

University of La Verne
Career Services
Division of Student Affairs

GRADUATE SCHOOL

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GRADUATE SCHOOL INFORMATION

Making the decision to continue on to graduate study is a long-term commitment. People offer many explanations for their own decisions about further schooling. It may well be worthwhile to examine your own reasons for pursuing graduate study. For some the decision is personal--the challenge, sense of achievement, personal growth or a love of study and campus life. For others, it is specific career development; 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 graduate school. It will help you maintain the motivation and dedication which are so important to success in a graduate program. Be sure that the goal is really what you want. For example, don't attend law school unless you know enough about what a lawyer does and whether you would like that. Do an internship, informational interviewing and self assessment before you start a graduate program.

You may find yourself asking if you should jump straight into graduate school after completing your bachelors, or taking a break and getting out in the real world. 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. For instance, those who are pursuing a PhD in Philosophy or Pre-Med students may find themselves at a disadvantage if there was a break before graduate studies as the information would not be as fresh in their minds; where as a student looking to pursue an MBA would benefit from two to four years of experience in the field and may also benefit financially by having tuition costs reimbursed by their current employer. Talk to faculty, professionals in the field, or Career Services for more information. (Information provided by GradSchools.com)

Another important decision to consider is whether to pursue a Masters degree or a PhD. Take a deeper look at the amount of time, money and commitment you will be required to put in. On average master's degrees can be acquired with in two to three years, where as a PhD will require a minimum of five to six years and maybe even more. Financing a college education is not cheap, and either is graduate school. As you may have realized during the course of completing your bachelors, the more time you spend in school the more it costs. On average, masters programs are generally cheaper in comparison to PhD programs because of the decrease amount of time required to complete the program. Individuals who have PhDs yield a higher income following graduation than those individuals who earn a masters degree. Most students will end up either in debt from large student loans, or live on one of the tightest budgets while they complete their education. Both degrees require additional commitment above and beyond what is expected as you complete your bachelor's degree. Masters degrees tend to be more career-oriented, where as PhDs tend to be more research-oriented. A master's degree can be especially helpful for individuals who are looking for a career change or looking for advancement within a field. Although, some careers require the intellect of a PhD, in that case, it would be necessary to obtain the degree. (Information provided by GradSchools.com)

CHOOSING A GRADUATE PROGRAM TO FIT YOUR NEEDS

After making a decision to go on to graduate work, you may gather more information by researching local graduate schools, talking with faculty advisors or professionals in the field, or read journals in the field of your interest. Consider the following questions to help you pick the right school and right program to fit your needs:

A. PROGRAM

1. Does the department have a good reputation?
2. Is the opportunity for specialization present? Is specialization required?
3. Will you feel comfortable with the method of teaching used?
4. Does it offer you sufficient course and career options?
5. Are internships or work-study programs part of the curriculum?
6. If certification is required, what percentage of the class passes?
7. How long is the program (number of credits)?
8. How many classes are required outside of the discipline?
9. What is the retention rate into the second year of the program?

B. FACULTY

1. Who are the faculty members?
2. How many professors hold Doctoral degrees?
3. What are their areas of specialization? What are their research interests? Have they had extensive work experience in the field?

4. What is the faculty's quality with regard to teaching and/or research?
5. What is the faculty to student ratio? Is the faculty accessible to students?

C. STUDENTS

1. Is the school selective with regard to admissions?
2. What is the make-up of the student body?
3. What academic standards are placed on the student?
4. What percentage has worked full-time? How many enter directly from undergraduate school?
5. Is there a student association? What are its activities?

D. JOB PLACEMENT

1. Where are most graduates employed?
2. What types of jobs do recent graduates hold-and, at what salaries?
3. What placement services are offered?
4. If certification is required, what states have reciprocity?

E. DEGREE OF FIT

1. Does the program fit your personal goals and educational needs?
2. Can you be competitive and effective in the program?
3. Does the program utilize an interdisciplinary approach to the field or focus on one specific approach?
4. Will it offer you knowledge within your capability and interests?
5. What are the philosophy and methods of instruction?
6. Will it challenge you?
7. Will you be comfortable with class size?

F. CAMPUS LIFE-GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

1. What social/cultural life will be available?
2. Do most students reside on-campus or off-campus?
3. What living accommodations are available and what are they like?
4. Will the location offer an outlet for your individual interests and activities?
5. What is the distance from home?

