

Considering Graduate School?

Deciding to pursue graduate school is a major commitment of **time** and **money**. You will face several years of intensive study and research—a much more demanding course load than your undergraduate program. Receiving a graduate degree is rewarding and not a decision to take lightly. In this guide you will find key information to help you through the decision-making process, and guidance on how to prepare and apply to graduate school.

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Step 1

Deciding On & Planning for Grad School

The decision to advance your studies through a graduate degree program is a major decision which requires a defined purpose. Having a defined career focus will help you choose the graduate degree program and school to help you achieve your end goal.

IDENTIFY YOUR PURPOSE | QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. **Why are you considering a graduate degree?** You need to have a clear understanding of what you want to do with your career and not use graduate school as a default move.
 - **Career goal:** Have a clear understanding of what you want to do with your career and how earning a graduate degree will help you reach your goal. If you have doubts about your professional goals, consider putting off grad school and instead spend time working on self-assessment and career planning. If you go to grad school without a clear goal, you will probably end up wasting both time and money. **Certain careers require an advanced degree**, and many **others offer plenty of job opportunities** with an undergraduate degree.
 - **Compensation:** Most studies show that people with advanced degrees earn more on average than people with a bachelor's degree. Don't let "increased compensation" be your only motivation!
 - **Marketable:** While a graduate degree is not required for most entry-level jobs, you may need to earn an advanced degree to keep your skills current and make you marketable for advancement.
 - **Career Change:** A graduate degree can often make sense for a jobseeker who is looking to make a career change. In this case enroll in a graduate degree in the field you plan to enter.

2. **When should you consider obtaining a graduate degree?** Here are some things to consider whether to attend grad school **right after** obtaining a bachelor's degree or to **wait** and get some work/life experience.
 - The benefits of applying to grad school **right after** completing a bachelor's degree is that you are accustomed to being a student, have momentum, sharp study skills, few obligations, and some occupations require an advance degree for entry-level positions.
 - Deciding to **wait** after completing a bachelor's degree and work in the industry instead can help you understand your career goals, gain work experience (required for some grad programs), develop a mature outlook on school, bring a broader worldview to your studies, gain a solid financial footing, increase the possibility of employers paying for some of your grad school expenses, and improve grad program acceptance chances (especially if you were not the best student in your undergrad program).
3. **What is the best graduate degree for you?** There are **2 traditional categories**, master's and doctoral.
 - **Master's:** These degrees are growing and evolving, with degrees offered in just about all fields, and can be professional or academic. Professional degrees, such as a Master of Business Administration (MBA), are designed for employment/advancement within a given field. Academic degrees, such as a Master of Science, are designed for intellectual growth and sometimes a prerequisite for doctoral work within a given field. Master's degrees may take **1-3 years to complete**.
 - **Doctorate:** These are the highest possible earned academic degrees and can also be professional or academic. Professional doctoral degrees, such as the Doctor of Medicine (MD) and the Juris Doctor (JD), stress the practical applicational of knowledge and skills. Academic doctoral degrees, the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), focus on advancing knowledge through original research in an academic field. Doctorates may take **3-6 years to complete**.
4. **What is the best graduate school/program for you?** Just as important a decision as whether to go to graduate school is the decision of **where to attend**. In fact, some experts say your choice of a grad school is much more important than your choice of an undergraduate school (Refer to [criteria to evaluate grad schools/programs](#) below). A more fundamental question is whether to continue graduate studies at the college you earned your bachelor's degree or at a different college.
 - Unless you attend(ed) a top-tier undergraduate college, most experts suggest that you should seek a grad program at a different college from where you earned your bachelor's degree.
 - The idea is that by attending a different school, you are exposed to different faculty, perspectives, and resources, all designed to broaden your knowledge and experiences.
5. **Can you afford graduate school?** It is crucial to look at the cost of the various grad programs that interest you and determine what mix of financial assistance will make attending the program feasible. Review the information the grad school/program sends you and compare it against the information you found through research. Then meet with a financial aid advisor to review the details. **Start early** on identifying ways to finance your studies. Here's a list of possible types of financial aid to consider:

