



Planning for the Next Step: Graduate School

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As graduation draws near, feelings of excitement, nervousness, anticipation, relief and a plethora of other emotions are prevalent. One feeling that doesn't need to overwhelm is the fear of graduate school.

With research, planning and preparation, thinking about graduate school doesn't have to be scary. Here are several things to look into that will help with your next step up the academic ladder.

Focus in Undergrad Work

It is so easy as the last couple of semesters of undergraduate work comes to a close to think, "I don't have to work as hard anymore! Graduation is within reach!" This fallacy causes many students to slack off, receive bad grades their last semesters and lower their G.P.A. The number one factor of getting into Graduate school is the G.P.A. Keep up the hard work and keep those grades up!

Stretch Outward

Graduate schools want students who will contribute not just with their good grades, but also be involved with clubs and organizations. On resumes and applications, they will look for that sort of involvement during undergrad years. Get involved in a cause, start a group, volunteer or serve.

Start Specializing

If at all possible, volunteer or work in the field that you want to study. This shows a real interest in the field and the desire to really work for what you want—it reveals ambition.

Keep Deadlines

All schools have deadlines for applications, tests, essays, tuition, etc. Whether applying to one or many schools, look into their deadlines now. Give yourself ample time—make plans to complete all parts of the application process long before the actual deadline. Don't miss a deadline—the schools won't give extra time.

Take Entrance Exams

For many different types of graduate schools students must take entrance exams to show their level of comprehension, writing, reasoning, and other skills. Most graduate schools require their applicants take the GRE, Graduate Record Examinations. Business schools often call for the GMAT, Graduate Management Admission Test. The LSAT, Law School Admission Test is necessary to apply to a law school. For medical school, students must take the MCAT, Medical College Admission Test.

Talk with an admissions advisor of the graduate school if you are unsure which test scores needed to be included with your application. On the website graduateguide.com there is an accurate list of when and where these tests can be taken. One of the most important parts of taking these tests is ample study and preparation. Research what each test entails. Buy specific and up-to-date books to help study. Spend the time to prepare.

Write Amazing Personal Essays

Another important part of the application process lies in the personal essay. A professional and persuasive personal essay can be the key to entrance into grad school. Research the assigned topic. Take time to write it well—don't wait until last minute. Have others review the essay and don't be afraid to revise it. Take the essay to a writing center, a professor or a teacher for suggestions.

Submit Professional Letters of Recommendation

When looking for someone to write a letter of recommendation, make sure to find someone who has merit behind them. While a student's mother may love them and sing their praises, a graduate school will be much more impressed with recommendation from a professor or employer. Be specific in the request for the letters—specify what you plan on studying or what qualities the school is looking for so that the writer can focus on what will help you the most.

Research Financial Aid

Financial aid can be received from private loans, student loans or gov-



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ernment loans. One example is the Federal Perkins Loan (which is determined by FAFSA) and can be up to \$6,000 per graduate year. Find out the difference between subsidized and unsubsidized loans. Read the fine print before committing to a loan. When picking a graduate school, look not only at program costs but also the living costs of that particular area.

It may seem overwhelming thinking of all there is to do to prepare for gradu-

ate school. But don't panic! There are many resources online.

Gradschools.com contains information on everything from exams, essays to financial aid. This site also contains a search engine which enables searches of specific colleges, degrees or programs and provides links to those schools. It gives basic information about estimated living costs, tuition and even the demographics of the schools.

Make a plan, talk to your academic advisor, call the admissions office of the graduate schools, research online and enjoy the ascent to graduate school.