G. SUPPORT SYSTEMS

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

H. COSTS AND FINANCIAL AID

1. Do tuition and fees fit your budget?
2. What type of work-study programs, loans, scholarships, research opportunities, and assistantships are available? Can you qualify for these?

I. ADMISSIONS PROCEDURES

1. Do you know the admissions procedures?
2. Are any advanced exams required?

TESTS

Most graduate programs require scores from standardized admissions tests. Below are the common tests -- be sure you have read the requirements for admission carefully so that you are aware of all the tests necessary and the deadline dates for submission of the test results. Application materials, for most tests, are available in the Career Development Center.

If you are applying to:

Business School
Dental School
Graduate School (most programs)
Subject GRE

You should take:

[Graduate Management Admission Test \(GMAT\)](#)
[Dental Aptitude Test \(DAT\)](#)
[Graduate Record Examination \(GRE\)](#)
[Subject GRE: Biochemistry, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Literature in English, Mathematics, Physics, Psychology](#)

Law School
Medical or Podiatry School
Optometry School
Pharmacy
Psychology, Education, Social Service
Teaching

[Law School Admission Test \(LSAT\)](#)
[Medical College Admission Test \(MCAT\)](#)
[Optometry Admission Test \(OAT\)](#)
[Pharmacy College Admission Test \(PCAT\)](#)
[Miller Analogies Test \(MAT\)](#)
[California Basic Education Skills Test-California \(CBEST\)](#)
[California Commission of Teacher Credentialing](#)
[California State Credential Information](#)
[California Subject Examination for Teachers \(CSET\)](#)
[Reading Instruction Competence Assessment-Reading Education \(RICA\)](#)
[Single Subject Assessments for Teaching](#)
[Teacher Licensure Certification](#)
[Veterinary Aptitude Test \(VAT\)](#)

Veterinary School

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Although some institutions no longer require confidential letters of recommendation, many still do. Letters of recommendation should be requested from professors, advisors, employers or other individuals who are familiar with your work, undergraduate preparation, commitment, motivation, and/or potential. Choose people who view your work positively. Ask them if they feel they can write you a good letter.

When requesting a letter, it is much better to talk to your potential letter writer in person and provide all the necessary information, i.e., a copy of your personal statement, unofficial transcripts, list of classes or experience that individual has had with you, special projects or reports in classes with that individual, and school activities. Letters which reflect a personal knowledge of you as an individual are much better than generalized, impersonal letters which only describe your academic performance in class.

FINANCING GRADUATE SCHOOL

There are several kinds of financial assistance available for graduate students. These include fellowships, scholarships, teaching and research assistantships, loans and grant-in-aid. Some of these are through the school and others are from outside agencies. Financial aid application deadlines are frequently earlier than the general application deadline. If you are currently receiving financial aid, you may also request that the application fee be waived.

Fellowships: On the graduate level, the equivalent of a scholarship is a fellowship. It is usually a straight monetary award given on the basis of scholastic achievement. Fellowships are often tax-free unless they involve teaching or research; in these cases the recipient will more than likely be required to report them for income tax purposes.

Assistantships: Teaching or research assistantships are often available through the academic department or program of study. Assistantships usually involve working 10-20 hours per week in exchange for some stipend and/or fee remission. Although fee remissions are common, be aware that in accepting a graduate assistantship, you still may be responsible for partial payment of your tuition and/or fees. Some institutions have programs in which graduate students earn a stipend, room and board, or both by working as assistants in undergraduate residence halls. If you do not receive information on such a program, along with your application materials, you might contact the school's director of housing and residential life to inquire about such possibilities.

Long Term Educational Loans: Most institutions have loan programs for which graduate students may be eligible. Such programs include private, state, and federally-sponsored student loans. The institution's financial aid office will be able to explain these loan programs to you.

CAN YOU AFFORD GRADUATE SCHOOL?

Using the [Educational Investment Planner](#) from the Sallie Mae website, you can map out your entire financial future at a college without even applying to the college. Using this tool, you can select the school of interest, the number of years you anticipate you will be enrolled, and finally, indicate available financial resources including scholarships and grants or select Stafford loans to help pay for your tuition, and they calculator will give you an fairly accurate estimate on how much you will need to repay in student loans and what your monthly payment would look like. Other financial aid calculators are available through the World Wide Web.

