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Graduate School This EXIT
Professional School 10 miles

What's My Next Step?

Your guide for considering graduate or professional school

University of Dubuque Career Services
Enhancing Career Development and Exploratory Learning Opportunities

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Things to Consider...**...Before You Apply**

Developing Career Goals

Before you decide whether or not you want to go to graduate or professional school, it is very important that you take the time to develop clear goals for pursuing this possibility. Obtaining an advanced degree without extensive planning or research could leave you in debt and further behind in your career.

More importantly, going to graduate or professional school does not necessarily mean you will make more money or advance in your career field faster—it all depends on the career field and position you are aspiring to achieve. In fact, in some career fields having a degree beyond a Bachelor's degree is considered a negative quality in the hiring decision. So take time to do the research, reflect on your goals, and explore your options. Best of luck!

Important Questions Ask Before Applying to Graduate or Professional School:

- What are my short-term and long-term career goals?
- Am I ready to commit to a career field by pursuing an advanced degree?
- Is graduate or professional school a necessary prerequisite for achieving my goals?
- Do I need a break from school?
- Do I have the interest, enthusiasm, motivation, abilities, and personal qualities to succeed in graduate or professional school?
- Am I prepared for the extensive research, course work, and writing demands of an academic program at the graduate level?
- Would I benefit by gaining some practical experience before pursuing graduate studies?
- Am I sure that my career path is right for me?
- Will a Master's Degree be adequate for my career goals or will I need a Doctorate?
- Do I have the financial resources available at this time to cover the costs of graduate or professional school?
- Do I want to go full-time or part-time?
- Will the time and money spent in graduate or professional school translate into the greater career mobility and the financial rewards that I aspire to?
- Are there alternative educational programs that would assist me in attaining my goals? (i.e. vocational/technical training, additional course work, professional seminars, and workshops)
- Am I motivated by my desire to postpone entrance into the job market?

More Points to Consider...

1. Good and Not So Good Reasons to Consider Graduate/Professional School Right Now
2. Should I go now or wait?

Top 5 “Good” Reason to Consider Graduate or Professional School Right Now:

1. You’ve clarified your career goals and have determined that a graduate or professional degree is necessary to achieve those career goals.
2. You are extremely passionate and interested in pursuing further study in an academic area without first consideration of its connection to a career or financial benefits.
3. You have a good support system behind you and are motivated to pursue a degree that may take two to seven years to complete.
4. You enjoy reading, writing, and researching and are prepared to take on the challenge.
5. You are seeking a career change and obtaining an graduate or professional degree will allow you to achieve those new goals.

Top 5 “Not-So-Good” Reasons to Consider Graduate or Professional School Right Now:

1. You are not clear about next steps after graduation and see graduate or professional school as a way to clarify and explore your career goals.
2. Your parents, professors, and others are pressuring you to go.
3. You aren’t ready to “face the real world” and you see graduate or professional school as a way to delay entry into the world of work.
4. You think it will help you get a better paying job and advance your career quicker.
5. It seems like everyone else around you is going onto graduate or professional school.

Should I go right after undergrad or wait a couple of years?

Advantages of Proceeding Directly to Graduate School

- Continuity is maintained between undergraduate learning and the specialization of a graduate field.
- You are accustomed to being a student and remain energized for studying and learning.
- It is easier to finance graduate school now prior to future financial obligations and responsibilities that could occur if graduate school is delayed (marriage, mortgages, family, etc).
- It can be advisable to get educational preparation "out of the way" prior to one's starting in their career development.
- Entrance into your desired profession will be sooner if the graduate degree is a necessity.

Advantages of Waiting 2 to 5 Years Before Attending Graduate School

- You will have time to explore further whether this career path is the right fit for you.
- Gaining additional work experience may help you to clarify your goals.
- Some schools (MBA and some Law) seek applicants with prior work experience.
- Establish financial stability prior to further education.
- May gain a stronger likelihood of obtaining internships, fellowships, etc., for assistance during graduate school.
- Experience may enhance your chances of acceptance into a program of your choice as some schools (MBA and some Law) seek applicants with prior work experience.
- A future employer may be willing to finance your graduate education.
- You will have time to “recharge your academic batteries” after four years of undergraduate education.

