

Planning for Graduate School

Are You Thinking About Grad School?

Graduate school may be a great investment to make for both your education and career path. A Post-Baccalaureate degree may have different outcomes for different majors and occupations. Some occupations require that a student obtain a master's degree specializing within a certain field of study. Other occupations may not mandate additional education, but possibly require a particular amount of work experience. There are many factors that distinguish graduate schools from one another such as purpose, admissions requirements, program preferences, financial aid, assistantships and levels of graduate degrees granted.

Types of Graduate Study

Professional Schools

These programs enhance the practical application of your knowledge, experience and skill set. These schools include but are not limited to medical, dental, veterinarian, law and business schools. Undergraduates applying to this type of school are not required to have a specific Bachelor's degree; although performance in certain rigorous undergraduate courses may be an important factor in determining your eligibility for a program. Professional schools are known to delve deep into a student's personal statement. They are very concerned with your ability to respond and evaluate ethical scenarios; write critically and thoughtfully when addressing such issues in your personal statement. Professional schools also require completion of standardized testing such as the GMAT(Business), LSAT(Law), MCAT(Medical).

Graduate Schools

These programs allow you to enhance their knowledge within a particular field or specialized path. Such paths may include master's degrees in clinical psychology, counseling education, social work, biological sciences, zoology, engineering and liberal arts. Post-Baccalaureate education may or may not always guarantee increased salaries within your field of choice; this is especially true for graduate schools. Some graduate admissions committees require prior experience related to the field of study upon acceptance. Admission committees are also interested in your experience

with community service, leadership roles, and standardized test results.

Factors to Consider

- **Location-** Consider the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition. Graduate and Professional schools outside your home state are likely to have an increased rate of tuition. Remember to research housing options and associated costs within the designated area.
- **Finances-** There are many expenses associated with graduate school in addition to tuition, such as books, moving and living expenses. Does the university you are applying to offer financial aid assistance, scholarships or graduate assistantships? Also consider investigating regional tuition breaks, there may be a significant difference in tuition rates.
- **Program Status-** Make sure your program of interest is accredited by the appropriate accreditation panel.
- **Program Requirements-** Identify the number of credit hours and years needed to complete your degree. Does the program require you to pass a comprehensive final in order to graduate? Will you be required to write an extensive research or thesis paper? Are there opportunities for internships or work experience in your field?
- **Faculty and Coursework-** Are there faculty researching topics of interest to you? This faculty member may become a lifelong mentor to you. Are there classes focusing on your research interests?

Developing Effective Personal Statements

A personal statement is also known as a letter of intent and is typically used as a supplemental application material when applying for graduate programs and internships. The sole purpose of a personal statement is to demonstrate your strengths and uniqueness to the admissions committee. Develop your statement in a way that persuades the employer or school faculty members

to accept you into their program. First, we will examine the two different types of personal statements, the writing process and then common mistakes to avoid.

Two Types of Personal Statements

1.) General Personal Statement

This type of testimonial lets you choose a topic that allows you to reflect your full potential. Common examples of such topics may be: Career goals, personal learning experience(s), interest in the field, internships and work experiences. Often the best outline to follow is: 1.) Why are you interested in this field? 2.) Why are you interested in the particular school? 3.) What do you bring to the school? What is your unique promise of value to the program?

2.) Specific Prompts

These statements request that you write about a certain subject topic or experience. Follow the instructions carefully, but most often, they want a similar outline as above.

Starting the Writing Process

1. Begin your personal statement by grabbing the reader's attention. The opening paragraph will serve as a platform for the rest of the essay. Make a good first impression to the admissions committee.

2. Make each personal statement you write specific to the program you are applying for. Avoid using the same statement for every application; consider the various cultures of the places you are applying to and incorporate these findings into your statement. For example, is the graduate program well known for their community involvement? If so, community service experiences might be a good topic to address within your personal statement.

3. Add credibility to the essay by providing evidence for your statements and ideas; if you believe that you would succeed as a Physical Therapy student in their program, tell them why. Discuss your unique strengths and share how their program would advance your career goals and skills.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Be Honest..But Not TOO Honest

Provide the admissions committee with an honest reflection of yourself; do not simply write what you

think they would want to hear. However, there are some topics which are typically deemed inappropriate to discuss within this context. Such matters as religion, political issues and financial interests should not be included within a personal statement. These topics are controversial and are not relevant to the requested information for a personal statement.

Demonstrate Your Knowledge

Research the universities, developing working knowledge of their missions and critical values before writing the personal statement. If possible, identify one or more of these values within your own testimonial.

Avoid Making Excuses

The personal statement essay is meant to be a reflection and not an explanation. Focus on demonstrating your strengths and abilities rather than drawing attention to weaknesses.

Write Responsibly

Keep your writing focused and relevant to the question(s) being asked; consider word count limits when making outlines for the personal statement. Remember to proofread your essay before making a final submission to a graduate school or employer. Our career services department can help you craft and edit your personal statement.

Contact Career Services

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Check out this video with advice for grad school and how to apply.