

Applying to Graduate School

SEAVER COLLEGE CAREER CENTER
Pepperdine University



Tyler Campus Center, Suite 270
(310) 506-4184

<http://seaver.pepperdine.edu/studentaffairs/careercenter/>

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Some Important Advice:

Avoid choosing grad school just because you don't think you'll get a job.

Richard Fein, Director of Placement at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst Business School says "Don't choose a grad school because you don't want to find a job or you are unsure of what your career interests really are. You'll be expected to have clearly defined goals when you get to graduate school."

Questions you should ask yourself:

- Do you have a clear idea of the career you want to pursue? Is a graduate degree a requirement for your career? Will it make employment easier? Or could it make your search more difficult because you are "overqualified" for the field?
- Who wants you to go to graduate school? Is it your interests or motivation pushing for the advanced degree? Are you responding to others in your life such as friends, parents and teachers?
- What can you do with your undergraduate degree? There are lots of choices for all levels of education, so keep your options open.
- Will time and money you spend on graduate school repay you for the money and experience you will earn if you take a job beginning immediately after graduation?
- Is there another avenue for continued learning? For instance, could you gain marketable skills through professional seminars and workshops or a training certificate?

Things to Consider:

- Specific characteristics of each program (i.e. graduate placement, faculty-student ratio)
- Cost of program and availability of financial aid
- Geographic area and surrounding community
- Living expenses
- Reputation of the program
- Faculty that specialize in your area of interest

Find the best program for YOU:

- Do your research: read research articles, use the Internet/college websites, talk to people and professors in your field, use annual reports such as Petersons and US News.
- Attend graduate school fairs.
- Visit schools.
- Talk with current or former students, alumni, and faculty (ask for their evaluation of strengths/weaknesses of the program).
- Do the academic strengths of the department fit your career goals?
- If possible, visit schools of interest—this will give you the best chance to get a feel for the program, the requirements and the faculty and students. If you cannot visit you should definitely try to talk with current students or professors for insider information.

Factors considered for Admission to Graduate School:

- Academic major and GPA
- Writing sample
- Test Scores (GRE, GMAT, etc)
- Personal Statement
- Leadership/Volunteer activities
- Work experience (post-college)
- Publications/Affiliations
- Racial/Ethnic background
- Internships (during college)
- Personal interview (if conducted)
- Quality of undergraduate education
- Honors and awards

Admissions Tests

Graduate School Admissions Tests:

- Graduate Record Exam (GRE)
- Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT)
- Law School Admission Test (LSAT)
- Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)

Graduate Record Exam (GRE):

General

- The GRE is a “general” graduate admissions test and is required for most programs.
- The General test will examine you on the areas of verbal, quantitative and analytical abilities in attempts to measure your potential success in graduate school.
- The GRE exam is a Computer-Adapted test where your answers influence the next questions you will answer.
- The GRE is offered at many testing facilities and, unlike the other exams, is offered most days throughout the year.
- Scores on the GRE General Test are valid for up to 5 years.

Subject

- The GRE Subject Test will examine your knowledge of a particular academic subject including: Biochemistry, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Literature in English, Mathematics, Physics and Psychology.
- These tests are administered on paper three times per year: April, October and November
- For more information and to register go to: www.gre.org.

Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT):

- GMAT is a standardized test used by most graduate management programs (Business Schools) to assess the qualifications of applicants.
- Scores are used to predict your academic performance during the first year.
- The first section of the GMAT is the analytical writing assessment which consists of two parts: analysis of an issue and analysis of an argument. Each section takes 30 minutes to complete.
- Next will be the quantitative section which examines problem solving and data sufficiency questions. You are given 75 minutes to answer 37 questions.
- The verbal section utilizes 41 questions to test reading comprehension, critical reasoning, and sentence correction. You are also given 75 minutes for this section.
- For more information and to register go to: www.mba.com.

Law School Admission Test (LSAT):

- All US law schools registered with the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) require applicants to take the LSAT examination prior to applying.
- The test measures reading and verbal reasoning skills.
- The LSAT is only offered four times per year so be sure to plan accordingly .
 - For 2007-2008: Sept 29, 2007; Dec 1, 2007; Feb 2, 2008
- For more information and to register go to: www.lsac.org. Also stop by the Seaver College Career Center and pick up the “Applying to Law School” packet.

Medical College Admission Test (MCAT):

- Almost all Medical Colleges require the MCAT examination as a way to compare applicants and to predict first year success in Medical School.
- The MCAT is a standardized, multiple choice test designed to assess problem solving, critical thinking, and writing skills in addition to the examinee's knowledge of science concepts and principles prerequisite to the study of medicine.
- Scores are given in verbal reasoning, physical sciences, writing, and biological sciences.
- MCAT scores are valid for approximately three years.
- For more information and to register go to: www.aamc.org.