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- Besides the types of **financial aid** offered in undergrad, most grad programs also offer **fellowships, teaching** or **research assistance**. Research information on **paid internships** in your field of study.
 - If, employed, don't forget to inquire with your **employer** about **tuition reimbursement programs**.
 - Depending on your needs you may consider committing your studies to **full-time** or **part-time**. If committing to part-time studies and part-time employment, be sure to educate yourself on the type of financial assistance available and your eligibility.
6. **How will you balance work, life & studies?** Simply put, graduate studies require a higher academic rigor than your undergraduate studies. You will likely need to make life adjustments to successfully complete your grad program which involves time, and mental, emotional, and financial commitment. Chances are that your loved ones will want to pull you in different directions, sapping much needed study time. Prior to making your final decision, be honest and clear with your family and friends about allotting much of your time to your studies so you can receive the support you need.

Adapted: Hansen, R. S. (2020, September 24). *Considering Graduate School? Answer These Questions First*. LiveCareer. livecareer.com/resources/careers/recent-grads/considering-graduate-school.

CREATE A LIST OF GRADUATE SCHOOLS & PROGRAMS

There are many graduate degree programs, so give yourself time to do adequate research and get all the information you need to achieve your career goal. It's wise to take about **1-2 years** to do your research because graduate schools start accepting applications just under 1 year before your **intended start date**. Develop a **list** of important characteristics to research graduate programs of your interest:

- Start with an **initial web-based search** regarding **the field of study** you are interested in.
- Review the **prerequisite courses** and discuss them with your academic advisor; add courses to your academic plan. Graduate schools look for applicants with **solid academic backgrounds**.
- Learn about the **type of experience** you'll need to increase your acceptance odds. Search for **experiential learning opportunities** in your field of study (internship, work, volunteer).
- Learn about the **type of graduate degree** program needed (masters, doctoral, license/credential) that you need to achieve your career goals.
- Connect with **program faculty** to ask questions/get advice on preparing the best grad application.
- Contact **alumni** who did your program of interest to get the inside scoop ([FPU's Alumni Group](#)).
- Reach out to **employers** to see if they hire people from grad programs of your interest. Visit the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistic's [Occupational Handbook](#) to learn about career paths by industry, educational requirements, market growth and earning potential to help you make informed decisions.
- Find a **mentor** in your discipline to gain support/guidance especially during the application process.

CRITERIA TO EVALUATE GRADUATE SCHOOLS & PROGRAMS

Here are the most common school and program evaluation items (in alphabetical order), which can be found in school guides, catalogs, and websites:

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- **Accreditations:** There are 2 types: *institutional* and *program specific*. Determine the proper accreditation programs required in your field. While accreditation is not an indicator of quality as much as process, you could face consequences from unaccredited programs. For example, students who attend an unaccredited law school may not be allowed to take the bar exam (required for a practicing lawyer). **Note:** an unaccredited school may not openly volunteer this info, so dig deeply.
- **Admission Standards:** It's better to be among the select few than with a larger group that may end up lowering the quality of your graduate education. Most schools publish information on the **# of applicants** compared to the **# of acceptances**. Search for base admission requirements, which usually include undergrad grade-point averages and standardized test scores.
- **Career Assistance:** Your goals for grad school may be career advancement, getting a new job, or entering a new field. Examine the amount of **career development and placement assistance** each program provides to grads. While this assistance should be a small part of your overall job search upon earning your degree, it's still important. Search where graduates are working and the salary ranges that they are earning.
- **Cost/Financial Aid:** Examine all associated costs, including tuition, books and supplies, housing, and miscellaneous fees/expenses. Review the types of financial assistance each program offers, including **grants, loans and fellowships**. Don't be afraid to negotiate with your top schools; if a school really wants you in their program, they will find additional resources for you.
- **Culture:** Identify schools with cultures that fit your style and comfort-level so that you'll have a better chance to excel. Some call this concept the **philosophy of education**.
- **Degrees Offered:** The most **fundamental consideration**; if the graduate school does not offer the degree or certificate program you seek, then it does not make sense to investigate the school any further. Make sure you know the specific degree/certificate/credential you need to take this next career step. Don't compromise or consider a lesser degree!
- **Faculty:** A grad program is only as good as the faculty who teach it. It's important to work with faculty who are respected and known in your field of interest. Review the percentage of classes taught by fulltime, terminally qualified faculty, and investigate their reputation by examining the # of scholarly publications, as well as their national/regional acclaim and professional experiences.
- **Location:** Except for top-tier programs, the value of an advanced degree is typically strongest in the region where the school is located/known. Determine the degree needed for your next career move and where you want to live and work. Educational requirements vary in certain states.
- **Multicultural/Diversity Opportunities:** Better programs tend to be diverse, leading to a broader worldview. Examine both the faculty and student composition, determining a mix where you'll feel most comfortable. If interested, inquire if the program offers an international study opportunity.
- **Physical Facilities:** Investigate programs that stress "state-of-the-art" facilities to see if they really include the tools needed for your specific interests. Planning to specialize in market research? Find a program that has great computer facilities, as well as behavioral labs for focus group events.

