Applying to Graduate School

Everything you need to know about selecting & applying to Graduate School
By Sallie Nevitt

Evaluating your Schools

- Reputation (Accreditation, Competitiveness)
- Program specialization
- Faculty research specialties (Pick faculty you want to work with)
- Method of study - theory, practice, research?
- Geographic location (Be realistic about where you could live)
- Financial assistance (Does the program offer assistantships?)

- Peterson’s Guides to Graduate Schools
- www.gradschools.com
- Your Career in Psychology – By Tara Kuther
When to start

- Begin asking graduate schools for information at least **15 months** before you plan to attend, or at least by the spring of your Junior undergraduate year.
- Seniors it's OK to take time off and then apply if you don't know what your plan is. Experience in the field looks great on applications.
- Call or email schools: ask for descriptions of
  1. Programs in your field
  2. Application materials
  3. Information on financial aid
  4. Assistantship applications
  5. Housing

When to apply

- Deadlines vary by degree & program.
- Most will be during the fall semester the year before you plan to attend (Fall of SR yr).
- Ph.D – Fall
- Master’s- Spring
- **Apply early** for the best chances of getting financial aid, assistantships, fellowships, and clarification that your application is complete.
The application process

- You will most likely have to apply to BOTH the ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT and the GRADUATE SCHOOL, so be prepared to send materials to different locations - the school will let you know this!!!
- 2-3 Letters of Recommendation
- Autobiographical statement of interest or goals
- Graduate Admission Test Scores (GRE) (GMAT) (LSAT)
- Official undergraduate transcripts (2)
- Application fee ($30-$80)
- Curriculum Vita or Resume
  - Some require a subject test and/or interview
  - It is not uncommon to apply to between 5 – 12 schools, depending on program. (clinical = 8+ due to competitiveness)

Obtaining letters of Recommendation

- Some schools may specify who they want letters from (professors, advisors, employers)
- Ph.D level professors are preferred
- Choose references that can speak to your abilities in your field (i.e. they know you well)
- If you don’t have any in mind: get to know your professors, use writing in the major courses, undergraduate research opportunities w/in your field, look for opportunities to make these connections now, or during the summer if needed!
- If you are taking time off – still get letters done now
- Ask them at least 3-4 weeks before deadlines!
How to ask for letters

- Make personal contact w/ potential writer by appointment, phone, or email (It is good to have 3 faculty in mind)
- Ask “Will you write a positive letter of recommendation for me”?
- It is preferred that you “waive” your right to see the letters if given the option.
- Provide them with a packet of information to make it easy for them including:
  1. List of schools & deadlines
  2. Resume/Vita
  3. Personal statement –why you want each program
  4. Self-addressed, stamped envelopes to you or the school
  5. Specific forms that the school requires for reference letters
  6. Transcript or list of classes taken & your grades (so they know why kind of student you are)
  7. A thank you note for their support (Important!)
  8. Your contact information if they have any questions

Personal statement

- Short essays, usually 300-500 words, 1-2 pages.
- Don’t copy-paste the same essay for different schools (they will know)
- Pay attention to grammar & spelling (get it edited)
- No fancy fonts (12 pt, single spaced) unless otherwise noted.
- Tailor each letter to the program: (Important – they will know if you sent the same one to each program)
  1. Why you got into the field
  2. Career/future goals
  3. Specializations or interests w/in field
  4. Background, life, or related work experience that has helped you/motivated you
  5. Personal attributes to show off (work ethic, organization)
  6. How the program can meet your needs/goals
  7. Specific faculty that you want to work with
  8. Express a desire to become apart of their community too
Resume/ Vita

- Contact information
- Summarize your related experiences to the job/school/program
- Use descriptive words that show how you did your job, not just what you did. (Action verbs)
- Talk yourself up
- Dates for all experiences
- Most recent, or most relevant goes first

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<td>Work experience</td>
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* Career services can help you with your personal statement & resume/vita.

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GRE…www.ets.org

- GRE- $130, can take it more than once, offered (Nov/Dec/April)
- Adaptive: answers will direct difficulty level of questions
- Study early, summer is a good time.
- Verbal (800), Quantitative (800), Analytical Writing (6), Experimental (Not scored), Research (Not scored).
- 500 on each subtest often considered minimum score
- Verbal: sentence completion, analogies, reading passages, antonyms (30 M.C. 30min)
- Quantitative: quantitative comparisons, problem solving, data interpretations (28 M.C. 45min)
- Analytical Writing: Critical reasoning/writing skills, 2 tasks; present perspective on an issue for 45 min, Analyze an argument for 30 min.
- Subject Tests: Biochemistry, Cellular & Molecular Bio, Biology, Chemistry, Computer science, literature in English, Math, Physics, Psychology. (Not always an entrance requirement)
- Can buy prep books online at Amazon for cheap (Kaplan is good)
Final application tips…

- Know/understand all admissions requirements for your programs—they will not review your application until all materials are received.
- Call program weekly to make sure it is complete
- Make interviews with faculty- if they meet you in person you have an advantage over someone just on paper.
- Apply to at least 2 fall-back schools
- Career services can help you through this process!
- Clean up your myspace/facebook page – they will look!

Financial Aid

- **Assistantship**: you work a certain number of hours a week, tuition waiver, monthly stipend (should be enough to live on), TA, research assistant, Administrative assistant (try to get one within your field).
- **Fellowship**: Same as an assistantship, but does not require you to work. (Like a scholarship) Some will ask you to do research.
- **Grants**: government money that you don't have to pay back
- **Scholarships**: Within your program, independent, school
- **Loans**: Stafford, Perkins, independent
- **FAFSA**: Fill out every year! As a GRAD you are considered an independent regardless of your situation (more $ is available to you)
- Apply early to programs for qualifying for assistantships, grants, and tuition scholarships.
What if you don’t get accepted

- Don’t be discouraged. Don’t give up!
- Contact the Department/School and learn the reasons; ask if you can apply for a later term.
- It is OK to work for a couple of years before going to graduate school, many programs prefer this and state it as an admissions requirement! (Get involved early with community/campus activities so you can add experiences to your VITA)
- Many programs require 2 years of work experience, or you to have your Bachelors Degree **BEFORE** they accept you.
- Taking more courses to better your GPA, getting applicable work experience, and studying for the GRE are the best things to do to better your chances for future applications.
- **Graduate school is selective**, so many programs will only accept 6-24 students depending on the program. This is why you need to apply to MANY programs!

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<tr>
<th>Application Due Date</th>
<th>Transcripts</th>
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Good Luck!

- Utilize Career Services, Academic Advisors, Mentors, and Faculty to help you through this process.

- Questions?
- Feel free to email me with questions: nevitts@cc.wwu.edu