Suggested* Timeline for Applying to Graduate School:

*If you plan to attend graduate school right after graduation, this process should start during spring of your Junior year.

Junior Year

MAY

- **Begin your online research**, familiarizing yourself with schools, grad school life, and the ins and outs of the application process.
 - The **Advanced Graduate School Search** is a good place to start identifying specific schools: <http://www.princetonreview.com/grad/research/advsearch/match.asp>
- **Take a practice GRE test**, ETS offers a free version:
 - <http://ntis01.ets.org/onix/powerprepTestTakers.htm>
- Your score will help you determine how much prep you'll need for the real deal.
- Sign up for a GRE course, or at the very least, start studying on your own with a study guide, such as Princeton Review's *Cracking the GRE* or ETS's *Practicing to Take the GRE*.

JUNE- JULY

- Continue your **GRE prep**.
- **Register for the GRE** General Test, if required for your schools.
- If you are not already sure, research and decide what your specific area of concentration will be within your field.

AUGUST

- **Take the GRE General Test**. If you are not happy with your scores, this gives you plenty of time to retake the test(s) by mid October.
- Begin your **statement of purpose** (also called personal statement or essay).
 - This will also help you define your grad school goals and allow you time to get feedback from your professors/advisor.
- **Research the schools** that are best suited to your academic and personal interests.
 - Request further information from these schools—this can usually be done through the schools website.
 - Create a 'Schools of Interest' spreadsheet to organize your research.

School	Program	Degree	Area	Professor(s)	Deadline	Materials Needed

- **Contact (former) mentors and professors**. They are great sources of career advice and can probably recommend some good programs--and maybe even help you make some connections.
 - It's also a smart way to refresh their memory of who you are and what you are interested in, which will come in handy when it's time to ask them for letters of recommendation.
- **Start talking to professionals in your prospective field** to learn more about what it's really like to do this type of work and what the long-term opportunities that are available.

Senior Year

SEPTEMBER

- **Register for the October GRE Subject Test** (if necessary).
 - The Subject Tests are still administered on paper and are only given three times a year: October, November, and April.
- Once you've isolated the most appealing schools, **pick a professor or two** from each program whose interests match up with yours and start to familiarize yourself with their work.
 - This should include reading some of their most recent articles.
 - Many students also attempt to establish contact with these professors of interest—they are the best resource to use in your search.
 - Establishing contact can help you to get a feel for the professor and the program and also to see whether they'll be accepting students for the coming year.
 - If you feel uncomfortable contacting a professor, try to contact a current graduate student—they are also great resources and have recently been in the same situation as you.
- **Choose** two or three professors (or 2 professors and one supervisor) to serve as your **recommenders**. Some schools have specific requirements so pay attention to their instructions!
 - First, send a friendly note or phone call telling them your plans and asking if they'd be willing to write you a recommendation.
 - If they agree to be a reference for you, many people suggest giving them a deadline two weeks earlier than you plan to have your application in—this helps to give leeway for a busy schedule.
 - See the section on Recommendation (page 7) for more information.
- Look into merit-based **grants and fellowships** as possible ways to help finance your education.
 - This can include a scholarship search.
 - Also, add any financial assistance application deadlines to your schedule.
- **Keep polishing your statement** of purpose.
 - Ask a Professor or Career Counselor to review your statement.
 - This is one of the most important aspects, so use your energy wisely.

OCTOBER

- **Finalize your list** of potential schools.
- Continue to **prepare for the GRE Subject Test** if you are taking one.
- **Take the GRE Subject Test**, if necessary. Arrange to have scores sent directly to the schools.
- It is best to complete your applications online--it's faster and easier.
 - If you are doing any applications on paper, be sure to get the hard copies now.
- **Request official transcripts**, paying careful attention to where they should go.
 - **To request a transcript stop by ONESTOP or go online to:**
<http://www.pepperdine.edu/registrar/transcripts/>
- Send your recommenders the appropriate forms:
 - The latest version of your personal statement, your resume, and stamped-and-addressed envelopes (carefully note where each should be sent)
- If you are visiting your prospective schools (a good idea), **set up an informational interview session with professors** and financial aid officers.

NOVEMBER

- **Refine your personal statement**, tailoring it to each school as necessary.
- **Tie up any other loose ends.**
 - Do you know where your recommendation letters are? Have you made sure that all your test scores have been sent to schools? Noted financial aid and scholarship deadlines?

Senior Year (Continued)

DECEMBER

- **Complete and submit all applications**, keep a copy of each part for your records.
- **Verify** that your recommendations have been sent.