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- **Reputation/Ranking:** Different organizations rank graduate programs. While rankings are an important measure of quality, you also need to investigate the source of the rankings. Ranking may not be as important as other criteria here because of the flaws in the ranking process, including the ability for a school to have a high ranking while the program that interests you could still be weak.
- **Research/Academic Focus:** Grad programs tend to have a strength/focus in 1 or 2 areas within a specific discipline; fully investigate the faculty interests/research areas of each program.
- **Resources:** Research endowments/foundations that support student research/publications.
- **Size:** There are 2 aspects to evaluate: **program and university size**. Find what feels right for you, whether it's a small fish/big pond or a big fish/small pond. Examine university environments and available resources. More importantly, consider the program size, including faculty/student ratios, since this is where you'll spend the bulk of your time.
- **State Regulations & Residency Requirements:** Looking at state university programs? Examine admission requirements/costs for in-state residents vs others. If you love a specific state university where you don't live, consider relocating to that state and establishing residency before applying.
- **Surrounding Community:** You're going to live there for years (unless online program), so attend a university you feel comfortable with (larger city vs small town; urban vs rural vs suburban setting).

Create a spreadsheet and add the above criteria to help you organize your grad school/program research.

Adapted: Hansen, R. S. (2020, September 24). *Criteria for Choosing a Graduate Program*. LiveCareer. livecareer.com/resources/careers/recent-grads/graduate-school-criteria.

Step 2

Preparing for Graduate School

Once you have decided on the right graduate program and school for you, begin preparing early to increase your chances of acceptance. **Before your senior year**, narrow down the programs and schools that you plan to apply to. Applying to a graduate program is different than applying to an undergraduate program because now you are preparing to apply to a specific/specialized program. **Prepare in advance** to demonstrate to the admissions committee that you are an outstanding applicant.

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS + SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTS

Graduate schools are looking for prospective students with a solid academic background, relevant employment, and research experience. Graduate schools have some remarkably similar admissions requirements. Your task is to confidently demonstrate to the admissions committee that you will succeed in the graduate program and profession.

Admission requirements to guide your preparation:

- **Application Forms:** Some grad program/schools may utilize a **centralized online application** while others may have a **direct and unique campus application** form. In these applications you'll provide your educational background, demographic, and contact info. Review the application thoroughly to make a list of the required and supplemental documents to prepare. Understand the submission process, by mail, electronically or a combination of both. Inquire about fee waivers.
- **Entrance Exams/Standardized Test:** Identify the entrance exam(s) required for your program and scores range. It's important to **study** for the entrance exams and take them the spring or summer before your senior year, this way if you are unhappy with your scores you can retake in the fall. Here are the most common types of entrance exams. **Know which exam is required and which graduate schools you'll need to share your test scores with:**
 - [Miller Analogies Test](#) (MAT) - used by *graduate schools* accepting the exam; assesses analytical thinking ability.
 - [Graduate Record Examination](#) (GRE) - used in most *graduate schools* and *business schools*; assesses verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning & analytical writing skills.
 - [Graduate Management Admission Test](#) (GMAT) - used mostly for prospective *business school* students; assesses analytical writing, problem solving, data sufficiency, logic & critical reasoning.
 - [Law School Admission Test](#) (LSAT) - used for *law school* admission; assesses critical reading, analytical & logical reasoning, and persuasive writing skills.
 - [Medical College Admission Test](#) (MCAT) - used for *medical school* admission; assesses problem solving, critical thinking, and knowledge of natural, behavioral, and social science concepts.
 - [Dental Admission Test](#) (DAT) - used for *dental education programs*; assesses perceptual ability, reading comprehension, and quantitative reasoning.
 - [Pharmacy College Admission Test](#) (PCAT) - used by *pharmacy colleges* to identify qualified applicants; assesses academic ability and scientific knowledge.
- **Essays:** Each grad school application will have **1 or more essay(s)** unique to the program (noted with instructions in each application packet). Respond to *all* parts of the prompt and follow the word limit. Essays are a window to share your story and represent who you are. You are writing to an audience of professionals (admissions committee); write in a way that lets them hear your voice. Show your willingness to learn as an amateur in their field. Your goal is to **persuade/convince the committee** that you are an outstanding applicant. Partner with someone you trust to provide feedback/support while writing your essays. Here are 2 overarching themes you can modify as needed:
 - **A Statement of Purpose** is a short statement written to present your academic background, career goals, and reasons the program will help you achieve your goals. Clearly and concisely convey your career/research interests and readiness to succeed in the program/profession.

