Considering Graduate School?
Guidebook
Rusk Building, 3rd Floor
www.sfasu.edu/careerservices
936.468.3305 • careerservices@sfasu.edu
3 Reasons to go to Graduate School

1. You want to acquire specialized knowledge in a specific area of study
2. The occupation you pursue requires additional education beyond a bachelor’s degree
3. For advancement within your career field

Post Baccalaureate Options

Professional School
- Includes dental, medical, veterinarian, law, paralegal and business schools
- Many professional schools do not require applicants to have a specific undergraduate degree; however, specific undergraduate courses may provide a beneficial background
- Professional schools often heavily evaluate applicants according to responses to application essay questions and/or a personal statement due to an interest in responses to ethical/philosophical and scenario questions
- Professional schools are interested in an applicant's extracurricular activities such as campus involvement, leadership, work experience, volunteer work and test scores such as LSAT or MCAT
- More students go directly into professional schools immediately following undergraduate education than graduate school

Graduate School
- Graduate school constitutes an advanced program of study focused on a particular academic discipline or a specific profession
- Graduate schools are interested in an applicant’s extracurricular activities such as campus involvement, leadership, work experience, volunteer work and results of standardized tests such as GRE or GMAT
- Graduate degrees may or may not increase salaries depending on the academic area
- Many students take time off between undergraduate and graduate studies in order to acquire work experience and further confirm their specialty area of choice

Immediate Entry vs. Delayed Entry

Some undergraduate students struggle when faced with the decision to enter straight into graduate school or obtain real work experience before pursuing a graduate degree. There is no set answer. To help make your decision, consider the following questions:

- Are you relatively sure of your career goals? Or, is it a possibility that you could change your mind after gaining practical experience in the “world of work?”
- Do you have ambiguous career goals? Would some time in the “world of work” help clarify those hazy career goals?
- How much will your job and salary prospects be enhanced by a graduate degree? Investigate, it varies by industry!
- Is a graduate degree mandatory for your chosen career?
- What are the direct and indirect costs of graduate school?
- Is there a possibility a future employer might pay for you to attend graduate school?
- How strong are your test scores and GPA? Would work experience enhance your application by offsetting sub par grades or test scores?
- Would you have difficulty readjusting to student life after a break?
- Do you need a break before beginning graduate school?
Apply early! Typically, application deadlines range from August 1 (before your senior undergraduate year) to July 1 (after your senior undergraduate year). Begin your evaluation of graduate programs at least one year in advance of graduation!

TO HOW MANY GRADUATE SCHOOLS SHOULD YOU APPLY?
In general, apply to 3 - 6 schools with programs that match your interests. Remember, each application will entail a fee. If you are accepted to more than one at the end of the process, all the better!
To cover all bases, many students apply to:
- one prestigious competitive school
- one major university where you feel you have a reasonable chance of being accepted
- one institution where you feel certain to be accepted

APPLICATION TIMELINE
At least 1 year before starting a graduate program
- Research schools by website
- Request information from the school
- Visit campuses
- Practice/study for standardized tests

1 year - 9 months before starting program
- Sign up and take required standardized test(s)
- Review application packets
- Prepare required documents, essays and personal statements
- Ask for references
- Watch for admission and financial aid deadlines

7 - 9 months before starting program
- Complete applications and financial aid forms
- If provided, give references the recommendation forms to complete
- Mail applications
- Follow up by phone to verify all materials received
- Regularly check your email and snail mail for updates on the status of your application
Consider the criteria listed below to help you evaluate and determine the graduate program that best suits YOU!

**PROGRAM OF STUDY**
- What degrees are offered? What areas of concentration are available?
- Does the program focus on theory and original research, or does it emphasize the practical application of knowledge and skills?
- Does the program provide hands-on experience such as practicums and internships?
- Is the curriculum structured or flexible?
- Are there opportunities to work on research projects?
- What is the average length of time students spend in the program?

