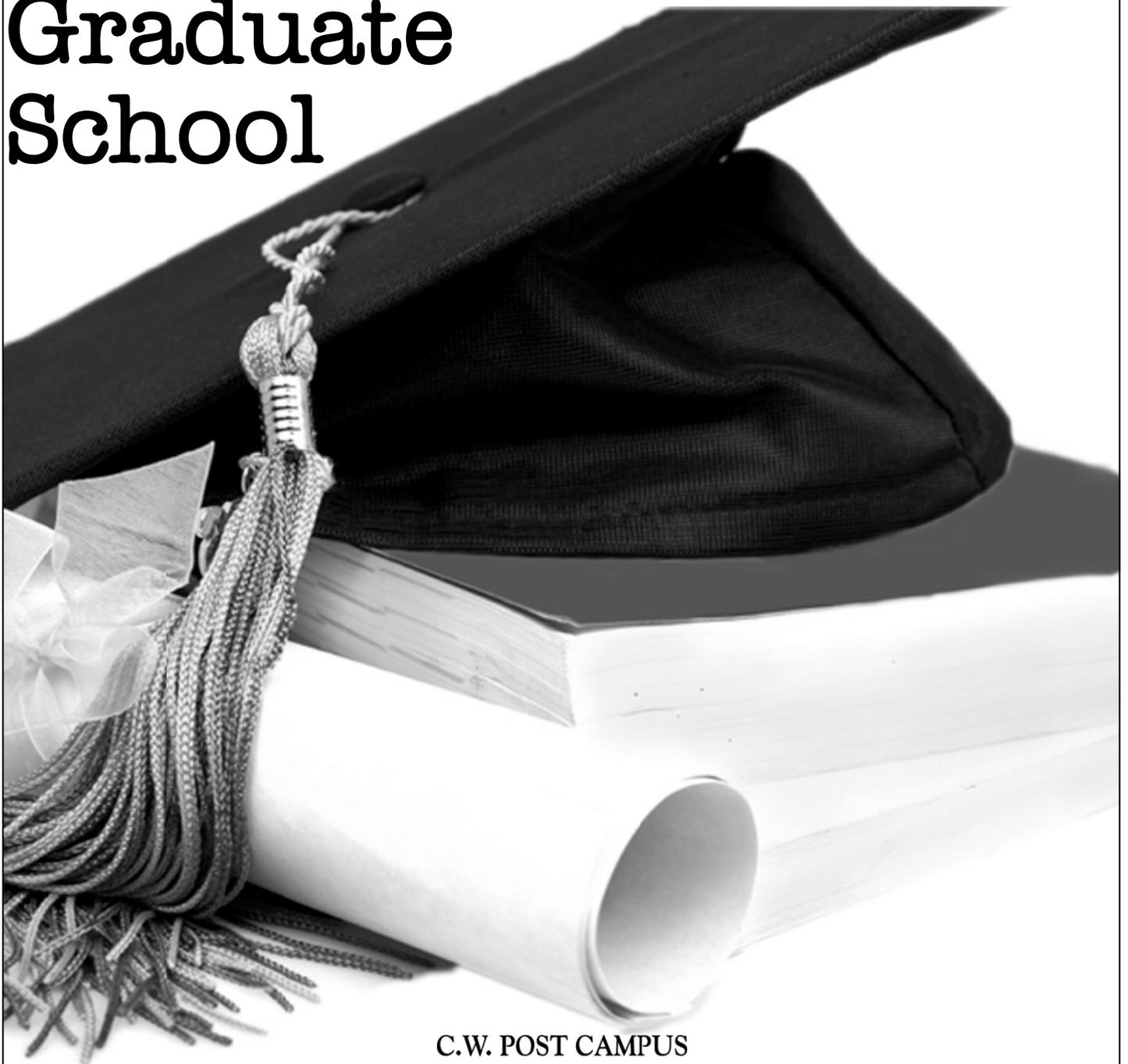


A Guide to Applying to Graduate School



C.W. POST CAMPUS



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Is Graduate School Right For You?

Before you begin applying to graduate school, you should be sure that it is the right decision for you. Graduate school can be a great place to expand your network and earn an advanced degree, both of which can help you tremendously in your career. However, graduate school takes a great deal of time, effort and financial commitment. Therefore, you should be as certain as possible that it is the right decision for you.

You must seriously consider what degree you wish to pursue before applying to schools. There is no “undecided major” in graduate school. The process of decision-making will involve self-assessment and research. Career Services in Kumble Hall can help you by providing assessment instruments for you to take and a counselor to speak with to coach you through the decision-making process. You might also want to interview people who work in the field or fields that you are considering. Ask them how they got started, what they like or dislike about their job, where they see this field going, and what advice they would give to someone just starting out.

Admissions counselors are valuable sources of information, as are alumni and professors from any schools you are considering. Ask around, you might not even realize how many people are in your network!

