



RICHARD M. FAIRBANKS

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Graduate and Professional School

Attending graduate school is a great way to gain more experience in your field and advance your career options. However, admission and attendance is very different from the undergraduate level and can seem daunting. Don't panic. Although the personal decision to attend graduate school may be difficult, the admission process can be simplified with organization and planning.

IS GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL RIGHT FOR YOU?

Continuing on to a graduate or professional program is not a decision to be made lightly. Before you commit to spending the next few years in a program, ask yourself the following questions:

- **Why go?** Many people go to graduate school because they want to get more experience in their field of interest, or have higher earning potential. Graduate school is a challenge. You should only go if it means an advance in your career. Graduate school is too timely and expensive to use as an opportunity to explore your career options.
- **Why now?** You should want to pursue graduate school now because it is the next logical step in your career. You need your graduate/professional degree to progress in your chosen profession. Attending graduate school should not be used to avoid the job market or to avoid making a career decision.
- **What kind of program?** Some individuals continue to study within the same field as their undergraduate major, while others go onto new areas of study or professional school. Be sure that the program you choose corresponds with your career aspirations.
- **Academic or professional program?** Academically-oriented programs set you up for a career in higher education. Professional programs are geared toward hands on positions within the field. Ask yourself in what environment you want to work.
- **Where do you want to study?** In an increasingly globalized academic environment, the whole world can be your classroom. Graduate school is also an opportunity to relocate. Consider your geographic expectations and compare them to graduate program offerings in those areas.
- **Should you wait and gain experience first?** Some programs, such as MBA programs, prefer that students obtain several years of work experience before applying. It is important to understand if your field values experience prior to the start of a graduate program. Going straight into a program without considering this can leave you well educated but under qualified come graduation.

If you know you need an advanced degree for your chosen career path, then graduate school is likely a good choice for you. Now you just need to decide the specifics: when, where, what program, etc. If you are unsure of your career goals, you are encouraged to take the time necessary to determine what you want to do in your career. Graduate school is far too expensive and time consuming to use as an exploratory period.

CHOOSING A PROGRAM

Finding the right graduate program is dependent upon finding the right match between your academic and career interests, the research interests of faculty and staff, and the atmosphere of the program offered. Students typically apply to several “target” programs, several “reach” programs, and several “safety” programs. Target programs are the programs you’d love to attend, and to which you have a good chance of being admitted. Safety programs are the programs you’d love to attend and are likely to admit you. Reach programs are the programs you’d love to attend, but are extremely competitive or have extremely rigorous admission standards.

Don’t be afraid to apply to your dream school. However, it is important to be realistic about your competitiveness as an applicant. Applying to multiple programs is expensive and time consuming. Call the programs you’re considering and ask for the average GPA and entrance exam scores for the previous year’s class. This information will aid you in your program selection process. Here are some additional resources:

Directories

- www.petersons.com
- www.graduateguide.com
- www.gradschools.com

Rankings

- US News: <http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools>
- PhDs.org: <http://www.phds.org/>

Students & Alumni: Contact students in each program you are considering. Ask them about their experience in the program, what financial aid packages were available when they applied, and how they would describe the culture of the program and school. If you are having issues connecting with current students, call the program coordinator and ask to be connected to a current student.

Faculty & Staff: Ask faculty and staff where they attended graduate school or what they think the best programs are in your field and why.

Emphasis: A department may offer a specific program that you are interested in, but how are these areas emphasized? Does the department prefer that students gain experiences through internships, research, or another kind of experience? What are the specific specialties and research interests of faculty and staff? Seek programs with faculty members whose research and career interests align with your research interests.

Curriculum: Find the department’s course listings online. Do the classes look interesting? What electives outside of your department will count toward your degree?

APPLICATION PROCESS

The application process for graduate school can be long and involved. Before you begin to gather your application materials, make a list of all the schools you are applying for, their application deadlines, and a list of everything you need to be included in your application packet. Start early and stay organized.

Online Application Form

Most programs have online application forms. These forms provide an area for you to upload specific documents, answer departmental questionnaires, complete student aid considerations, and allow for electronic submission of letters of recommendation. However, some programs require certain materials to be sent by mail, especially transcripts. Look carefully for submission instructions for each department.

