

Graduate & Professional School Resource Guide



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Making the decision to continue on to graduate study is a long-term commitment. People offer many explanations for their own decisions to pursue graduate school. It may well be worthwhile to examine your own reasons for pursuing graduate study. For some, the decision is personal, the challenge, a sense of achievement, personal growth, or the love of study and the campus life. For others, it is specifically geared towards career development; or perhaps an advanced degree is necessary or will increase qualifications and, therefore, competitiveness in the job market. It is usually a combination of several reasons. A period of self-assessment may prove beneficial; knowing why you are going to graduate school will help you get what you want from it. It will help you maintain the motivation and dedication needed to succeed in a graduate program.

It is critical that you gather enough information about your field to make a wise decision about graduate school. Every field is different; in fact, in some fields you can be in a negative position if you attend graduate school at the wrong time during your career. Talk to faculty, professionals in the field, or the Career Center to gather information about your chosen field.

You also need to ask yourself some of the following questions:

- Am I ready to continue my formal education?
- Do I have sufficient financial resources?
- Do I know enough about the field to make this commitment?
- Would it be more appropriate to work first and then return to school?
- Are there other options that I should consider?
- Is this the best career path?

Deadlines: While considering graduate school, be aware of the application deadlines. For fall admission at most graduate schools, applications are typically due in January or February, some are even earlier. Often it is necessary to start thinking about graduate school and taking some first steps before the end of your junior year. (Ref to p. 5-7 for planning timeline tips)

Choosing a Graduate Program to Fit Your Needs

Program

- What is the reputation?
- What is the philosophy or core values of the program?
- What is the ratio of faculty to students in the specific graduate program?
- Is the opportunity for specialization present? Is specialization required?
- Will you feel comfortable with the method of teaching used?
- Does the school offer the type of enrollment option you want?
- Does it offer you sufficient courses and career options?
- Are internships or work-study programs part of the curriculum?
- If certification is required, what percentage of the class passes?
- How long is the program (number of credits)?
- How many classes are required outside of the discipline?
- What is the retention rate into the second year of the program?
- Is it a research-based institution or an applied based institution?
- What are the pre-requisite requirements?

Faculty

- What is the make-up of the faculty?
- How many professors hold doctoral degrees? What areas do they specialize in?
- How many professors have had extensive work experience in the field?
- What is the faculty's quality with regard to teaching and/or research?

Students

- Is the school selective with regard to admissions?
- What is the make-up of the student body?
- What academic standards are placed on the student?
- What percentage of students has worked full-time?
- How many enter directly from their undergraduate degree?

Job Prospects

- Where are most graduates employed?
- What types of jobs do recent graduates hold—and, at what salaries?
- What career services are offered?
- If certification is required, what states have reciprocity?

Degree Fit

- Can you be competitive and effective in the program?
- Will it offer you knowledge within your capability and interests?
- Will it challenge you?

Campus Life

- What kinds of opportunities do students have to get involved?
- What social/cultural life will be available?
- Do most students reside on-campus or off-campus?
- What living accommodations are available and what are they like?

Student/Faculty Ratio

- Will you be comfortable with the class size?
- Is the faculty accessible to students?

Support Systems

- What library and computer facilities are available?
- How accessible will they be to you as a student?
- What types of professional affiliations are there?

Geographic Location

- Do you prefer an urban or rural environment?
- A hot, cold, or mild climate?
- Will the location offer an outlet for your individual interests and activities?
- What is the distance from home?

Costs and Financial Aid

- Do the tuition fees fit your budget?
- What type of work-study programs, loans, scholarships, research opportunities, and assistantships are available?

Admissions Procedures

- Do you know the admissions procedures?
- Are any advanced exams required?
- What documents will you need?
- Is there an interview process?

The Application Process

To Do: Find out *application deadline* for each program you will be applying to

The Application Form

To Do: *Fill out and submit application(s)*

Cost: *Generally \$50-\$85*

Typically the application will be online. Be sure to read the instructions carefully and to fill out the form completely and correctly; free of errors. Some departments have additional requirements, so make sure you complete the general application and department requirements.

Personal Statement

To Do: *Write and edit your personal statement*

This should be a concise, well-written essay that demonstrates your ability to organize and present ideas clearly. Your statement of purpose should reflect your background, qualifications and goals.