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- **A Personal Statement** is a bit broader and presents your background, life experiences, personal challenges, goals, and motivations for pursuing a specialized degree. Demonstrate/persuade the committee of your clarity, focus and passion for the program with openness to learn/succeed.
- **Letters of Recommendation:** Most schools request **3-4 recommendation letters**. Carefully choose people (preferably faculty) who are acquainted with your work, with whom you have worked with for a long period (preferably 1+ years), and who is willing to provide a **positive recommendation** and **attest** to your abilities, experiences, career goals, and potential to succeed in graduate-level studies. Some grad programs request letters to be only from professors or employers. Openly ask your recommenders if they feel comfortable writing a good recommendation, this way they can share whether they can support you or have reservations. Your recommenders have a busy schedule and are doing you a favor; request all recommendations at least **2 months in advance of the submission deadline**. Faculty/supervisors can write in a positive tone with supportive detail of your work. To help your recommenders produce credible, informative, and outstanding letters, share your CV/resume, essay(s), list of courses taken with them, GPA, minor and explanation on how it will enhance your grad studies, a list of items to address in the letter, submission directions and deadlines (see our [Letter of Recommendation Request Guide](#)). Upon receiving a recommendation letter, send a thank you note. Grad schools require letters to be completed in their own recommendation forms or electronically:
 - **Recommendation forms** are created and utilized by some grad schools (application packet). Provide these forms to your recommenders; include stamped envelopes addressed to the schools and faculty member to which the forms are to be sent.
 - **Electronic recommendation systems** are utilized by some grad schools. You'll be asked to provide your recommender's name and contact info. Your recommender then receives an email from the school with a link/direction to complete/submit their letters.
- **Resume/Curriculum Vitae (CV):** Grad schools require a **CV** or **resume** as a supplemental document. It is key to understand which is required, as well as the differences between the two (see our [CV Guide](#) and [Resume Guide](#)) so, you can submit the correct document and help the admissions committee understand your educational background, academic achievements, employment history, research experience, internships and volunteer work.
- **Transcripts:** Provide a record of your solid academic background, including grades, GPA, and the rigorous courses completed. If attended more than 1 college, request/share transcripts. If you still enrolled while applying to grad school, follow-up and send official transcripts once you graduate.

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974: Letters of recommendation contain a statement asking whether you do or do not waive your right to inspect the completed letter of reference.

FINANCING GRADUATE SCHOOL

During your initial research you identified the **types of financial assistance** each program offers. It's important to also search for ways to fund your education. *First*, fund your education with **free money**, grants, scholarships, and employer tuition programs. *Secondly*, with **earned income**, fellowships, teaching (TAs) and research assistantships (RAs). *Finally*, finance your education with **borrowed money**, federal student loans. It's imperative to learn if you'll need to apply for institutional scholarships, fellowships, TAs or RAs at the same time when submitting your application or after you receive admissions offer.