Official Transcript

Official transcripts must be obtained directly from IUPUI. The following page has more information on how to obtain and send transcripts to the schools to which you are applying. <http://registrar.iupui.edu/transcript/>

Resume or CV

A resume is a tool that is meant to convey that a candidate is capable of doing a specific job based on their past experience, skillset and accomplishments. Most programs require a curriculum vitae (CV) instead of a resume, but in some cases, the submission of a resume is acceptable. For more information on writing a resume, check out our Resume Writing Handout.

A curriculum vitae is the appropriate way of presenting yourself for employment in academic and research-based settings. It can also be used for applying for fellowships and grants. The CV has an academic focus and is a very important tool for graduate students. A CV may include, but is not limited to, professional qualifications, area of study for all degrees (showing dates and institutions), teaching experience, research interests, and publications. For more information on writing a curriculum vitae, check out our CV Handout.

Letters of Recommendation

- **Who to ask:** If you are applying for admission to an academic program, for an academic position, or scholarship/grant award, you will want to be sure that the majority of your letter writers are academics themselves, ideally in the field of interest to you. They should be professors you have built a strong relationship with either through taking classes with them or acting as their research assistant. It is also beneficial to include a professional reference who can speak to your abilities in a work environment. This could be a past supervisor or boss. If you are attending professional school, it is crucial that your letter writers are professionals within your field.
- **How to ask:** It is important to always politely ask for a letter of recommendation well ahead of the application deadline. It is extremely unprofessional to request a letter at the last minute. Be sure to give the letter writer at least two weeks to complete the letter for you. It is also imperative that you provide each of your letter writers with adequate information for them to provide you with the strongest letter possible. Materials to include are: your cv/resume, a list of schools that you are applying to with their deadlines, instructions on how to submit letters, your personal statement, a personalized letter thanking them, and preaddressed and stamped envelopes (if any materials are to be submitted via mail).
- **Follow Up:** Be sure to send each of your letter writers hand written thank you notes at the end of the submission process. You will also want to inform them when you have news to share. Recommenders always love to hear that you got into a program. For more information on requesting letters of recommendation, read our References and Letters of Recommendation Handout.

Personal Statement

The personal statement is an important part of the application packet, especially if you are applying for a Ph.D. program. Be sure to follow each school's prompts and avoid clichés. Your personal statement needs to be a unique and engaging essay (typically one to three pages in length). This is your opportunity to provide a detailed explanation of your personal and professional experiences and to describe your career goals related to completing that particular graduate or professional program.

Writing a strong personal statement allows you to emphasize your strengths while simultaneously downplaying areas of weakness. Although the personal statement is all about your accomplishments, it is also about the program to which you are applying. Explain why the program is right for you by citing specific features of the program, and tie them back to your own career goals and interests. Finally, take the time to write multiple drafts of your personal statement, and have it reviewed by professors and advisors.

ENTRANCE EXAMS

- **GRE:** The Graduate Record Examination is the most commonly utilized graduate school entrance exam. The test consists of an analytical writing section, two verbal reasoning sections, two quantitative reasoning sections, and a trial section that will not be scored. There are also eight additional subject tests that may be taken separately. To contact the IUPUI testing center, call (317) 274-6916. To learn more about the specifics of the test, visit www.ets.org.
- **GMAT:** The GMAT is most commonly used for professionals entering business schools. It consists of a quantitative section, a verbal section, an integrated reasoning section, and an analytical writing assessment.
- **MCAT:** The MCAT is the entrance exam for medical school. It consists of verbal reasoning, biological sciences, physical sciences, and writing sample sections.

- **LSAT:** The LSAT is the entrance examination for law school. It consists of five thirty-five minute multiple choice sections. One of these sections is an experimental section that is not scored. There is also a writing section.
- **DAT:** The DAT is the entrance examination for dental school. It is composed of four sections: survey of natural sciences, perceptual ability, reading comprehension, and quantitative reasoning.

Preparation: Preparation for the GMAT, LSAT, MCAT, and other entrance exams are regularly offered on campus. If you are a disciplined student who can take on their own study plan, additional preparation resources for these exams may be obtained at the University Library. Popular resources include books by Princeton Review, Kaplan, and ETS.