DEADLINES: APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

Deadlines: While considering graduate school, be aware of the application deadlines. For Fall admission at most graduate schools, applications are 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.

SENIOR TIME TABLE

SEPTEMBER

- Talk to ULV faculty and career counselors at the Career Services Center about Graduate School plans and alternatives.
- Write to schools you have selected to request admissions and financial aid applications.
- Find out when graduate transcripts must be sent and what other materials are required with applications.
- Register for needed entrance examinations.

OCTOBER

- Take required examinations.
- Make contact with administrators, students, faculty and/or alumni at each institution you are considering for helpful information.
- Talk to graduate recruiters at the various institutions you are considering.
- Visit, if possible, the schools you are interested in. Talk with admissions people, faculty, and students.

NOVEMBER

- Secure needed letters of recommendation.
- Begin preparing any required financial statements. These are often required at the same time or earlier than admissions applications.

DECEMBER

- Take required examinations this month if you didn't do it in October.
- Send admission applications in this month.
- Check on the transcripts and letters of recommendations to see that they have been sent.
- If you have not done so, visit the schools to which you are applying.

JANUARY

- Last chance to take the required tests for fall admission (may be too late for some schools).
- Check with each school to see that they have received all materials, including test scores and financial statements. If some of your application materials are missing, you might be eliminated from consideration.

FEBRUARY

- Wait (might seem like forever) to hear whether you have been accepted.
- Continue to make contact with representatives of the schools to which you have applied to check on the progress of your applications.
- Finish outlining contingency plans in the event you are not accepted.

DEVELOPING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

Applications for graduate or professional schools often include a section requiring you to write a Personal Statement, an essay about your background, and your reasons for wanting to pursue advanced study in the field or profession you have chosen. 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 clear, coherent language. As you write it, ask yourself, "Would I be inclined to admit myself to graduate school?" Before submitting the statement, seek constructive comments and criticism from friends and advisors. The following is a sample outline which might be used in writing a Personal Statement:

- I. **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 yours gives them a sense of your particular talents and individuality.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** Concentrate on those experiences that have served as a foundation for your forthcoming graduate work. Describe your community and family background and tell how your interest in, and knowledge of, your chosen field developed. Giving examples, describe any personal attributes and qualities that would help you complete graduate study successfully, such as determination in achieving your goals, initiative and ability in developing ideas, and capacity for working through problems independently.
- III. **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 for community activities, including names of organizations and other concrete details.
- IV. **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:**
 - A. Short term -- what specific area do you want to study in graduate school?
 - B. Long term -- how do you intend to combine your knowledge and experience with your graduate work to achieve goals?
 - C. What impact will you have on society, community, etc., with your advanced degree (i.e. M.D., J.D., M.A., Ph.D., etc.)?
- V. **CLOSING PARAGRAPH:** It should pack the punch -- that is, 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.)

HINTS:

1. Be clear and concise.
2. Talk about yourself positively, avoid negative experience.
3. Start with an outline. After you have written your first draft, pretend you are on the selection committee. Would you accept yourself on the basis of your statement? If not, why? Work out problems and rewrite.
4. If you want someone to check your statement, have an advisor, a faculty member and/or friends, etc., read it and ask for constructive criticism.

Below are links to various web sites offering suggestions on do's and don'ts for writing your personal statement. Overall, the main idea of a personal statement is to encourage your reader to accept you to graduate school. It is important to keep a neutral tone as well as to make sure the information is relevant.

- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>
- http://gradschool.about.com/od/essaywriting/All_About_the_Graduate_Admissions_Essay.htm
- <http://career.berkeley.edu/Grad/GradStatement.stm>

GENERAL SITES YOU MAY FIND HELPFUL IN YOUR QUEST TO PURSUE GRADUATE SCHOOL

- www.phds.org
- www.gradschools.com
- www.collegesource.org/home.asp
- www.graduateguide.com
- www.finaid.org
- www.gradschooltips.com
- www.petersons.com
- <http://gradschool.about.com/>
- <http://www.gradview.com/index.jsp>

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT THE CAREER SERVICES CENTER
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