Tests

To Do: *Register for and take the appropriate graduate school exam.*

Cost: *\$205 and up; depending on the test*

Most graduate programs require scores from standardized admission tests. Below are common tests. Check with your graduate programs the deadline dates for submission of the test results.

If you are applying to:

Graduate school (most programs)
Law School
Business School
Medical School
Dental School
Optometry School
Pharmacy School

Most Likely Required Test:

Graduate Record Examination (GRE)
Law School Admission Test (LSAT)
Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT)
Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)
Dental Admission Test (DAT)
Optometry Admission Test (OAT)
Pharmacy College Admission Test (PCAT)

Transcripts

To Do: *Request official transcripts from your undergraduate school(s)*

Cost: *Varies, \$4 and up*

It is your responsibility to have an official copy of your transcripts sent to each school to which you are applying. Please note that it can take the CSUF Registration and Records office up to 7 business days to have your official transcripts ready.

Letters of Recommendation

To Do: *Request letters of recommendation from college professors, mentors, or employers*

Most graduate schools require at least two or three letters of recommendation. The best letters come from professors or people with whom you've developed a close relationship. Ask them if they feel they can write you a good letter. (Refer to p. 10 for more tips.)

Financing Graduate School

To Do: *Check graduate programs if there are deadlines to apply for financial assistance*

There are several kinds of financial assistance available for graduate students. These include fellowships, scholarships, teaching assistantships, graduate assistantships, research assistantships, and loans. Some of these are through the school and others are from outside agencies.

Timeline for Applying to Graduate School

September- May, Fall Semester - Spring Semester (Junior Year)

- Identify if graduate school is an option for you.
- Do you need to obtain a graduate degree to further advance in your career or to obtain the job you want?
- Speak with a faculty member and a career specialist at the Career Center about graduate school plans and alternatives.
- Begin identifying what types of graduate programs you are interested in.
- Begin to select at least 4-5 graduate schools of interest.
- Request admissions and financial aid information from each graduate program.
- Look carefully at their admissions requirements and pre-requisites.
- Identify how you can further prepare for graduate school. "How can you make yourself more marketable and a well-rounded candidate?"
- If you decide to take standardized tests, like the GRE, in the summer, register to take the exam to reserve your spot.

July/August, Summer (Junior Year)

- Study for and take standardized tests, such as GRE
 - July or earlier is when you should study and prepare to take the tests
 - August is the ideal time to take the standardized tests necessary for admissions because you'll have time to retake them in the fall if you're unhappy with your scores

September, Fall Semester (Senior Year)

- Seek advice from a faculty member, career specialist, and professionals in the field, such as asking what graduate programs they recommend for you.
- Continue to contact schools you have selected and request admissions and financial aid information.
- Research financial aid options.
- Register and study for required standardized tests (like the GRE).

October, Fall Semester (Senior Year)

- Take required standardized tests (like the GRE).
- Make contact with staff, students, faculty and/or alumni at each institution you are considering for helpful information.
- Visit the campus, such as campus tours or information sessions; talk with admissions professionals, faculty and students from the program.
- Start working on the application.
- Begin drafting your Statement of Purpose, consider scheduling an appointment with the Career Center for assistance. (Ref. p. 8-9 for more.)
- Contact individuals you want to write your letter of recommendation. You want to give them 1-3 months to write your letter.
- Consider attending the Graduate School Expo by the Career Center to talk to different schools.

November, Fall Semester (Senior Year)

- Request recommendations.
- Order official transcripts.
- Work on the application.
- Get organized. Make a timeline of due dates and what's required for each program. Create a folder (electronic or paper) for each school to help you stay on track.
- Finalize your Statement of Purpose and have it reviewed one more time by a career specialist, faculty member, advisor, or mentor before you submit it.
- Begin preparing any required financial statements. These are often required at the same time or earlier than the admissions application.

December - January, Fall Semester (Senior Year)

- If your program allows, take required standardized test if you didn't take them earlier.
- Begin sending in your admissions applications.
- Follow-up on transcripts and letters of recommendation to see that they have been sent.
- After you apply, make sure you receive a confirmation statement from each school within two weeks. Contact the admissions office if you do not receive an email or letter assuring you they have your application.
- If an interview is required as part of the admissions/selection process consider scheduling a mock-interview appointment with the Career Center.

