

STEPS TO PURSUING GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

Step 1: What is Grad School Really Like and Do I Want to Go?

When deciding on whether graduate school is the right option for you, ask yourself these questions:

- Does your desired career field require or highly prefer an advanced degree?
- Do you have a strong interest in the field of study and deepening your expertise?
- Have faculty encouraged you to attend graduate school?

But also consider:

- Are you considering graduate school solely to delay your entry into the job market? Do you feel unprepared to enter the working world?
- Will you be academically overqualified without any practical experience for a first job?

Having trouble determining your answers? Unsure if you really want/need to pursue an advanced degree? Seek assistance! Speak to a career counselor to explore these questions and to guide you through the process. Professors and industry professionals are also great resources for advice.

Step 2: Research Your Options

1. Track Your Progress

- Make a spreadsheet with a list of all the schools/programs you are considering. Fill in basic categories such as: name of school, program type, location, application deadline, fees, tuition cost, class size, standardized testing requirements, upcoming admissions events, etc. Add whatever key criteria is important to you. This list is flexible, so make sure to update/remove/add options as you see fit.
- On average, applicants apply to around 6 programs and organize them into categories of target, reach, and safety schools.

2. Evaluate Funding Opportunities

- This could be the chief determinant between your school options. School A might be great, but could cost significantly more than School B, which has more funding opportunities.
- Different types of funding include:
 - Research assistantships
 - Teaching assistantships
 - Administrative assistantships
 - Fellowships
 - Financial aid (merit & need-based)
- How much/how competitive these assistantships are depends on the size of the school and the program. Some schools do a better job matching you with opportunities than others. Be sure to ask about this at open houses or other admissions events.
- **Note:** Some schools also offer health insurance to their graduate student population, which may be a factor worth considering, especially after age 26.

3. Leverage Available Resources

- To help identify programs and evaluate your options, talk to trusted sources like professors, alumni and peers; review websites like gradschools.org, professional associations, and relevant academic journals; and take advantage of graduate school open houses & fairs (in person and virtual).
- For more tips, see Don Martin's Book: "Roadmap to Graduate Study," available in the Career Center.

Step 3: Check Admissions Requirements:

1. Prerequisites

- Confirm that your undergraduate course requirements match the prerequisites of the program. Specific questions should be directed to the graduate program you are applying to.

2. Standardized Testing

- Determine any required testing (GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT, DAT) and build a study plan/timeline.
- **Note:** Some schools are test-optional – another factor that might impact your decision!

3. Letters of Recommendation

- The number of recommendations required varies by school; most typically require 2-3.
- Be sure to ask academic or professional references who can/will provide a *strong* endorsement of you.

4. Personal Statement & Other Essays

- The point of a personal statement is for the admissions board to gain a deeper understanding of who you are apart from your education and work experience. It explains why you're the right fit for the program and a worthwhile applicant. It's also an opportunity to highlight important factors that may not be readily available in the rest of your application.
- A personal statement is different from a statement of purpose (if you're asked for that as well). A statement of purpose will touch on your academic and career goals, as well as your past credentials. While those should also be discussed in your personal statement, it's more about your life experiences and how they've shaped you and your journey to graduate school.
- Need help? Schedule an appointment with the Career Center or the Writing Center to review.

5. Check Deadlines

- Carefully follow all instructions and plan to submit your application before the deadline to be considered for funding opportunities.

Step 4: Submit Applications:

1. **Submit Materials** - Save any confirmation pages you receive in the submission process.

2. **Follow Directions** - Double-check length requirements, amount of recommendation letters, grammar, and any other additional forms that you have submitted.

3. **Make Copies** – Save copies of all sent and received materials in a separate, digital folder for easy retrieval.

4. **Verify Receipt** – Contact all of your schools and check your application portal to ensure that all of your materials have been submitted.

APPLYING TO PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL:

Law School:

- Interested in applying to law school? Schedule an appointment with the Career Center's Pre-Law Advisor on Handshake. These sessions cover legal career options, the law school application process, writing personal statements, and more.
- Subscribe to the biweekly Pre-Law Newsletter at <https://villanova.joinhandshake.com/edu/surveys/20738>
- Visit the Pre-Law Career Connections page at <https://connections.villanova.edu/channels/pre-law/>

Medical School/Health Professions:

- Students interested in medical school or any health professions programs should schedule an appointment with Villanova's Health Professions Advising Office (*academic and exploratory-focused*) or the Career Center's Pre-Health Advisor (*career and application materials-focused*) via Handshake.
- Workshops, programming, and resources are available on the Health Professions Advising Office website.