**ADMISSIONS**
- Does the program prefer recent graduates or applicants with work experience?
- Must you meet any prerequisites before acceptance?
- What are the admissions requirements? Do they include:
  - Graduate admissions test (i.e. GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT)
  - Transcripts
  - GPA
  - Letters of recommendation
  - Application essay/personal statement
  - Interview
  - Portfolio

**FACULTY**
- What is the size of the department?
- Is there diversity?
- What are their credentials?
- What have they published?
- What research have they conducted?
- What is the student/faculty ratio?

**REPUTATION**
- Is the university/college accredited?
- Is the program well established or relatively new?
- Who has graduated from the program and what are they doing now?

**COSTS**
- What are the tuition and fees?
- What types of financial assistance are available? Loans, scholarships, grants, etc.?
- Are graduate assistantships available?
- How much is out-of-state tuition?

**FACILITIES**
- Are there adequate study facilities including library, research and lab space available?
- Are student services, recreation and clubs available on campus?
- Are medical services available?
COMMUNITY

- Would you be happy with the location, weather, political and social climate?
- What is the size of the school and community?
- Does the area offer cultural or recreational activities?
You’ve done your research and now know to what schools you’d like to apply. Now it’s time to assemble your application package. Application requirements differ between schools, however below are a few standard items required for submission:

- Application form
- Personal essay or statement of purpose
- Application fee
- Financial aid application
- Transcripts
- Letters of recommendation
- Standardized test scores
- Personal interview

**Application form**
Complete the application form clearly and truthfully. Be sure to spell out your full, legal name as it should match your transcript from past institution(s).

**Personal essay or statement of purpose**
Confused on how to write your essay? Be sure to address any questions specifically posed in the application. Other talking points may include motivation for graduate study, strengths, weaknesses, greatest achievements and solutions to hypothetical problems.

Essay requirements vary between institutions. Some schools request only a few paragraphs, while others require several separate, lengthy essays. Whatever the case, your objective should remain constant: **provide a clear, focused essay that illustrates you have a distinct sense of your career goals and enthusiasm for the field of study you have chosen.** Before you write, take a look at these other helpful pointers:

- Sense what the reader might be looking for (refer to application directions for clues)
- Think about the possible criteria admissions committees may use to base their evaluations:
  1. Expectations of you in the program and in your career
  2. Your writing ability and depth of thinking
  3. Your major areas of interest
  4. Your educational background
  5. Your immediate and long term goals
  6. Your reasons for pursuing this particular graduate program at this particular institution
  7. Your maturity level
  8. What you bring to the program in terms of personal uniqueness
- Neatness counts! Your essay should be typed and free of spelling and grammatical errors
- Keep your message positive
- Review and critique. Submit to Career Services for feedback

**Application fee**
While fees vary among institutions, most application fees are non-refundable and range from $25-$100. Most schools have an application fee waiver for students with financial need. If you would like, call the admissions office and ask how to apply for a waiver.

**Separate financial aid application**
Note that an application for financial aid may come with your general application packet or you may have to call and request a separate financial aid application from the institution’s financial aid office. Be sure to file all documents on time!
Transcripts
Contact the registrar's office at each college/university you attended and request they send your transcript directly to the admissions office of the schools to which you are applying.

Letters of recommendation
Most all institutions request three to five letters of recommendation. Select people who are qualified to assess your academic or work performance. Try your best not to ask people who only know you in a social setting (i.e. family and friends); while they may have pleasant things to say about you, admissions committees don’t place value on those kinds of recommendations. Be sure to give your recommenders ample time to write and submit these letters.

Standardized test scores
Most institutions require you take one of the standardized admissions exams before they decide to accept you into the program. Common standardized tests include GRE (Graduate Record Exam), GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test), MAT (Miller Analogy Test), MCAT (Medical College Admission Test) and LSAT (Law School Admission Test). Typically, each graduate program will specify which test you need to take and the score you need to obtain to be competitive for their program.

Personal interview
Some schools require an interview as part of the application process. A face-to-face interview is the perfect opportunity to showcase your qualifications, personal aspirations and why you think you’re an ideal fit for the program. Be prepared to sell yourself!