schools

- Meet with an admissions staff member to arrange a tour and to meet staff for your program.
- Find the student lounge and talk to current students about what they like and dislike about the school
- Check out the campus's career development office . What is their success rate at helping graduates find gainful employment?
- Visit the alumni office, to get an idea of how successful past graduates have been.

Preparing for a Test

Generally speaking, preparing to take your entry test is the most stressful part of applying to graduate school; the tests have reputations for being challenging, time consuming, and generally impossible. While the first two are certainly true, the last one certainly isn't. Here are some ideas to get you through.

□ **Try to pick a testing date that's four to six months out from where you are right now, giving you plenty of time to study**

□ **Pick up or order a study guide especially for your test; Kaplan usually has a good one. Make sure it includes the following :**

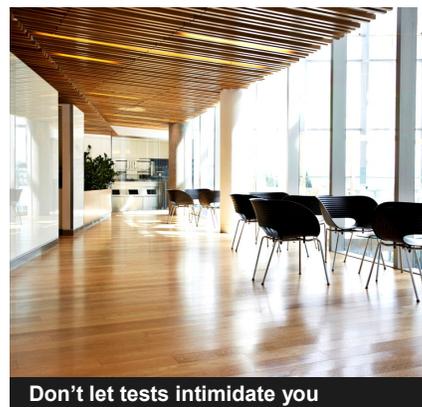
A pretest

Practice tests

Detailed question explanations

BONUS: A CD that will allow you to take computerized practice tests

□ **Plan on studying once or twice a**



Don't let tests intimidate you

week for an hour or so, working on the weak spots the pretest showed; studying too much will just wear out your brain and disrupt its ability to hang onto information

□ **Schedule your test early enough that you can take a second if you need to; it'll relieve pressure the first time you go to take the test**

Most of all, remember that more you worry, the harder the test seems. Study ahead without burning yourself out, and you'll do great!

Tests for Graduate School

Requirements for entry vary from school to school, so make sure that you know the following for certain:

- Whether you need a test for entry or not
- What that test is
- When the deadline for your score is
- Whether they have a minimum score requirement

The following are tests you may be required to take:

GRE: General	LSAT
GRE: Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology	MAT
GRE: Biology	GMAT
GRE: Chemistry	PCAT
GRE: Literature in English	DAT
GRE: Mathematics	MCAT
GRE: Physics	OAT
GRE: Psychology	

Some college websites can be very confusing about the testing requirements. Instead of relying on that, email the program you're interested in directly in order to get the most up-to-date information on testing and requirements

Start Your Search Early

Not everyone decides to go to graduate school early on in the undergraduate experience, but if you do you're in luck. The process of searching for, selecting, and applying to graduate schools will be much less hectic for you.

Since you have the time, you should pace yourself starting about a year prior to when you would like to actually start taking graduate classes. Plan a time each week to work on your search and stick to it. If you don't finish everything you thought you would one session, work on it the next week. You have plenty of time!

To begin your search, start on the web.

Go to the websites of organizations in the business you're interested in, check out graduate school rankings, look at programs you've heard others talk about. Try to generate a list of 10 – 20 programs.

Once you've done that, conduct initial research on the schools you've listed – request printed material from their graduate office, read their website, etc. Narrow your options based on such things as the school's website, their responsiveness, how you feel you were treated by personnel you came in contact with, to start with.

At this point, it would be wise to create a spreadsheet of characteristics. Things like class size, cost, and application process would all be appropriate qualities to track in the graduate schools you're considering. Try to create some kind of ranking system for the choices you have left, but remember not to think those rankings are set in stone. They could still change quite a bit.

At this juncture, you're ready to start planning campus visits and to start preparing yourself for the admissions tests required by the schools you're considering. To your graduate school search schedule, add a study schedule. Don't overload yourself; the rest of your life is still important! Set an hour or so aside per day, or a big chunk on the weekends if you concentrate better that way, and set studying aside otherwise.

The final thing to do:

Contact current students and alumnus of the programs you're considering. Ask current students if the program is what they expected. Ask alumnus if they feel like the degree they earned from the program has helped them in their career. Finally, take out all the notes you've made and review what is most important to you as a graduate student. From there, you'll want to apply to the top 5 to 8 schools on your list. Remember, which school to attend is an intensely personal choice and one that is about *your* life. Choose the one that feels right to you.



