

Graduate School -What you need to know before applying!

Samford University Career Development Center

Reasons to Attend Graduate School

Graduate programs are designed to focus on a specialized field, discipline or profession. Students are expected to complete research, internships, fieldwork, and/or comprehensive exams. Faculty will count on more from the graduate students in terms of class participation, attendance, and quality of work that is completed.

Questions you should ask yourself:

- Is an advance degree required for my career field?
- Do I enjoy my career field enough to attend graduate school for an advance degree?
- Am I able to finance graduate school?
- Should I go full-time or part-time?
- What different programs are offered in my field of interest?
- Will my personality and skills be successful in graduate/doctoral programs?
- Am I burned out academically or should I take a break?

Best Reasons to Attend Graduate School	Worst Reasons to Attend Graduate School
Your career goal requires an advanced degree: for example, counselor, lawyer, medical profession, etc.	You want to don't want to pay back your student loans immediately.
You want to develop in your career or change career directions.	You don't want to get a job or believe that you can't get a job.
You want/need to gain certification or licensure in a career field.	You believe graduate school will be just as fun as undergraduate school.
You want/need to specialize in a topic that is important to you.	You are unsure on what you want to do for the rest of your life.

Searching for the Right Program/ School

When searching for the right program or school, you will need to keep in mind:

- *Accreditation*- Is the program accredited institutional or program specific? Accreditation is not always a sign of quality of a program; however, you may come across some negative consequences if it is not accredited.
- *Admission Standards*- If a school distributes this information, look at the number of applicants versus the number accepted. Pay attention to the GPA requirements, along with the graduate school exam scores. If the information is not available, ask an Admissions Counselor for this data.
- *Size/Location*- What is the size of the campus? What is the size of the program? Are you going to be comfortable living in this area? Where is the school located? What is the climate of the region?
- *Faculty*- Are they published? Does their research interest you and your career goals? Are they active within their professional community?
- *Current Students*- Communicate with current students to learn the pros and cons of the program and school.
- *Finances*- How much would the tuition, books and fees cost you? Is there any financial assistance available? Do they have assistantships, fellowships, grants and/or loans available to you?
- *Does it fit your career interests?* - If you are interested in a career field, research the graduate programs that will offer specialized courses, research, etc. in that particular career field. For example, if you are interested in Addictions Counseling, find a program that will offer those opportunities.
- *Graduation Requirements*- What is required to graduate from the program? An exit project, thesis, comprehensive exam- make sure you understand what will be required of you.
- *Reputation/Rankings*- The reputation/rankings of the school can determine the quality of the school; however, do not let this be the only deciding factor.

Once You Find the Schools...

- Attend the Graduate School Expo held in the fall in the Birmingham area to speak to recruiters.
- Visit the school- You want to make sure that you can see yourself at the school for the next few years.
- Talk to an Admissions Counselor- Admissions counselors would be able to answer any questions that you may have regarding the school and programs, specifically regarding admission requirements
- Familiarize yourself with what is required of you, throughout the application process

Graduate School Jargon

- GA- Graduate Assistant
- TA- Teaching Assistant
- Cohort- A group of students that share something in common. Several graduate programs are cohort based, which means the students take the courses at the same time every year together as a group
- Dissertation or Thesis- A research paper that is completed at the end of the course work that is reviewed by faculty
- Comprehensive Exam- Written or oral exams at the midpoint or end of the course work of the graduate program
- Full-time status- Full-time is 9 credits (which is a heavy load)
- Failing Grade- In most graduate programs, the failing grade is a C

Graduate School Applications

Typically graduate school applications will require the following:

- Application Form
- Application Fee
- Resume/CV- See section below
- Statement of Purpose- Every graduate program will be different with what they want out of the statement of purpose. If there is no description for the statement of purpose, we recommend explaining your past (background, experiences and training), why you want to attend that particular school and program, and make the program/school the hero of your story. Strive for depth rather than breadth and give them insight to what drives you so they'll know what makes you unique.
- Official Transcripts- You will need to contact Samford's Registrar's Office to send copies of your transcript to the different schools. The website is: <http://ung.edu/registrar/index.php>.
- Letters of Recommendation- Most schools require three; however check with the requirements before asking for the recommendation. Professors, supervisors, and campus professionals would be great examples of individuals that you can ask for a recommendation. Allow them a few weeks for them to write the letter, so be aware of deadlines.
- Entrance Exam- See section below

Resume vs. CV

Curriculum Vita (CV)	Resume
Length: Usually longer than a resume	Length: One to two pages at most
Audience: Academic Professionals	Audience: Employers
Full list of academic qualifications and experiences, such as teaching, publications, presentations, etc.	Focuses on skills and experiences related to the job

Entrance Exams

Graduate Record Exam (GRE) - www.gre.org

- General GRE is the main test required by many academic graduate and doctoral programs and the score you receive is valid for five years. There are two tests, the General and Subject Test. The General covers verbal reasoning, analytical writing and quantitative reasoning. The Subject test covers information regarding a specific topic (Literature, Physics, etc). Check with the graduate program to see if you will have to take the GRE Subject Test.