February, Spring Semester (Senior Year)

- Wait to hear whether you have been accepted as a potential candidate.
- Continue to make contact with representatives of the schools to which you have applied to check on the progress of your applications.
- Secure financial aid. See if you will receive financial assistance from your grad program. It's a good idea to submit your Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application.
- Consider practicing your mock-interview skills for your entrance interview with the Career Center.
- Finish outlining a contingency plan in the event that you are not accepted into graduate school.

March - April, Spring Semester (Senior Year)

- Visit schools you got accepted. You'll get to meet with faculty, current students, and see if you can see yourself attending that school.

If You Don't Get Accepted

- Talk to an admissions representative from the graduate program to determine reasons why you didn't get accepted and to determine additional options.
- Schedule an appointment with the Career Center to discuss your options.
- Decide if you want to apply again and/or pursue other options such as gaining more experience by volunteering, internships, or working.

Developing A Personal Statement

Applications for graduate or professional schools usually require a written statement that outlines your background and your reasons for wanting to pursue an advanced degree in the field or profession you have chosen. It is commonly referred to as a personal statement, essay or letter of intent. If the application asks you to respond to certain questions or cover certain topics in your statement, make sure that you do so.

Your essay should be clear, concise, and well written. Talk about yourself and your experiences in positive terms. The Personal Statement is important to admission selection committees; it provides them with a sample of your writing skills and your ability to present ideas in a clear and coherent way. Before submitting the statement, seek constructive comments from advisors, faculty and from career counselors at the Career Center.

The following is a simple outline which might be used in writing a Personal Statement:

Opening Paragraph: State your general reasons for pursuing graduate study and introduce yourself to the selection committee. Make it interesting; the committee members will read many applications, so be sure that you give them a sense of your particular talents, individuality, experience, and uniqueness.

Background: Concentrate on those experiences that have served as a foundation for your upcoming graduate work. Describe your community and family background and tell how your interests in, and knowledge of, your chosen field developed. Describe any personal attributes and qualities that would help you complete your graduate study successfully, examples are very helpful. Focus on your determination to achieve your goals, initiative and ability in developing ideas, and capacity for working through problems independently.

Qualifications: Describe those experiences that will serve as a foundation for your forthcoming graduate work. Discuss (1) your expertise and accomplishments in your major field, (2) your undergraduate studies in general and how they relate to what you intend to do in graduate school, (3) specific learning experiences that demonstrate your motivation and inspiration for continued study, and (4) other relevant experiences such as jobs, internships, community activities, volunteer experience and other related experience.

Goals and Objectives:

- Short term- What specific area do you want to study in graduate school?
- Long term- How do you intend to combine your knowledge and experience with your graduate work to achieve your career goals?
- What impact will you have on society, the community, or your field of study with your advanced degree?

Closing Paragraph: Leave the reader with a strong sense that you are qualified and that you will be successful in graduate school. (You should combine this with your qualifications)

Tips for Developing a Great Personal Statement

Get Organized

- Write an individual and unique letter for each school
- Make sure you follow the instructions accordingly

The Essentials

- Candor-honesty, sincerity, and authenticity
- Grammatical accuracy and clarity
- Good writing is writing that is easily understood
- Have three or four people read your personal statement and critique it
- Maintain the proper tone
- Stick to the length that is requested

Be sure to...

- Make yourself stand out
- Find your unique angle- ask yourself “Who am I?” “Why am I different?” “What distinguishes me from others?”
- Always consider your audience

What to Leave out and What to Avoid

- Don’t repeat information from other parts of your application
- In general, avoid, generalities
- Don’t try to be funny unless it’s actually funny
- Stay away from anything remotely off-color
- Circumvent political issues if possible
- Don’t make religion the focal point unless you’re applying to a graduate or professional school with a religious affiliation
- Put the fraternity bake sale behind you- make sure that whatever you did rises to the level of having an actual impact on your life
- No gimmicks; no gambles- avoid tricky stuff. Don’t rhyme; don’t write a satire or a mock-up front page newspaper article