Ways to finance your graduate studies:

- Complete the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** to determine your financial need/eligibility. Financial aid is money to help pay for college through *grants, scholarships, work-study and loans* to help make college affordable. Have a clear understanding of your financial need, the school attendance cost and the type of aid you'll accept to make an informed decision.
- **Grants & scholarships** are funds available for student education that do not have to be paid back. Most grant programs are needs-based, and scholarship programs may be either need or merit-based. Grants and scholarships are financed by federal and state governments, individual colleges, and universities, and by private and non-profit organizations.
- Graduate schools offer **Teaching & Research Assistantships** which are a form of funding for graduate students. *Teaching Assistants (TAs)* work with professors and may require instruction responsibilities. *Research Assistants (RAs)* are employed to assist conducting academic research. Both TAs & RAs may be on need or merit-bases and are competitive. Be sure to inquire about these opportunities as they give grad students a way to earn income and gain experience.
- Academic **fellowships** are a funding source to subsidize the cost of graduate school, are a type of scholarship awarded to students pursuing a specialized degree and are competitive as most are merit-based. The length of the fellowship depends on the graduate school. Fellowships provide the opportunity to grad students to earn income and gain experience.
- If you are working and considering applying to graduate school, find out if your **employer offers tuition reimbursement assistance**. Examine your career goals and your current type of employment to investigate if your current employer has tuition reimbursement programs. You'll be surprised to find out that employers are willing to cover some of the cost of your advanced education. If your employer offers this benefit, learn about the specifics of the tuition program.
- Most graduate students will have the need to finance their education through loans. Financing your education through **borrowed money** is a decision not to take lightly since you'll have to pay back the loans with accrued interest. Learn about the type of loans ([Direct Unsubsidized & Direct Plus Loans](#)) and terms/conditions of accepting.
- Learn about [Public Service Loan Forgiveness](#) (PSLF) and check your eligibility.

Check your credit score before applying to graduate school to learn how it can impact your school loans.

Step 3

Applying to Graduate School

You have narrowed down your schools, done a broad online search, prepared your documents, and taken the required entrance exam(s). It is time to get your **documents organized** and **create a timeline** to meet due dates for each school you will be applying to, as well as confirming that your application was received.

ORGANIZING APPLICATION DOCUMENTS

You have collected your letters of recommendations, transcripts, test scores, and have completed your statement of purpose/personal statement, and other supplemental documents. Organize with meticulous detail to avoid missing an important document or worse, send a document to the incorrect school.

Organization Tips:

- Develop a **checklist and timeline** for each graduate school so you can keep track of the completed and pending documents. This will help you keep track of the required and supplemental documents to avoid missing the submission deadline (see [Grad School Timeline](#) on pages 12-13).
- Create **individual file folders** (paper or electronic) for each graduate school.
- **Collect and add application documents** to their corresponding folder.
- **Revise your essays** to ensure you are responding to *all parts* of the prompt.
- Check that documents are **addressed specifically** to each school (don't send APU your FPU essay).

SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION + CONFIRMATION OF RECEIPT

Some graduate schools accept applications by **mail**, while others accept **online** applications. It is imperative that you understand the submission process and deadlines for each school.

Submission + Receipt Confirmation Tips:

- If **mailing** your grad school application packet, be sure to include **all required documents**:
 - Make a **photocopy** of the application and documents for each graduate school.
 - You may want to **postmark** your application packet.
 - Use a **legal-size envelope**; include the correct designation and your return address.
 - Enclose a **self-addressed, stamped postcard** with each application with a message "Please send to verify receipt of application to the University" this way the school can return to verify receipt.
 - Include the **application fee** or the **fee waiver** (gather eligibility and process info to obtain fee waivers, which are offered at some schools based on need or certain program participation).
- If **applying online** understand the process and label each of your documents accurately:
 - **Complete all parts** of the applications to avoid submitting an incomplete application.
 - **Upload all** required and supplemental documents.
 - Have a credit card ready to cover the **application fee** or have your **fee waiver** available.
 - Check the **status** of your application online and documents received/processed.

Step 4

After Submitting Your Application

Once you've submitted your grad school application, the waiting period begins. Stay in contact with the program coordinator or faculty to continue monitoring your application status. The program faculty will review and decide upon your application. Students are then contacted with an invitation to an admission interview. *Not all schools require an admission interview, but this is becoming more common.*

Types of admission interviews:

- **Evaluative interviews** take place at prestigious graduate schools to gain admission; your performance is evaluated and considered when deciding whether to offer you admission.
- **Informative interviews** are a way for an interviewer to impress you, and learn more about you and your goals, while allowing you to make a positive impression and show interest in the program.