Miller Analogies Test (MAT) - www.milleranalogies.com

Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT) - www.gmac.com (score is also good for five years)

Law School Admission Test (LSAT) - www.lsac.org

Dental Admission Test (DAT) - www.ada.org/dat.aspx

Medical Admission Test (MCAT) - www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/

National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX) - www.ncsbn.org/nclex.htm

Optometry Admission Test (OAT) - www.ada.org/en/oat

PRAXIS- <https://www.ets.org/praxis>

Graduate School Funding

- Financial Aid- This is available for graduate students; consult with the Financial Aid office of the school you are applying to for more information
- Fellowships- These are available based on an individual's merit, measured by grades, entrance exam scores, letters of recommendation and publications. They are normally offered through government or private organizations to help cover the expenses of tuition and living costs. In return, the fellowship recipient is often expected to work on a project or conduct research.
- Assistantships- These positions are campus-affiliated work assignments, usually in a department or office (Residence Life, Student Affairs, Athletics, Professors, etc). They typically cover your tuition, along with a stipend for the hours that are worked.
- Grants- These are awarded for research or specific projects to help cover expenses.

You can also try:

- Your Employer
- Professional Organizations
- Churches/Religious Organizations
- Greek Organizations

Online Resources

Peterson's Guide for Graduate Schools- www.petersons.com/graduate-schools.aspx

Princeton Review- www.princetonreview.com

Graduate School Tips- www.gradschooltips.com

Graduate Studies- www.gradschools.com

U.S. News & World Report's Graduate School Rankings- <http://gradschools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/grad>

Graduate School Guide- www.graduateguide.com

College Confidential- www.collegeconfidential.com

Timeline

Three to six months prior to applying

- Assess educational goals, career direction, financial resources, etc.
- Meet with selected faculty/career counselor to discuss application requirements
- Begin researching specific programs
- Review the *Peterson's Guides to Graduate Programs* (available in the Library Technology Center) contains admission requirements, acceptance rates, and descriptions of most accredited programs
- Check out the web links for graduate and professional schools on the back of this page
- Register and prepare for appropriate graduate admission tests
- Investigate national scholarships
- If appropriate, obtain letters of recommendation

Three months prior to applying

- Write to targeted programs requesting application materials, course catalogue, and financial aid information

- Prioritize choice of programs
- Begin drafting essays for applications; work with a faculty member and career counselor to critique responses
- Research and apply for Financial Aid
- Check financial aid web links on the back of this page
- Check on application deadlines and rolling admissions policies
- Take required admissions test(s)
- Request letters of recommendation from faculty, advisors, and former employers

Fall, a year before beginning graduate program (assuming a fall program start)

- Complete applications (note each application deadline and allow yourself plenty of time to thoroughly complete all forms)
- Collect recommendations from writers, or if the letter is a confidential letter, check with destination schools to ensure timely completion of letters (1 month lead time for ref. writers). In many cases, you will enter the names and e-mail addresses of your references into the application system, and they will be e-mailed a link to complete the reference online.
- Take admissions test(s) if you haven't already
- PROOF your application materials
- Make a copy of your application for your records before mailing
- Send in completed applications
- Request transcripts to be sent from Registrar (you may want to wait for your fall grades before requesting your transcripts to be mailed) to graduate schools of interest

Winter, before beginning graduate program in the fall

- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Financial Aid PROFILE, if required.

Spring, before beginning graduate program in the fall

- Check with all institutions before their deadlines to make sure your file is complete
- Visit the institutions that accept you
- Send a deposit to your institution of choice
- Notify other colleges and universities that accepted you of your decision so that they can admit students on the waiting list
- Send thank you letters to people who wrote your recommendation letters, informing them of your success

Portions of this handout come from the University of Georgia Career Development Center at http://career.uga.edu/graduate_school/getting_into_graduate_school

***For more information, stop by or call the Career Development Center
217 Dwight Beeson Hall • 205-726-2980***