Check off once completed

Timeline for Applying

Junior Year *(or two years before entering a graduate program)*

- Develop a set of career goals to make sure graduate or professional school is necessary to meet your career goals
- Research graduate or professional school programs and degrees you may have interest in
- Research schools: become familiar with programs research interests, entrance requirements, entrance tests, and application deadlines
- Contact universities of interest and request admissions information and financial aid applications
- Take a practice GRE test
- Review for the GRE general test (and/or other required entrance tests)

Summer between Junior and Senior Year

- Review entrance requirements again and begin to draft a personal statement of your academic and professional goals. Most programs require a personal statement, although each program may have a slightly different requirement of what to write about. Be sure to include every element the program asks for
- Register for and take the GRE test
- Register and take the GRE subject test, if required
- Arrange a campus visit to visit three to five graduate or professional schools
- Contact faculty, students, administrators, and alumni of prospective schools to discuss their program, experience, and research conducted at their university

September, Senior year

- Narrow down your list of prospective schools
- Identify and contact individuals to request letters of recommendation Agree on a deadline!
- Have your personal statement reviewed by faculty, career services, the academic success center, and professionals in your field of interest
- Begin researching on financial aid options, including grants, scholarships, fellowships, assistantships, and educational and personal loans

October, Senior year

- Retake the GRE, if necessary
- Order official transcripts
- Begin to tailor your personal statement to the graduate programs which you are applying

Check off once completed**Timeline for Applying (cont.)****November, Senior year**

- Follow up on letters of recommendation to make sure they are completed
- Secure official transcripts
- Finalize your personal statements: have them reviewed by faculty, career services, the academic success center, and professionals in your field of interest
- Complete application and begin sending out packets. Make sure to complete EVERYTHING!
- Begin preparing financial aid applications
- Participate in a Mock Interview to prepare for the admission interview process

December, Senior year

- Finish sending out all applications—keep copies for your records
- Two weeks after submitting application, check with each school to ensure that all materials have been received, including transcripts, letters of recommendation, and test scores

January, Senior year

- Focus on financial aid: complete the FAFSA online and apply for private and educational loans, grants, fellowships, and assistantships
- Purchase professional attire to wear to admission interviews
- Participate in a second mock interview to refine your interview skills for the admission interview process
- If you receive any early rejections, use this as a learning experience. Contact the school to ask why your application was dismissed to determine if there are any last minute things you can change on applications or prepare for future applications.

February/March, Senior year

- Visit your prospective programs if possible
- Continue to make contact with program representatives to check on the status of your application
- See Career Services to talk about a contingency plan in the event that you are not accepted or choose not to go to graduate school
- Relax and wait to see if you are selected as a potential candidate!

Print several copies of this worksheet to use when considering your options

How to Chose a Program or School

Program Title: _____

School Name: _____

Admission Requirements

- What is the percentage of students accepted to this program every year? _____
 - What are the minimum and preferred GPA requirements? _____
 - What prerequisites do I need to have completed or participated in? (Ex: research, internships, full time work experience, volunteering, clubs or organizations, leadership activities, etc) _____
 - What types of test scores are required and what scores do they look for? _____
- What are some of your thoughts after reviewing the admission requirements? _____

Curriculum/Academic Focus

- Does the graduation requirement require a thesis, creative component, or final verbal or written exam? _____
 - Does the program offer assistantships? _____
 - What are the number of credits required to graduate? _____
 - How long does this program take to complete? Are part-time options available? _____
 - What is the national reputation or rank of this program? Is it well respected by professionals in this career field? _____
 - Is this program accredited? If so, by whom? _____
- What are some of your thoughts after reviewing the academic focus? Can you meet these requirements? _____

Career Assistance

- What is the number of students who have completed this program? What is the percentage that did not complete this program? _____
 - What is the employment rate of students who graduated from this program? What type of positions have they received? _____
 - Does this program offer career assistance and preparation? _____
 - Does this program offer networking opportunities or encourages attendance to national conferences? _____
- What are some of your thoughts after reviewing career assistance? Do you feel this program is concerned about your future career? _____

Faculty

- What is the faculty to student ratio? _____
 - How accessible is the faculty? _____
 - What types of research or publications has the faculty contributed to? _____
 - What is the focus of faculty, teaching, or research? _____
 - Do faculty offer opportunities for students to assist with their research? _____
 - Does the faculty comprise of a diverse group of individuals? _____
- What are some of your thoughts after reviewing the faculty? _____

Location/Facilities

- Is this program located in a urban, suburban, or rural area? _____
 - What is the cost of living? (housing, transportation, food) _____
 - How diverse is the community? _____
 - What types of on and off campus activities does the community offer? _____
 - Are there plenty of study locations? _____
 - What type of technology support is available for use? _____
- What are some of your thoughts after reviewing the location and facility? Could you see yourself flourishing here? _____

Cost/Financial Aid

- What is the tuition, room and board (if considering living on campus), and additional fees? _____
 - What forms of financial aid are offered? _____
 - Are assistantships available to subsidize tuition costs? _____
- What are some of your thoughts after reviewing cost and financial aid? _____
- Do you think this is a program that you feel is a sound investment both financially and career-wise? _____

OVERALL GRADE: _____

How to Prepare...

