Considering Graduate School?

CENTER FOR CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Grad School 101

Three 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 subpar grades or test scores?
• Would you have difficulty readjusting to student life after a break?

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
  • Submit applications by mail or electronically
  • Follow up by phone to verify all materials received
  • Regularly check your email and snail mail for updates on the status of your application
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 CCPD 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! Consider a mock interview with the Center for Career and Professional Development first for practice. Also, be sure to send a thank you note!
Why is a personal statement important?
Your personal statement is an opportunity to show the graduate school admissions committee who you are! Through your personal statement you want to show that you are eager and knowledgeable about your prospective field, and that you are a suitable match for the program you are applying to.

What should be included in your statement?
Pay close attention to the prompt you are given for your personal statement. While some personal statements are fairly generic, others will be seeking specific information or answers to specific questions. Some schools will use your statement as your opportunity to explain discrepancies in test scores or explain any extenuating circumstances you may have faced that affected your undergraduate GPA or preparation for the LSAT/GMAT, etc. The statement will also be used to gauge your writing abilities.

Personal statement format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Personal Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School and Program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Convey your eagerness: This is your opportunity to show the admissions committee who you are. What makes you different from other applicants? Use language that demonstrates both your enthusiasm and motivation to join the program you have selected.

Exemplify knowledge of your field or occupational path: Demonstrate an understanding of your field and reflect on your related experience. Consider the relevant opportunities you have had and articulate the experience you have through clear examples. Do more than explain the program—connect your skills and experiences to showcase why you are a good fit for the specific program you are applying to, and explain how this program will help you meet your career goals.

Market yourself: Use this opportunity to talk about how great you are! Describe your past skills with confidence and discuss your future plans with assuredness. You want to arouse interest in the reader and excite them about you as a candidate.

Show that you are a good “fit”: Express your genuine interest in the program. You should be able to clearly identify what drove you to the field and why you are interested in this program, specifically. Do research into the program to identify what differentiates it from similar programs, and articulate why

Helpful Tips:
Start early and review often. Be sure to give yourself plenty of time to compose your statement, and consider reaching out to trusted faculty, staff, or mentors to review the document for you.

Often times, your personal statement will be read by multiple people. This makes it especially important to avoid errors or grammatical mistakes of any kind. We recommend you read your statement aloud to yourself to help with sentence structure. You do not want to ruin a great statement with avoidable errors.

Make sure you follow directions! The admissions committee will provide a prompt. If the prompt is specific with multiple questions, be sure to thoroughly answer all questions asked. Be sure to note, and follow, the word or length guidelines given.

The CCPD encourages you to utilize the Academic Assistance and Resource Center (AARC) when completing your personal statement. The AARC offers assistance through both walk-in tables and the Online Writing Lab (OWL).
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?

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
- Who has graduated from the program and what are they doing now?

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?

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?

Reputation
- Is the university/college accredited?
- Is the program well established or relatively new?

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 organizations available on campus?
- Are medical services available?
The Stephen F. Austin State University Graduate School offers 40 master and 3 doctoral degrees. Graduate students select from a wide range of courses that are offered both in the traditional classroom setting and online. SFA graduate students have the opportunity to work side-by-side with professors on important research projects, study abroad in places like China, Costa Rica and Italy, and further develop their work and leadership skills by serving in internship programs throughout the community. Why graduate school?

Did you know people who hold a master’s degree make approximately $2.67 million in in their lifetime? It’s true. A master’s degree significantly boosts your earnings. Is it worth the time and effort you’ll put in? There’s no question, YES!

There are many factors to consider when selecting your graduate school. On every point, SFA stands out. Here’s why:

- Once you graduate and receive your degree, you can expect to earn about 38.3 percent higher wages than with a bachelor’s degree alone.
- SFA graduate students have the opportunity to work alongside professors on important research projects. Your contributions could lead to the discovery of a new asteroid or a new way to produce cancer-fighting drugs.
- SFA alumni are highly sought after by employers. Graduate programs within SFA’s academic departments heavily focus on leadership skills, which helps increase the demand for SFA graduates in the workforce.
- You’ll make friendships that will last a lifetime. No matter where your career takes you, SFA will always be part of your family.

The sooner you apply for admission and gain acceptance, the sooner you’ll be on your way to receiving your graduate or doctoral degree and living your dreams.

**Stephen F. Austin State University Graduate Program**

Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) is a comprehensive institution dedicated to excellence in teaching, research, scholarship, creative work and service. We are excited about transformative learning experiences that lead to your professional careers. SFA Research and Graduate Studies offers a wide variety of opportunities in doctoral degrees, master degrees, and certificates. The graduate programs are designed to engage you in a learner-centered environment and offer opportunities to prepare you for the challenges of living in the global community. We encourage you to utilize every resource our office offers to enrich your graduate study experience.

We invite you to explore the details of our graduate programs through the graduate bulletin and links on our website. SFA Research and Graduate Studies has what you want and need to maximize the impact of your studies. The Graduate Studies staff and I welcome your interest in SFA. We welcome the opportunity to assist you from admission through graduation. We are here to support your academic success at SFA. We are committed to our 1,629 graduate students. Please reach out to us if you have questions about policies or suggestions on ways to enhance your graduate education.
Today more than ever, a master or doctoral degree is needed to achieve success in the workforce. A graduate degree is an investment in your future, and the faculty and staff members at SFA are here to help you achieve it.

Convinced that SFA is the graduate school for you? We welcome your questions and inquiries. Get more information about our school and programs go to http://www.sfasu.edu/graduate/ and apply for admission at https://www.applytexas.org/adappc/gen/c_start.WBX. Contact by phone at 936.468.2807 or by e-mail at gschool@sfasu.edu. (November, 2018)

Nelson Rusche College of Business
- Master of Business Administration
- Master of Professional Accountancy

James I. Perkins College of Education
- Masters of Science in Athletic Training
- Master of Arts in counseling
- Master of Education in Early Childhood Education
- Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership
- Master of Education in Educational Leadership
- Master of Education in Elementary Education
- Master of Science of Human Sciences
- Master of Science in Kinesiology
- Master of Education in Secondary Education
- Master of Education in Special Education
- Master of Science in Speech Language Pathology
- Doctoral of Philosophy in School Psychology
- Master of Arts in School Psychology
- Master of Arts in Student Affairs and Higher Education
- Master of Arts in Teaching College of Fine Arts
- Master of Arts in Art
- Master of Fine Arts in Art
- Master of Music
- Master of Arts in Art Education

Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture
- Doctoral of Philosophy in Forestry
- Master of Science in Agriculture
- Master of Science in Environmental Science
- Master of Forestry
- Master of Science in Resource Communication College of Liberal and Applied Arts
- Master of Arts in Communication
- Master of Arts in English
- Master of Arts in Hispanic Studies
- Master of Arts in History
- Master of Interdisciplinary Studies
- Master of Arts in Mass Communication
- Master of Social Work
- Master of Arts in Psychology
- Master of Public Administration

College of Science and Mathematics
- Master of Science in Biology
- Master of Science in Biotechnology
- Master of Science in Cyber Security
- Master of Science in Nursing: Family Nurse Practitioner
- Master of Science in Geology
- Master of Science in Natural Science
- Master of Science in School Mathematics Teaching
- Master of Science in Mathematical Sciences

Certification Programs
- Graduate Certificate in Executive Hospitality Supervision
- Superintendent Certification Program
- ESL and Bilingual Certification Program
- Master Reading Teaching Certification
- EC-12 and 7-12 Teacher Certification
- Educational Diagnostician Certification