ADMISSION INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Since the admission interview may play a vital role in your acceptance, you'll need to adequately prepare to ace your grad school interview. Your goal is to leave a good impression and increase your chances of acceptance.

Tips to help you stand out:

- Review your **career goal** so you can confidently share why you are pursuing this specialized degree program. Create your [elevator pitch](#) to help you respond to "tell me about yourself."
- Study the **program curriculum** and how the program will help you achieve your next career goal.
- Review your **essays, statement of purpose** or **personal statement**. Prepare to respond to questions regarding the content in your essays (be honest/transparent in your application).
- Review your **Resume/CV** so you can clearly convey your education background and experiences.
- **Demonstrate interest** in the graduate program; develop a **list of open-ended questions** to ask during your interview (see [List of Possible Interview Questions](#) below).
- Practice for the admission interview with your mentor, career counselor, professor, friend, etc. Use FPU's mock video interviewing platform, [StandOut](#), to help you **practice and improve your interviewing skills**. Log in with your FPU credentials, then follow the steps to create your account.
- Learn about answering interview questions with **STAR Stories** (watch our [Ace the Interview Video](#)).
- Take copies of all your graduate school **application documents**; if available your **professional portfolio** (e-portfolio, LinkedIn, blog, etc.) as well.
- **Dress professionally** to make a great first impression. Plan what to wear the day before your interview (learn how to [dress for success](#)).
- **Confirm** your admission interview and arrive early.
- **Review** the list of possible interview questions on the next page.

LIST OF POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Prepare to Answer	Consider Asking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell me about yourself. Why do you want to study at our school? What are your strengths and weaknesses? If accepted, what will be your biggest challenge? How has your experience/education prepared you to succeed in this program? What are your career goals? How will studying here help you achieve those goals? Describe your greatest accomplishment. What unique qualities can you offer this program? What appeals to you most about our program? What are your research interests? How do you motivate yourself? How do you deal with stress? What do you do in your spare time? What is your plan B? If you were not accepted to the program, what are your plans? Define teamwork? Success? Leadership? Fairness? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General questions about the degree program Preparations for the program - do they prefer experience? Interviewee's educational path Culture/environment of the school What characteristics distinguish this program from others? What financial assistance is offered? (Scholarships, fellowships, TAs, RAs, etc.) What experiential learning opportunities are there? How to apply? Placement? (TAs, RAs, Adjunct, Internships, etc.) What factors are most important in admitting students? Where do alumni of the program work? Do students usually publish or present papers? When do I need to begin your research/thesis? Will I get to choose, or will I be assigned a thesis mentor/advisor? <p><small>Adapted: University of Illinois, Springfield . (n.d). Graduate School Interviews - Career Development Center. https://www.uis.edu/career/students/career-planning/launch-your-career/graduate-school-strategies/graduate-school-interviews/.</small></p>

RECEIVING A RESPONSE FROM GRADUATE SCHOOLS

You have successfully navigated the application process and completed an outstanding interview. The waiting period is almost over; you begin to receive responses from graduate schools. Mixed emotions are normal as you receive acceptance letters and evaluate your options to make a decision.

Evaluate your options:

- Review the **number of applications** you submitted.
- Check your **school priority list**; have you received a response from your top choice school?
- You may be celebrating your **1st admission offer** and be tempted to immediately accept. But wait until you review the program, financial assistance, and the pros/cons to make an informed decision.
- If you have **not received a response** from your top school choice, consider waiting and don't make a premature decision. Contact your representative to find out the response timeframe.
- If you are fortunate, you may receive admission offers to all the schools you applied to. However, **avoid holding on to all admission offers**. [ThoughtCo](#) advises against this for 2 reasons:
 - Choosing a program is itself a hard decision; choosing among 3+ can be overwhelming.
 - Holding on to programs you don't intend to accept prevents waitlisted students from admission.

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- **Discuss your options** with your mentor, family, and faculty; they give a fresh and academic perspective.
- **Examine the specifics** of each admission offer to determine which program will fit your needs. What factors/characteristics of the program are important to you? Will this program prepare you for your next career goal? What financial assistance is offered? Etc.

