

# Graduate & Professional School

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Many Oswego State students have considered graduate or professional school. To achieve success at the graduate level, you need to give a great deal of thought to your educational and career goals. Attending graduate school should be for the right reasons.

## Why Pursue Higher Education?

There are many reasons for going on for further study. The best reasons for enrolling in a graduate program are 1) the love of a particular subject and the desire to study it in depth and/or 2) the need for an advanced degree to enter or move up in your profession of choice. If other factors are influencing your decision, be cautious. Reasons you don't want to attend graduate school include avoiding the "real world", not wanting to conduct a job search, etc. Many students face pressure to attend graduate school from parents, peers or well-meaning mentors. Perhaps the practice of law or medicine is a family tradition or as a high achiever, you've been urged to pursue an academic career. Be sure the advice you receive confirms your career goals; it is difficult to succeed in such a highly demanding environment when you are unsure of your reasons for being there.

## Prepared to Commit to a Career Field?

Graduate school serves to focus your energy and education in a specialized discipline. If you are unsure of your career field, you may be able to refine your interests by researching areas of study in the Career Services Office, talking to professors, reading institutional literature and participating in an internship. If that doesn't help, a year or two of valuable work experience may enhance your perspective. Consider how interested you are in studying a particular body of knowledge. Are you interested in theory or research or it is

the degree at the end of the program that excites you? An advanced degree may not be the only way to achieve your goals. For example, in the performing arts or business fields, real-life experience can be more valuable than graduate coursework.

## Your Long Range Career and Lifestyle Goals

Whatever your motive for going to graduate school, it is a good idea to think about the impact that experience will have on your life in 3-5 years and beyond. Will the degree prepare you for a specific occupation or career field? If so, what is the employment outlook? When you select a graduate field of study, you're also to some degree defining a profession and lifestyle. Can you envision yourself as a lawyer, an art history professor, or a psychologist? Make arrangements to talk with people in the field (professors, alumni, family and friends) about the rewards and drawbacks of the path you're considering. Currently enrolled graduate students can provide valuable insights.

A full time Master's program usually takes one to two years, while Ph.D.'s and some professional degrees require three or more. During this period, you'll focus intensely on your academic subjects, forfeiting salary, workday routine, and free time. Are you comfortable with the thought of spending a few more years as a student? Perspective is important, and a sense of long-term direction can make your graduate school experience more meaningful.

## Cost-Benefit Analysis

Virtually every student in graduate school will need some type of financial aid at some point. It is a major investment for which you'll need to develop a sound financial plan from the very beginning.

Ultimately, you'll need to decide if graduate school is worth the financial sacrifice. Prior to making that decision, you'll want to familiarize yourself with potential funding sources. There are basically two types of funding: money you don't have to pay back, and self-help aid which must be repaid or earned. Fellowships and scholarships may be awarded based on need, merit or both and are the most sought-after type of funding - and the most difficult to receive. Typically, these are awarded by the institution or outside agency, generally lasting throughout the academic career (although some must be renewed yearly) and often awarded to doctoral or post-doctoral students. Institution-based aid most frequently takes the form of a graduate assistantship, graduate (or teaching or research) work part-time in exchange for a stipend and tuition reimbursement. Loans are the primary source of governmental assistance. Part-time employment is another way to offset the costs of graduate school. The type of aid available to you vary widely from one institution to another. Make sure you investigate fully before making decisions.

## Researching Graduate Schools

Graduate and professional school information is housed in various locations on campus. The Career Services office has assorted books and directories with descriptive information on a wide range of programs. We have bulletins for graduate admissions tests (GRE, GMAT, LSAT, etc.) and additional information on scholarships and fellowships. Familiarize yourself with publications and related journals describing current research in your field in Penfield Library. Make an appointment with a Career Counselor or faculty member to review your admission strategy. You can also find valuable resources on the internet such as the US News and World Report

rankings (see back page of this handout for sites.

### Deciding Factors

You'll need to figure out which institutions and programs are best suited to you and how the application process works. There are many factors to consider:

**Reputation** - Is the program/institution nationally recognized? Recognized on a regional or local level? For those looking into program rankings, be advised that there is no single rating for graduate and professional school that is universally accepted. Read several reports and ask your professors about the reputation of the schools. Rank the schools to which you want to apply; then consider 2-4 schools in each of the following categories:

1. Reach, 2. Probably, 3. Safety, for a total of about 6-12 target schools.

- **Program of Study** - What emphasis does the program use? Theory? Research? Case Study? Thesis vs. Non-Thesis? How many students are enrolled in the program? What is the student mix and attrition rate?

- **Geographic Location** - Is this an area in which you want to spend two or more years? Ties that you develop could lead to jobs in that area.

- **Post-Grad School Employment** Where do graduates of the program typically find work? How much help is provided by the institution to find employment?

- **Faculty** - Are the faculty conducting research in areas that are of interest to you? Are professors seen on the cutting edge of their field? What have they published? What is the student-faculty ratio? Have you visited the campus to meet with any faculty to discuss their program?

- **Facilities** - What type of housing is available? How extensive are labs and facilities?

- **Cost** - How will I pay for school? What are the average starting salaries of graduates in

my field? Will I be able to support my loan payments? Is financial aid available?

### THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Gather information early. It is a good idea to start seriously considering graduate school one and half years before you begin further study. Application deadlines vary; it is important to know when a particular institution's deadline is well in advance. Generally speaking, deadlines fall between January and March. Some schools have rolling admissions. See attached timeline for assistance.

To get applications, send a neatly written or typed postcard requesting information to the schools of your choice. Ask for an application, catalog, and any specific information they may have in which you are interested. In a few professional fields, there are national services that provide assistance with some part of the application process. These services are: Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS), American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS), American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS), American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine Application Service (AACPMAS), and American Association of Dental Schools Application Service (AADSAS).

Each field has different requirements, and schools offering the same type of degree may have different requirements. Therefore, it is important that you read the information available from each program and decide what needs to be completed before applying. Colleges and universities usually require specific graduate admissions tests and departments sometimes have their own requirements as well. Specific information on which test to take will be noted in the literature on each program. Most programs require the following items:

- **Application Form** - Make sure it is neat (it is usually best to type your application rather than hand written). Before writing your final version, it might be helpful to prepare copies for practice

versions. Don't leave lines on your application blank.

- **Essay** - The essay varies from school to school and is often the most difficult part of the application. Your essay should be well organized, succinct, specific, customized, proofread, free of spelling errors, and thought out thoroughly. Remember to stick to the topic and try to consider what the reader might be thinking. The essay is your chance to show why you want to go to graduate school, your strengths and achievements, and why you're interested in a particular department or program. The personal essay should represent your best writing efforts. It is always a good idea to talk about the essay with someone else to get their view (i.e. professors, respected friends, etc.). The Career Services office is also available to critique your personal statement and has books designed to assist you in this process.

- **Application Fee** - Don't forget that most graduate schools require an application fee. Some fees may be waived if you meet certain financial criteria.

- **Interview** - Some graduate schools (especially medical and business) require you to appear for an interview. It can be a very important opportunity for you to persuade an admission's officer that you are an excellent candidate for their program. Keep in mind, as the interviewer is asking you questions, that they are more interested in *how* you think than just *what* you think. You should prepare for a graduate school interview just as you would for a job interview. Remember to be thinking of what you want the interviewer to know about you so that you can present this information in the interview. The ideal candidate is a mature, thoughtful, well prepared person who has a mission and vision of his/her life. Fields that involve creativity usually require you to submit a portfolio as part of the application process. It should show your skill and ability to do further work in a particular field, and it should reflect the scope of your cumulative training and experience.



# Timeline for applying to graduate school during senior year

Applying for

Fall Semester	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.
Spring Semester (not always available)	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.
<p style="text-align: center;">Gather Information on Graduate Programs</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Collect Application Materials</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Process Information &amp; Secure Documents</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Send in Applications &amp; Follow Up</p>
<p>Information Sources Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty</li> <li>• Peers</li> <li>• Peterson's Guide to Graduate/Professional Study</li> <li>• DISCOVER - career guidance system</li> <li>• Reference Literature prepared by prof. field</li> </ul> <p>Online Resources</p> <p>Begin asking for letters of recommendation</p> <p>Investigate national scholarships</p> <p>Pick up bulletin and register for required entrance test</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GRE, GMAT, LSAT (Career Services)</li> <li>• MCAT, DCAT (Biology Dept.)</li> </ul> <p>Search for private sources of graduate School funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Danforth, Fulbright, Ford, Carnegie Mellon, etc.</li> </ul>	<p>Request from Schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application for admission</li> <li>• Application for financial aid</li> <li>• Graduate school catalog</li> <li>• Specific information regarding your chosen program which applying</li> <li>• Application for scholarships and fellowships</li> </ul>	<p>Process Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin to make initial decisions</li> <li>• Apply for appropriate graduate school admission test - GRE, LSAT, GMAT, etc.</li> <li>• Secure letters of recommendation &amp; send thank you note to authors</li> <li>• Begin credential file in Career Services office if appropriate</li> <li>• Begin to create rough draft of general graduate school essays</li> <li>• Double check application deadlines and rolling admissions policies</li> <li>• Register for national application or data assembly service (for medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry or law school)</li> </ul>	<p>Submit Applications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalize your graduate/professional school choices</li> <li>• Send in all application materials</li> </ul> <p><i>After you have applied:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verify your application file is complete</li> <li>• Visit institutions that accept you</li> <li>• Send a deposit to institution of choice</li> <li>• Notify other programs that accepted you so they can admit other students</li> <li>• Send thank you notes to persons who wrote you recommendations</li> </ul>
<p>Note: These dates are extrapolated from the deadline (Feb. or Nov.) for receiving applications as most commonly stated by graduate schools. There are exceptions, but to be safe, consider Aug./Sept. as the latest possible date for starting search.</p>			
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>The vast majority of resources you need to conduct your research can be found in the Career Services Office, 142 Campus Center, or Penfield Library.</i></p>			
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Internet Resources</b></p> <p><i>Peterson's Guides to Graduate and Professional School:</i> <a href="http://www.petersons.com">www.petersons.com</a>  <i>Graduate School Rankings:</i> <a href="http://www.usnews.com">www.usnews.com</a>  <i>Admissions Testing Information:</i> <a href="http://www.ets.org">www.ets.org</a>  <i>Online Funding/Scholarship Search:</i> <a href="http://www.cashe.com">www.cashe.com</a></p>			