Subject Matter to Avoid in Your Personal Statement

- “My LSAT/GRE score isn’t great, but I’m just not a good test taker.”
- “My college grades weren’t that high, but...”
- “I’ve always wanted to be a lawyer.”- the admissions committee wants to know why
- “I want to become a lawyer to fight injustice.”- this is a very common topic, you want to make sure you stand out

Addendum

- If a school welcomes an addendum, consider including one if you feel that there is additional information you would like to include
- Please consult with a mentor, advisor, faculty member, or the career center before you consider adding an addendum

Tips for Requesting Recommendations

- Carefully read through all information about the grad program(s) you are applying for, to find out how and where recommendations are to be submitted. Contact the office for that program for further assistance or find out more if needed.
- Choose recommenders wisely!
 - Think of faculty you have visited during office hours and had conversations with. Faculty in whose classes you have done your best work. Supervisors from jobs or internships can also be excellent recommenders. Advisors from other departments are a possibility as well, but only if you have done work for them or made accomplishments they can refer to as examples of your strengths.
- Request in person if possible.
- Plan ahead. Begin asking for recommendations 1-3 months in advance of your deadline.
- Be gracious and don't expect a response to your request immediately.
- Follow up if they do not respond – but give them at least 3-4 weeks before you do, especially when you are requesting early.
- Remind them who you are (where they know you from), especially when sending via email and your contact with them has not been recent, or if you have not spoken to them in person about it first.
- Mention recent achievements or updates since the time you were last in contact.
- Tell them what you are applying for, include information about the deadline you are trying to meet.
- Include your resume/CV for reference.
- When and if they yes to your request, be sure to reply ASAP providing all pertinent information.
 - What is pertinent? Anything you did not tell them about already that is specific to the process of submitting a recommendation for you to the programs you are applying for. Instructions or links provided by the program, as well as any special requirements, prompts or useful information to help them write about you in a way that is relevant to the programs you are applying for.
- Don't forget to say thank you! In all of your communication with the recommender, whether it is a faculty member or supervisor from your job or internship, be sure they know how much you appreciate their time and effort on your behalf.

Sample Request for Recommendation

Dear Dr. Moore,

I am pursing admission to several Counseling programs for the fall of 2023. As I prepare my applications, I wanted to inquire about your availability to write recommendation letters for me. After doing my research, I have narrowed down my choices to three counseling psychology doctoral programs and I would greatly appreciate a recommendation from you regarding my ability to be successful in graduate programs such as these.

Attached is my CV for your reference. If you are able to be a recommender, please let me know and I will forward you the link(s) to upload for each of the programs I am applying for. As far as the timeline is concerned, I plan to submit my applications by Dec 5, 2022 and so I would need the recommendations uploaded before the end of the semester.

Thank you in advance for your help. Your time and support in this process is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Patricia Watanabe

Sample Reply to Offer of Recommendation

Dear Dr. Moore,

Thank you for writing letters of recommendation on my behalf. For your reference, I am attaching my current CV. The universities I am applying to are:

University of San Diego
California State University, Fullerton
California State University, Sacramento

For the University of San Diego – Attached is recommendation letter form with addressed envelope. Please seal the envelope and write your signature across the seal. Please do not mail the recommendation letter. I will pick it up from you and submit it with my application packet as they instruct. I would like to send out my application by Dec 5th and would like to pick up the letter during your office hours on the week of Nov 29th, if possible.

For Cal State Fullerton and Sac State – Both require online submission of recommendation letters through the Cal State Apply system. You will receive an email directly from those institutions with a link to the site where you complete the recommendation and upload the letter.

Please let me know if you have any questions. 714-555-5555 or patricia.watanabe@gmail.com.

Thank You Again,

Patricia Watanabe

Resources

CSUF Graduate Studies Office (<http://www.fullerton.edu/graduate>)

This CSUF department provides support, opportunities, and guidance for current graduate students as well as prospective CSUF graduate students.

CSUF Health Professions Advising Office (<http://www.fullerton.edu/healthprofessions>)

This CSUF department provides support and advising for students looking to gain admission to health professions schools including allied health programs.

CSUF McNair Scholars Program (<http://www.fullerton.edu/mcnair/>)

This CSUF department prepares students from underrepresented, first generation, and low-income students for doctoral studies.