If You're Not Accepted

Handling denials is something nobody wants to think about. However, the reality is that you will probably be turned down from at least one or two of the programs you apply to. This is especially difficult if you get a denial from the program you most dearly wanted to attend. So here are some things to remember.

To start with, hard as it is, don't take it personally. Write a thank you note to the admissions board; be gracious. It would not be completely amiss to politely call and make certain that nothing in your file was missed. Sometimes papers get misfiled or lost, and it may make a difference in your acceptance.

If everything is accounted for, ask if any additional information would help. Also, don't be afraid to ask for feedback — but be professional about it. Accept criticism gracefully and apply it to your next attempt.

Above all else, remember: this is a setback – not a final blow

Quick Tip: Applications

- Follow directions on every application! Don't assume they're all the same.
- Check, double check, and triple check for spelling and grammar errors. They can eliminate you from consideration.
- Have a friend or professor look over your essays to be certain they give a clear idea of how unique you are and what you bring to the table.
- Turn in your applications early, so if there are any difficulties, you have time to solve



Further education invariably comes with further cost

Funding Graduate School

Probably the scariest part of graduate school is considering how to fund it. You may have heard (correctly) that graduate students have fewer opportunities for funding directly from the government. Once you're in graduate school, you can no longer receive Pell Grants or subsidized federal loans.

What you can get are unsubsidized federal loans (meaning loans that accrue interest while you're in school). Of course, it's better to avoid loans as much as possible. So, what are your options?

Just because you're not eligible for the Pell Grant anymore doesn't mean that you're not eligible for any kind of grant. In fact, there are a lot of grants available to graduate students out there. Check the "web resources" list for a few places to start looking.

There are also scholarships for graduate students, despite what you might hear. The college you choose to attend will likely have at least a limited number of graduate scholarships. Private sector scholarships are also a resource; if you look, you will find plenty of scholarships that are open to graduate as well as undergraduate students.

The best way to subsidize your education is through a graduate assistantship or fellowship. These are opportunities to work directly for the college and receive financial compensation for your time. The number of opportunities and the type of compensation you receive (ranging from hourly pay to tuition payment) will depend entirely on the school you attend. The availability of these opportunities is something you'll want to think about when you're looking at schools.

Web Resources

Learn more about financing your education!

Informational Resources

www.youcandealwithit.com/borrowers/graduates/howtopay.shtml

studentaid.ed.gov/sites/default/files/graduateprofessionalfundinginfo.pdf

www.collegescholarships.org/grants/graduate.htm

Scholarship & Grant Resources

www.studentscholarshipsearch.com/matcher/

www.collegegreenlight.com

www.collegegrant.net/graduateschoolgrants/

www.nsf.gov/funding/education.jsp?fund_type=2

www.acs.org/content/acs/en/fundingandawards.html

www.cfozarks.org/

www.petersons.com/graduateschools/graduateschoolscholarships.aspx

Just a place to start!

When You're Accepted

Congratulations, you did it! You made it through choosing a graduate school and you survived the harrowing admissions process. You have your acceptance letter(s) in your hand. Now what?

To start with, choose which school you will be attending and then politely turn down the ones that are not your first choice. You don't want to burn any bridges here, because you never know when your plans might change. Letting the school know that you won't be enrolling with them is a basic courtesy.

Then, of course, write to the school you've chosen to let them know you accept! Make sure to follow their procedures for accepting the offer, or they'll start to wonder why they chose you.

This is also the time to be sending thank you notes. These notes should go to the person who signed your acceptance letter, as well as to anyone at the school who was particularly helpful to you. Also in the list of those receiving thank you notes should be the people who wrote letters of recommendation for you, and any significant others/family/friends who were patient with you while you acted like a crazy person trying to get into graduate school. If writing that many thank you notes sounds like too much, think about having a nice dinner or party to say thanks. You deserve a little celebration anyway.



Once your thanks are appropriately handled, consider scheduling another campus visit. This can help you establish contact with more students on the campus, and further be of assistance to you as you prepare to relocate, if you need to do that.

The road to graduate school may not always be simple, but you've made it. Well done.