Fellowships & Scholarships





APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

During Your Junior Year

Assuming you have done well in school and have made yourself a well-rounded candidate with good working relationships with faculty, you should begin in your junior year to:

1.Gather Information

Look for strong graduate programs in your field.

Start with *Peterson's Guide to Graduate Programs* (on-line edition is at www.Petersons.com). Check in your academic department, the library, and the Career Services Office (Blake A 104) for further information. Look carefully at the websites of graduate programs in which you are interested; these sites will include catalogue and course information. If you look at ratings indicators for programs, remember that school ratings for individual graduate programs are not the same as a school's overall or undergraduate rating.

Use the Geneseo faculty as a resource.

The Geneseo College Bulletin (http://bulletin.geneseo.edu) lists the graduate programs from which Geneseo faculty have received their degrees. Talk to faculty members who have graduated from schools which interest you. Check to see if your academic department maintains a list of alumni, check this to see who has recently attended graduate school, and call or write these alumni who are usually very happy to share their experiences and suggestions.

2. Get Ready for Testing

The Graduate Record Exam (http://www.ets.org) and the Subject tests in your area of specialization or the GMAT, MCAT, LSAT and others are required by most schools. Because test results can take 5-6 weeks to process (or two weeks with computer-based testing), you should plan to take this exam no later than the first week of October of your senior year, in order to be seriously considered for admission to the schools of your choice.

It is not unreasonable to prepare for these exams. Suggestions for preparing for the exams are available on the GRE website listed above.

Many students find that taking both the general and subject tests on the same day is exhausting and leads to poor scores. They recommend that you take the subject test on a different date. That means you may need to plan to take one part of the test in June before your senior year. Each of the tests costs approximately \$160. Some students are eligible for a fee waiver - check with Financial Aid.

3. Enroll consistently in challenging courses

Make sure you have courses on your transcript which reflect the high quality of your preparation. Courses that are generally viewed as being "tough' are often those that prepare you the best for graduate school.

4. Make Contacts at Prospective Schools

Attend a professional conference in your field of interest. Ask a trusted professor for recommendations of which conferences it might be fruitful for an undergraduate to attend. Go to sessions in which people from prospective schools are giving papers. Later you can write a note saying how much you enjoyed the paper and perhaps even share a bit of correspondence with an interesting professional. Such an elaborate strategy was unnecessary a decade ago but is fairly common practice among savvy students now. Many graduate applications even have a space that asks for names of any faculty on their staff you have been corresponding with. This procedure won't work if you wait until a few weeks before applications are due; it requires advance planning.

During Your Senior Year

Most schools give more careful attention to early applications. If a school has two deadlines or rolling admissions, make sure your application is among the earliest. This means you may need to begin in the summer preceding your senior year and will be overwhelmed with the application process during the fall semester. Plan your schedule accordingly. Take the GRE exams required by the schools of your choice by no later than October. Applications are expensive. Plan to spend \$50-\$100 per school. Add the cost of mailing an official transcript to each one. A few schools offer application fee waivers to students with high GPAs - these are worth searching out. Despite the expense, the prudent student should probably apply to a minimum of eight schools. Two or three of these applications should go to the least prestigious schools you would be willing to attend. Before you spend time and money applying, make sure you talk to faculty about the schools you have selected. Remember that the reputation of a graduate program changes over times as stellar faculty come and go. Faculty will also know how competitive the graduate school admission process has been for recent graduates and can give you information you will not find in writing. There are usually two important components to most applications in addition to your transcripts and GRE scores:

1. Letters of Recommendation:

See the section on "How to Get the Best Possible Letter of Recommendation". These weigh heavily with admissions committees. If, by chance, a professor who knows you well happens to have graduated from a school to which you are applying, this is often an advantage.

2. Personal Statement:

These usually begin with a statement of goals and reasons for continuing your education. Requirements vary: some schools ask for much information about your personal life and extracurricular interests. These are hard to write well. Make sure you have several faculty members read your drafts before sending them in.

Always check with each graduate school to which you applied to make sure that your materials have been received.

Some graduate programs still require competency in at least one foreign language; some still require two for the Ph.D. but accept knowledge of a computer language for one of the two foreign languages. If you have extra time during the last semester of your senior year, take an advanced course or two in your foreign language or in computer science. This will save you time and grief later on after skills have become rusty.

Final Thoughts

You may not get into the graduate schools you hoped for and you will be tempted to settle for a lower-tier school. Some students assume they can go to a less-prestigious school for the masters degree and later transfer to a better school for the Ph.D. This is NOT a good idea. Good schools weed out their own masters candidates for their Ph.D. and accept the rejected Ph.D. applicants from even better schools. It is a real rarity for a student to move up from a mediocre masters program to a better Ph.D. program. Before you accept admission to a school you have reservations about because you have been rejected by the school you were really hoping for, consider the possibility of taking some time to strengthen your qualifications and applying again.