JANUARY

- **Start focusing on financial aid**
 - Fill out the FAFSA online--to qualify for financial aid, you need to complete the FAFSA as soon after January 1 as possible. Look into private loans and any alternate sources of funding available.

FEBRUARY UNTIL...

- Try to relax while you wait it out.
 - This may be the most relaxing time you will have for the next several years, so take advantage of it while you can!

APRIL

- Use Princeton Review's online [Aid Comparison Calculator](http://www.princetonreview.com/grad/finance/acc/calc.asp) to compare aid packages that the schools give you.
 - <http://www.princetonreview.com/grad/finance/acc/calc.asp>
- Investigate **applying for alternative loans** if the financial aid package offered doesn't meet your needs.

Keep in Mind

While this isn't the only workable application schedule, it's a good place to start. The important thing is to draw up a schedule at the beginning of the application process, make sure you account for all foreseeable factors, and most importantly stick to it.

One final note: Almost every graduate school applicant will receive at least one rejection during the quest for a graduate degree. While that won't be fun, it's not quite the final word on the matter. Contact the specific department and politely express your regret at not being admitted. Don't expect them to be able to give you a lot of their time, but do take advantage of the opportunity for some useful research. Ask them if they can give you some suggestions on how you might strengthen your candidacy in the future, or if they can highlight the weaknesses in your application that resulted in your rejection.

Components of the Application

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

- This section allows you the chance to “speak” to the professor you are interested in working with—use this part of the application to fully explain who you are and what your interests are in terms of research and career goals.
- Many people recommend writing this as if you were writing to the professor of interest.
- Be sure to follow page restrictions and answer the questions (if any) requested of you.
- A good format to follow:
 - Discuss the program you are applying to, personal and academic background, research and teaching experience, research and professional interests, ways in which this program will fit those needs and which professor(s) you wish to work with and how their research contributes to this.
- Be sure to have your advisor or professor read over your statement—the more eyes the better.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION:

- Choose your references carefully—your letters serve as a strong support of who you are as a student and what you can potentially offer to a graduate program or department
- Start by re-establishing contact with professors who know you well but that you may not have been in contact with recently.
- Ask each professor whether they will be able to write you a “strong” letter of reference. Almost any professor can create a standard form to write a recommendation but this will become obvious to the admissions committee—you want to strive to have a personal and well-written recommendation.
- Once you have selected your recommenders, be sure to give them enough time.
 - At least 6 weeks is appropriate—many advisors recommend giving the professor a deadline 2 weeks earlier than necessary to ensure the deadline is met.
- Create a Reference Packet:
 - Include: your statement of purpose, CV/resume, reference forms for each school or information on submitting the recommendation online, a list of schools you are applying to and professors/research focus at each school, deadlines, and a stamped (and addressed) envelope for each letter.
 - It is also helpful to write a letter to the recommender reminding them of how long they have known you, in what capacity, and any areas you would like them to emphasize in their letter.

CV:

- The CV is used to show and summarize academic achievements including your degree(s)/school(s), thesis/projects, teaching and research experience and sometimes coursework as well.
- Unlike the resume, the CV does not have a page limit and should showcase **all** of your academic experiences.

IMPORTANT TIPS:

- Apply early to avoid last minute mistakes/stress.
- Apply to a few schools; do not limit yourself to one school but also keep in mind the cost of applying to each school (application fees, GRE score reports, etc.).
- Make sure you meet all the undergraduate prerequisites for the program.
- Keep focused on your long and short term goals.
- The faculty is concerned about accepting students who will fit into their graduate environment and will progress and complete the degree at a reasonable rate.

Online Resources

Use the following sites to help gain more information on applications, timelines, testing, admission requirements, financial aid, research, rankings and other helpful information.

Council of Graduate Schools: www.cgsnet.org

Advice: <http://www.phd-survey.org/advice/advice.htm>

Princeton Review: www.review.com/index.cfm

Kaplan Online: www.kaplan.com

Graduate Schools: www.gradschools.com

Get Recruited: www.get-recruited.com

Financial Aid: www.finaid.org

Peterson's Education Center: www.petersons.com

What Every New Grad Student Should Know: www.csi.indiana.edu/docproject/grad.stuff.html

U.S. News and World Report: www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/beyond/bchome.htm

Graduate School Guide Publications: www.graduateguide.com

National Association of Colleges and Employers: www.jobweb.org/catapult/gguides.htm

Questions?!

**Need someone to help you write your CV/Resume?
Review your personal statement?**

Make an appointment with a Career Counselor:

SHEILA BENKO
sheila.benko@pepperdine.edu
310.506.4695

KATRINA DAVY
katrina.davy@pepperdine.edu
310.506.6107

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