RESPONDING TO AN ADMISSIONS OFFER

- Inform *all* programs you received an offer from about your decision: **accepting or declining**.
- Find out **how/when to provide a response**. Some colleges accept by email, formal letter, or through your online application account.
- If responding **by email or letter** (accepting or declining) be professional; follow proper forms of email etiquette and formal writing style (see [examples](#)). Be humble and thank the committee.
- Providing a response for **declining offers** allows offers to be made to waitlisted students.

Follow up with your recommenders and mentors with a thank you note!

TIMELINE TO PREPARE FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

(Application requirements/deadlines vary by school)

Freshman & Sophomore Years

- Take core courses & enroll in courses helpful for grad school
- Explore career choices
- Define your career goals
- Meet with a career counselor & academic advisor
- Explore volunteer opportunities
- Find an academic mentor
- Conduct informational interviews with professionals
- Join student clubs/organizations; become an active member
- Attend departmental colloquial & social gatherings
- Get to know your professors
- Continue developing professional relationships with supervisors, mentors, professors, employers
- Join professional organizations/associations related to your field of studies/career goal
- Join in FPU's Career Achievement Program (CAP)
- Prepare a professional portfolio: Cover Letter, Resume/CV, compile projects/work samples
- Attend state/regional conventions in your field
- Meet with a career counselor to discuss your grad school plans
- Research grad programs that meet your career goals
- Research grad schools that offer the degree program to help achieve your next career goal

Junior Year

- Take more advance courses
- Engage in experiential learning opportunities (internship, practicum, volunteer, work)
- Research topics of interest for research projects/thesis

Summer Before Senior Year | June-July

- Have a defined career goal:
 - Education level required to achieve your career goal
 - Type of degree (Masters, Doctoral, Credential/License)
- Narrow down your grad school list (5-10):

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- Do grad schools offer the degree program you need to advance your career?
- Request info, application & admission requirements
- Make list of the admission requirements & due dates
- Prepare for entrance exams (GRE, LSAT, MCAT, GMAT, MAT, DAT, PCAT):
 - Study for the require exam
 - Review registration & exam dates
 - Take the summer before senior year (retake in the fall if necessary)

Senior Year | August-September

- Continue requesting application & admission requirements from grad programs of your interest
- Carefully & thoroughly review all grad program info:
 - Research financial assistance
- Consult with your mentor, career counselor, academic advisor, faculty regarding the various grad schools/programs of your interest
- Take required exams (GRE, LSAT, MCAT, GMAT, MAT, DAT, PCAT)
- Update your professional portfolio:
 - Cover Letter
 - Resume/CV
 - Compile projects/work samples
 - [LinkedIn](#)

Senior Year | October-November

- Take/retake required exams (GRE, LSAT, MCAT, GMAT, MAT, DAT, PCAT)
- Request letters of recommendation
- Request transcripts:
 - Inspect your transcripts for any errors
 - [Registrar](#) to send official transcripts to schools
- Prepare your essays:
 - Personal statement or statement of purpose
 - Supplemental questions
- Complete the [FAFSA](#)
- Research financial assistance (How/when to apply):
 - Scholarships, fellowships
 - Teacher & research assistance
 - Loans

Senior Year | December

- Gather letters of recommendation
- Finalize your essays:
 - Personal statement or statement of purpose
 - Supplemental questions
- Complete & submit applications:
 - Make list of each school's required documents
 - Make photocopies of all documents
 - By Mail: enclose *all* required documents, including application fee (or fee waiver)
 - Online: upload *all* required documents; pay the application fee (or fee waiver)
 - Verify receipt of your application & documents

Senior Year | January-March

- Wait patiently, review your email & mail periodically; check your application status online (if this is a possible option)
- Keep recommenders updated on the status of your application
- Inform professors about your grad school status:
 - Openly communicate in case you need to be absent
- Prepare for an admission interview:
 - Practice your interviewing skills ([StandOut](#))
 - Learn about answering interview questions with STAR Stories (watch our [Ace the Interview Video](#)).

Senior Year | April-May

- Start receiving admission offers:
 - Not your top choice? Contact the admission representative of your top choice schools to check on your application status
- Evaluate your admission offers:
 - What factors/characteristics of the program are important to you?
 - Will this program prepare you for your next career goal?
 - What financial assistance is offered?
- Formally decline less preferred admission offers
- Formally accept your preferred admission offer
- Continue to explore financial assistance:
 - Meet with a financial adviser
- Follow up with final official transcripts