... for the Application Process

Application Packet: What you may be asked to include

1. **Official transcripts from University of Dubuque Registrar's office**
 - Can either be mailed directly by UD's Registrar's office or sent in your application packet?
Note: If your transcript is sent in your application packet, an official transcript must be contained in a sealed envelope provided by the Registrar's office.
2. **Project or writing sample from undergraduate work**
(Generally research based projects)
3. **3-5 Letters of recommendation from specified individuals**
(Generally faculty, university staff, supervisors)
 - Sometimes colleges provide a form for individuals to fill out in place of a general letter of recommendation
 - Be sure to agree on a deadline for when the letter is due
4. **Application Form**
 - Do not leave any blanks
5. **Test Scores and GPA**
6. **Non-refundable Processing Fee**
 - Cost can vary anywhere from \$30—\$100
6. **Financial Aid Application**
7. **Statement of Purpose**
 - Every institution has slight variation in what to include, but in general it will consist of why you are interested in that program, your career goals, and what you hope to achieve while at that institution.
 - Be sure to address EVERY question stated in the statement of purpose guidelines. Also keep within the *exact* guidelines given.
 - Have your statement of purpose reviewed several times for grammatical errors and typos. The number one element schools look for is your writing ability and understanding of that particular career field.
8. **Resume or Curriculum Vitae (CV)**
 - Have it reviewed several times for grammatical errors and typos

Testing: Steps to take before signing up for an exam

- **Be prepared for the cost.** Entrance exams are not a cheap expenditure, so begin budgeting and preparing for this in advance.
- **Know exactly what types of entrance exams your prospective school or program requires.** Testing can be very costly, so you do not want to mistakenly participate in a test you do not need. Moreover, testing takes several weeks to get your results back so if you accidentally forgot to take a required exam, you may not get it turned in by the due date.
- **Understand how long it will take to get your test back.** As mentioned above, your results can take several weeks to be returned to you. Make sure you have plenty of time between your application deadline and when you estimate receiving your results by.
- **Consider your preparation options.** Some of the material you will be tested on may involve information you learned several years ago. Because of this, you should take a considerable amount of time preparing. For some, self preparation books containing sample questions and practice tests may be all you need. For others, there are several course options for you to consider (for a list of examples, see page 5)
- **Try to figure out what type of scores your school or program needs to consider you a good candidate.** If your entrance exam score falls within this line, do not feel you need to take the exam a second time. If you are on the border or fall below the recommended score line, do not be discouraged. Plan to take the entrance exam a second time. In general, students fair better on their second entrance exams due to having already experienced the stress and environment of taking the test the first time.

The Admissions Interview:

1. **Sign up for 2-3 mock interviews.** Mock interviews are a great way to prepare for an admissions interview and can help you discover areas of improvement.
2. **Take time to consider your responses.** Many admissions' interviews ask similar questions. Come up with a response in advance, but avoid making your answer sound too rehearsed.

- Tell us about yourself
- Why are you interested in this program?
- What are your career goals?
- How do you manage your time?
- What type of research are you interested in?
- Tells us what keeps you motivated?

For more sample interview questions, go to the "Interview Assistance" tab found under "Career Development" on the UD Career Services website.

3. **Prepare a list of questions to ask.** When you ask questions, it shows the interviewer your interest in the program.

- Tell me about the relationship between faculty and students.
- What research or projects has your school done
- What type of assistantships are available?
- What is the employment rate after graduation from this program?
- What are you really proud of?
- What is the relationship like between the cohorts of students?

For more questions to ask, go to the "Interview Assistance" tab found under "Career Development" on the UD Career Services website.

4. **Purchase interview attire.** It is always best to wear a suit to an interview. It shows that you take the interview process seriously.

Why do schools ask for a Purpose Statement?

A Purpose Statement (also known as a Statement of Purpose) demonstrates your sincere interest to a field of study and your qualifications. It is also designed to demonstrate your overall writing ability, critical-thinking skills, and reflection on career goals. Because of this, your Purpose Statement is something you should spend a considerable amount of time drafting.

Where to start:

Before beginning your first draft (by the end, you should have many drafts!) of your Purpose Statement, take the time to reflect and jot down thoughts on the following items as they can help you develop what to include in your paper.

- Prior life experiences and events that are relevant to your career choice or application to graduate or professional school that make you unique and distinctive
- Individuals who have influenced your career decisions, have inspired you to pursue a particular career field, or who have had a significant impact on your morals and values as it relates to your career of interest
- Experiences that demonstrate your ability to be successful in a graduate environment
- Your short term, and long term career goals
- Hardships or obstacles you have overcome and what you have learned from those experiences
- Where you learned about this particular career field and what impact it has had on you (i.e. your passion for the field)
- Your research interests, as well as prior work, volunteer, and academic experiences
- Life experiences that are unique to you which can relate to your career goals
- Academic or professional accomplishments
- Details you learn about each school's program, program rankings, faculty publications, and research interests