TAILORING YOUR APPLICATION TO EACH SCHOOL

Personalization for each application is extremely important. Regardless of whether or not the application you are completing is for a reach, target, or safety school, you must fill out each application as if that institution is your top choice. Make sure to customize each personal statement you send. Also request that your letter writers tailor each letter to the different institutions you are applying to. Each institution requires a different set of application materials and may require more or fewer items for their application.

INTERVIEW

Being offered an interview means that the institution has decided that you are a capable candidate. They now want to learn more about your experience to determine if you are a good fit. The interview is an important part of the admission process. Be sure to prepare and practice. To get started, here are some general interviewing tips:

- Review your experience. Look over the program requirements, and consider how your own experiences relate to those requirements.
- Research the program. This includes degrees offered, specializations offered, and research interests of faculty and staff.
- Brush up on your professional etiquette. Begin and end the interview with a firm handshake. Dress in something conservative and professional. Listen to the questions that are being asked of you.

While most programs require an interview, some do not. Be sure you know which schools require this step. For interviewing tips, read our Interviewing Handout.

Sample Interview Questions

- What factors influenced your decision to go to graduate school?
- Why are you interested in our program?
- How do you see this program fitting into your career goals?
- How do you feel your undergraduate studies have prepared you for this program?
- What skills make you a good candidate for this program?
- Give an example of an ethical dilemma you faced and explain how you resolved it.
- How will completing this program help you achieve your professional career goals?
- Tell us about a time when you were under a great deal of stress. How did you handle that stress?

Questions You Should Ask:

- What features set this program apart from others in the field?
- What professional and practical experiences does this program offer?
- How are mentoring relationships established? Are advisors assigned?
- What financial aid options are available? Are you considered for financial aid immediately upon application, or is there a separate application that must be completed?

PAYING FOR GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

Paying for graduate school can seem daunting. Fortunately, there are many options for funding during your graduate years.

- **Fellowships:** Fellowships provide funding and tuition for graduate students without requiring the student to work as a teaching assistant, research assistant, or graduate instructor. Graduate fellowships are highly competitive. To begin your search for graduate fellowships explore the options at pivot.cos.com.

- **Assistantships:** Assistantships come in multiple forms, including teaching, instruction, and research. Many of these opportunities are offered to students who apply within the department; however, a student studying in one area may be able to find assistantships within another department. Check departmental websites to see what assistantships are offered and how priority is assigned to incoming students.
- **Teaching Assistantship (TA):** Teaching assistants aid professors in a course. The amount of classroom involvement that is expected of you varies by department, professor, and year in graduate school. For example, a student who has just begun their graduate career may be expected to proctor exams, grade assignments, and answer general questions about classroom material. An individual who is nearing the end of their graduate student career may be expected to develop and teach their own class.
- **Research Assistantship:** Research assistants support faculty and staff in their research. These experiences are guided, not independent. In addition to helping pay for graduate school, research assistantships are a great way to accrue publications within your field.
- **Graduate Assistantship:** Graduate assistantships give you the opportunity to work in an office on campus. These positions give you valuable experience in a professional setting.
- **Other Departmental Jobs:** When searching for funding, make sure to enquire if there are any open positions within the department for which you may be qualified. These opportunities will help you build connections with faculty and staff while simultaneously funding your graduate experience.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

Health Professions and Pre-Law Center (HPPLC) Online Resources

The Health Professions and Prelaw Center (HPPLC) is located on the Indiana University Bloomington campus, but their website is full of helpful resources and information. Take some time to read through their resources on attending attend law school, medical school, or an allied health profession (Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Dentistry, Optometry, etc.). IUPUI students are not eligible for advising appointments through this center but are able to use the online resources. To learn, visit <http://hpplc.indiana.edu/a-contact.shtml>.

Make An Appointment With Your Academic Advisor

Make sure all of your materials are in order for graduation. Your academic advisor can also review the programs you are applying to and offer guidance during the application process.

Make An Appointment With Your Career Coach

Your career coach can help you review your personal statement, curriculum vitae, and resume. They can also perform a mock interview to help you prepare for interviews at the schools to which you have applied.