Petersons.com (<http://www.petersons.com>)

This site includes a graduate program search tool and information about college admissions tests.

ThoughtCo. (<https://www.thoughtco.com/graduate-school-4132543>)

This site includes articles from graduates of master's and doctoral programs featuring tips and advice about the admission process, recommendation letters, admissions essays, etc.

GradSchools.com (<http://www.gradschools.com>)

This site provides various graduate school information. You can search graduate program as well as create a personalized student profile, which allows school recruiters to contact you.

Financial Aid

Federal Student Aid and Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

<https://studentaid.gov/>. You can begin to apply as of January 1st, deadline is March 1st.

Fergusons Online Career Guidance Database & Eureka Database

These databases include scholarship listings. Available to CSUF students through your student portal by logging onto <http://www.fullerton.edu/career/students/career-major-exploration/> then scroll down to 'Ferguson Career Guidance Center and Eureka'.

Additional web resources for scholarship and educational loans information:

- <https://www.fastweb.com/>
- <http://www.petersons.com>
- <https://finaid.org/>
- <https://www.salliemae.com/>

Career Information/Exploration

The following resources will assist you in identifying and researching different career options, but most importantly they will provide you information on the requirements and educational background needed to pursue those careers.

Navigate three databases available to CSUF students through your student portal at <http://www.fullerton.edu/career/students/career-major-exploration/> then scroll down to...

- **Fergusons Online Career Guidance Database**
 - Take career assessments and view occupational and industry profiles.
- **What Can I Do With This Major Database**
 - Identify common career areas, typical employers, and strategies to maximize opportunities.
- **Eureka Database**
 - Take career assessments and research careers.

O'Net Online

Developed by the U.S. Department of Labor, this site provides detailed occupational information where you can search by keyword or conduct a career search based on skills, go to: <https://www.onetonline.org/>.

Occupational Outlook Handbook

Developed by the U.S Department of Labor, this site provides descriptions and video clips of many occupations, go to <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>

Sample Graduate School Interview Questions

If your application was strong and you are being seriously considered for a school's graduate or professional program you may be invited to participate in an interview. These vary widely depending on the program to which you are applying. Be prepared to answer the following questions:

- Tell us about yourself?
- What would you bring to this cohort?
- What would your contributions to this program be?
- Why did you attend your undergraduate institution?
- What were your favorite courses at your undergraduate institution? Why?
- What books and newspapers do you read?
- What are your extracurricular activities?
- What do you do during the summer?
- What experiences led you to your career choice?
- What are your long-range goals?
- How do you see yourself ten years from now?
- What makes you believe that you will be successful in the program?
- What makes you a good candidate?
- Why do you think you are better suited for admission than your classmates?
- What appeals to you about our program?
- What do you plan to specialize in?
- What other schools have you applied to?
- Have you been interviewed or accepted at any other school?
- What do you think are the most pressing issues in this field?
- Describe any research project you've worked on at your undergraduate institution.
- How do you cope with frustrating situations?
- Tell me about your culture.
- What will you do if you are not accepted?
- What factors influenced you to go to graduate school?
- How do you feel your undergraduate studies have prepared you for this program?
- What problems do you expect to face while attending graduate school? How will you handle these?
- What contributions do you plan to make to the field?
- Tell me about a situation in which you took initiative.
- Tell me about your diversity experience.

Sample Medical School Interview Questions

- Why do you want to be a doctor?
- Why are you interested in our program?
- What would you do if you could not be a doctor?
- If you do not get into medical school, what would you do?
- What do you have to offer our medical school?
- Describe your experiences that have prepared you for medical school, such as clinical experience, volunteer work, or research experience.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- If you witnessed an accident on the freeway, as a doctor, would you stop to help the victims, knowing that doing so might lead to malpractice claims against you?
- Describe a challenging time or event in your life and how you got through it.
- What do you think is the biggest problem facing medicine today?
- How do you plan to finance your medical education?
- What do you think healthcare will be like in 20 years?
- Would you practice in the inner city or in a rural community?
- What would you do if you were asked a medical question that you were unqualified to answer?
- What non-medical book are you reading?
- How do you handle stress?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- What type of medicine do you want to practice when you finish your training?
- If you were placed in charge of all healthcare policy in the country, which one would it be and what would you change?