Planning for and Applying to Graduate School

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Learning objectives for today’s session

- what to consider when deciding whether and if you should pursue graduate school
- what to know and evaluate when selecting a program
- what you can do now to prepare and be a competitive applicant for a graduate program
- what the common application requirements, process for applying, and timelines are
- how Career Services can assist you in your graduate school efforts
Why graduate school?

- fulfill your professional ambitions and goals
- your target career goal requires an advanced degree
- you want to specialize in a discipline that you find important and interesting
- you know an advanced degree will help you increase competitiveness in the job market and/or earning potential
- you know an advanced degree will provide job security or opportunity for advancement

_don’t go to graduate school as a default because you’re unsure what you want to do, can’t find a job, or others expect you to go_
Ask yourself...

- What are your long term goals and how will a graduate degree help you achieve them?
- Are you really looking into graduate school to further your career goals, or to postpone making decisions about them?
- What is the right degree for you to pursue? Is a Master’s degree sufficient, or is a PhD required?
- When is the right time to pursue an advanced degree – directly out of undergraduate school or after gaining experience in a particular field?
- Are you mentally, physically, and financially prepared for another one to seven years of study?
Preparing for graduate school – general

From your freshman year:

- achieve and maintain a strong academic record throughout your undergraduate experience
  - meet with faculty and use tutoring services early and often as needed
- develop relationships with faculty
  - you’ll typically need at least two faculty members who know you well as recommenders when applying
- develop solid written and oral communication skills
  - good communications will benefit you in your undergraduate and graduate studies, job search, and professional endeavors
- research careers to define your professional goals and determine if and when graduate education is required/desired
  - use the many resources on the “Getting Started” page of our website
Preparing for graduate school - specific

- research graduate programs
  - do internet searches using reliable sites, attend graduate fairs, talk to MSC faculty, speak with MSC alumni and alumni of programs of interest

- speak with Admissions representatives, faculty, and alumni from your target schools
  - all can provide you additional info, and impact the Admissions process

- complete required coursework and/or work or volunteer experience and/or observation

- prepare for standardized entrance exams
  - scores are often very important to determining allocation of the limited financial aid available in graduate school
  - preparation for standardized exams is usually a matter of months, not days or hours

- maintain good credit history and keep personal debt low
Recommended graduate school timeline

if you are planning on going to graduate school in the semester directly following your graduation:

- sophomore/junior year: start meeting with faculty, research programs and potential scholarships, and prepare for (and take, if ready) standardized admissions tests

- summer before your senior year: secure application materials, request letters for recommendation, visit institutions, start essays

- fall senior year: apply to programs and for institutional and/or independent fellowships or scholarships, complete FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

- spring senior year: visit institutions, evaluate offers
Program selection

- focus on the program itself, and department it is in, not the university

- question you need to ask is “Do the goals of the graduate program match my educational goals?”

- create a personal ranking system based on what is important to you and what your research indicates is important for your career goals
  - use criteria from the following slide to create your ranking system
Program selection criteria

- program mission statement
- curriculum
- faculty
- cost
- financial aid
- alumni success
- facilities/resources
- location
- class size
- student/faculty ratio
- part-time/full-time options
- program culture
- campus culture
- program accreditation
- program philosophy
- academic support services
- student support services
- Career Services
- program reputation
- clinical experience, if applicable
Application Process – common required documents

- **application forms**
  - could be by school or a centralized process
  - make sure to read directions clearly

- **letters of recommendation**
  - typically, two from faculty, one from an employer or other party
  - some programs require a form be completed on-line, others, just a letter

- **official transcripts**
  - must submit for each educational institution you attended
  - must demonstrate passing grades for prerequisite coursework

- **graduate admissions standardized test scores**
  - some can be taken on-line at designated test centers; others only offered at specific times
  - all require studying extensively (think months, not days) to secure a competitive score
Application Process – common required documents

- **personal statement** and other essays
  - personal statement needs to speak to why you want to pursue a specific program
  - critical you plan your essays and write multiple drafts
  - write as many essays as allowed since the more info the decision-makers have for you, the better

- **résumé** or curriculum vitae
  - should be targeted to your intended career field
  - a two-page résumé may be allowed, but confirm length before submitting

- writing samples, if applicable

- portfolio, if applicable
  - you must submit exactly what is requested

- school and federal financial aid forms (FAFSA)
Application Process - acceptance

- timelines for when you will be notified about your status varies from school to school
  - some review in batches, and the timeframe before you’ll have a decision depends on whether you were at the start or end of the batch process
  - others wait until the application deadline(s) and notify all applicants only after that
  - some offer conditional acceptances based on your academic progress during the current or following semester
  - it can be beneficial to continuing to follow up with Admissions representatives while you await a decision, especially if you have new information such as an academic award, course project, etc.
Application Process - interview

- many programs do not require an interview, but it is to your advantage to speak or meet with Admissions representatives and/or faculty before and after you apply
  - they’ll have more information about you during the decision-making process
  - it demonstrates your interest in their specific program
  - even if an interview isn’t required, you should make a stop at Admissions during your campus visit
Financing your graduate education

- there is significantly less financial aid at the graduate level than undergraduate
  - especially true for professional degrees such as MBA, JD, MArch (v PhD programs)
  - what aid is available is usually given for academic performance
  - all students are considered as independent

- most aid given is in form of graduate, teaching, or research assistantships

- federal loans for graduate school are generally at higher rates than undergraduate rates, even if you have good credit

- connect with the Financial Aid office at your targeted schools early in the application process

- use sources like FinAid! to calculate your borrowing needs and repayment costs
Application Process – tips for success

- start early, submit early!
  - apply in advance of the deadline
  - connect with Admissions representatives with your questions
  - follow up to make sure all documents have been received – in advance of the deadline
  - rolling admission policies vary, but it is to your advantage to submit early

- update your information with Admissions contacts as semester continues

- connect with Career Services and Morrisville faculty on your application
How Career Services can assist you

- researching career fields and educational requirements for entry-level professional positions and advancement
- deciding on when, if, you should continue your education, given your career goals
- identifying graduate programs offering your intended degree
- reaching out to potential faculty or other recommenders
- connecting with program Admissions representatives and alumni
- finding resources for preparing for standardized entrance tests
- getting started or editing your personal statements
- polishing your résumé
- evaluating your graduate school acceptances
How to connect with Career Services

1/1 appointment: 30 minutes
call 315.684.6615 to find a time and day convenient to your schedule

Drop-in hours: 15 minute sessions, no appointment required
regularly scheduled: T, 10 am-12 pm; W, 11 am-1 pm; Th, 2 pm-4 pm
check your e-mails and the Career Services calendar for changes or additions

Attend a workshop
read your e-mails; see Career Services calendar for days and times

www.morrisville.edu/careerservices
24/7 access to resources and information; Career Services calendar

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