Things to remember:

- Read the application carefully and follow the direction. If you find any discrepancies or have questions about the description, contact the program director for clarification.
- Generally, keep within a 2-3 page limit, but keep within the EXACT guidelines given.
- Address EVERY question posed in the Purpose Statement description.
- Formatting: double space, basic font (Times New Roman, Verdana, Arial) , font size between 11-12 pt.
- If your application or resume demonstrates discrepancies such as lower GPA, lower examination test scores, or lack of experience in the field, you will want to address these.
- Have your Purpose Statement reviewed by several professionals including Career Services, faculty members, mentors in the field, and supervisors. Your Purpose Statement should contain absolutely no typos or grammatical errors.
- Do not use the same Purpose Statement for every school you apply for. You can begin with a similar outline, but you should make each unique and sprinkle in information about why you are interested in that particular program, faculty you'd like to work with, research interests unique to that program, and the program's reputation.
- Try not to jump around too much and write your life story. Keep one to two experiences or themes in mind when writing your Purpose Statement.
- Spend time developing a strong introduction that captures the reader's attention.
- In your closing, be sure that it ties the whole Purpose Statement together. A nice way to do this is to refer back to something mentioned in the introduction. Consider ending with a statement thanking them for their consideration.
- Avoid sounding desperate. (i.e. "It would make my year if I was accepted to this program").
- When defining career goals, you can use bullet points.
- Avoid the "cheesy" factor. Keep it unique and interesting, without sounding boring or cliché.
- Be sure your Purpose Statement is written in first person point of view in an upbeat and positive light.

Additional Resources

Testing Information

- **GRE - Graduate Record Examination**
www.takethegre.com
- **GMAT – Graduate Management Admissions Test**
<http://www.mba.com/mba/thegmat>
- **MCAT – Medical College Admissions Test**
<http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat/start.htm>
- **LSAT – Law School Admissions Test**
<http://www.lsat.org>
- **MAT – Miller Analogies Test**
www.milleranalogies.com
- **DAT – Dental Admissions Test**
<http://www.ada.org/dat.aspx>
- **OAT – Optometry Admissions Test**
<https://www.ada.org/oat/index.html>
- **TOEFL – Test of English as a Foreign Language**
www.toeflgoanywhere.com

Testing Preparation (courses)

- Cutts Review www.cuttsreview.com
- Gorilla Test Prep www.gorillatestprep.com
- Kaplan www.kaptest.com
- Power Score www.powerscore.com
- The Princeton Review www.testprep.princetonreview.com

Testing Preparation (self-preparation books)

- Kaplan GRE 2011 Premier with CD-ROM by Kaplan
- GMAT Review by the Graduate Management Admissions Council
- Cracking the GRE, 2010 Edition by The Princeton Review
- Next Ten Official LSATS by the Law School Admissions Council

Financial Aid

- www.finaid.org
- www.gradschools.com/info/financial.html
- www.grants.gov
- www.petersons.com/graduate-schools/graduate-loans-scholarships.aspx
- The Shropshire Group, Inc. (Provides resources to minority students seeking graduate or professional school)
<http://www.shropshiregroup.org/>
- Princeton Review Scholarships and Aid
www.princetonreview.com/grad/finance
- About.com: Graduate School
http://gradschool.about.com/od/financialaid/Financial_Aid.htm
- US News “Paying for Graduate School”
<http://www.usnews.com/sections/education/paying-for-graduate-school/>

Graduate School Tips and Suggestions

- www.gradprofiles.com
- www.gradschools.com
- www.gradsource.com
- www.graduateguide.com
- www.gradview.com
- www.gradschooltips.com
- www.internationalgraduate.net
- www.lawschoolcompanion.com
- General information for all test preparation dates
http://www.graduateguide.com/graduate_test_dates_17.html
- Peterson's Graduate Planner
www.petersons.com/graduate_home.asp?path=gr.home
- Princeton Review Grad Schools and Careers
www.princetonreview.com/grad/default.asp
- Jobweb - Grad School: Things to Think About
www.jobweb.org/studentarticles.aspx?id=814

List of Graduate and Professional Programs

- www.PhDs.org/rankings
- www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/rankindex_brief.php
- <http://www.graduateguide.com/default.asp>
- <http://www.gradprofiles.com/doi-geo/geo-home.html>
- <http://www.gradschools.com/>

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**Have a question?
Contact UD Career Services!**

Career Services Main Office

2nd Floor Peters Commons

Phone: 563-589-3132

Email: career@dbq.edu

Career Services Satellite Office

105 Myers Library

Phone: 563-589-3167

**Find UD Career Services on
Facebook and Linked In!**

Reference:

Boston University Career Services. (2010). *Considering Graduate School*. Retrieved from <http://www.bu.edu/careers/pdfs/grad-school-book.pdf>.