Applying

It is important to start gathering information about schools, entrance exams and applications as early as possible. The process should begin a year and a half prior to the desired date of entrance, sometimes even earlier. Application deadlines range from one year ahead to late spring or summer (some have rolling admissions.) Most deadlines for entry in the fall are between January and March.

Checklist for Graduate Applications

Use this checklist in your graduate school planning:

- () Research areas of interest, programs and requirements. Talk to professors and advisors
- () Learn about graduate admissions, tests, dates and requirements
- () Attend open houses and graduate/professional school presentations
- () Investigate national scholarships, fellowships and financial aid sources
- () Decide which schools you wish to apply to and gather applications
- () Register and sit for required admissions test
- () Complete and submit applications and essays and obtain letters of recommendation, transcripts and your immunization records
- () Follow up with schools to make sure your application file is complete prior to deadlines
- () Consider acceptances, visit schools, speak with current students and alumni
- () Decide which school you will attend and inform all others of your decision

Entrance Exams

TEST	CONTENT
Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) www.aamc.org/stuapps/admiss/mcat/pubs.htm	Scientific knowledge, critical reasoning, writing skills
Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) www.lsat.org	Logical reasoning, analytical reasoning, reading comprehension
Graduate Record Examination (GRE) www.gre.org	Verbal skills, reading comprehension, math, problem solving, analytical skills
Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) www.gmat.org	Math skills, grammar, reading comprehension, problem solving, analytical skills
Dental Admission Test (DAT) www.ada.org	Scientific knowledge, perceptual ability, reading comprehension, quantitative skills

Tips for Doing Well on Entrance Exams

1. Learn how the exam is structured and formatted
2. Decide if a commercial exam review program (like Kaplan or The Princeton Review are necessary)
3. Be prepared (have enough sharpened pencils)
4. Get a good night's sleep the night before
5. Eat breakfast and bring an energy snack with you
6. Do not cram information
7. Bring a book or magazine in case you must wait
8. Practice timing yourself beforehand
9. Don't stress (Remember, if a question seems hard to you, it is probably hard for everyone else!)
10. Arrive 30 minutes early to make sure you have time to complete all check-in procedures including paying your fee (don't forget your fee!)
11. Bring a valid photo ID with your signature



The Personal Statement

What is a personal statement?

A personal statement should be a creative sample of your writing abilities. It should link your past education and experiences to your future goals and give the reader a sense of who you are and why you have chosen a particular field of study. In addition, a personal statement should make you stand out as a unique individual and show how you can add to the school's program. The application will usually have instructions on how to answer or a question that they would like you to answer.

How to get started:

Ask yourself the following questions and write down your answers.

- What is special, unique, distinctive or impressive about you?
- What events, accomplishments, achievements or challenges have helped to influence your goals?
- When and how did you first get interested in this field?
- Why are you well suited for this field?
- How have you learned about this field? (classes, readings, seminars, work or volunteer experience, conversations with people in the field.)
- What are your career goals?
- What are you the most proud of?
- Have you overcome any unusual obstacles? (economic, physical, etc)
- What personal characteristics do you have?
- What skills do you possess?
- What would compel the admissions committee to be interested in you?

After you have answered these questions, it is time to organize and structure your thoughts. You first want to develop a theme for your statement. What is it that you want the reader to come away knowing about you? Tailor what is in your statement around the answer to that question.

Concentrate on your opening paragraph. You want to "hook" the reader into your story from the very beginning and grab his or her attention. This is where you are going to introduce yourself to the reader and set the framework for the rest of the paper.

Go through the answers to the above questions and pick out the facts that are relevant. You might also want to ask family and friends what would make them accept you into their school if they were on the acceptance board. They might also remind you of accomplishments that you have forgotten.

Do not include references to high school or earlier unless they are extremely important or relevant. You do not want to appear as if you do not have anything recent to talk about.

Stay away from controversial subjects. You do not know the biases of your readers. Statements regarding politics or religion do not belong in your personal statement, unless they are related to your field. For example, if you are going for a political science degree, it is appropriate to mention the extensive work that you did for a particular candidate prior to the last election.

Additional Tips for Your Personal Statement:

- NEVER lie in your personal statement!
- Do not use cliches
- Stick to the subject and follow the guidelines given
- Use imagery
- Make your case clearly
- Let the admissions office get to know you
- Focus on a single experience or a set of experiences, don't list all of your activities and accomplishments
- Make it personal
- Don't apologize for past experiences (low grades, for example)
- Be yourself, write about what you know
- Show your interest in the field and use examples
- Use a simple and easy to follow writing style
- Be confident and show motivation and enthusiasm
- Sell yourself – be bold!
- Remember your theme and stick to the point of your essay



The Graduate Admissions Interview

Purpose of the Interview:

- To uncover abilities not discovered on an application
- To answer your questions
- To see if your personality is a good match for the field
- To determine if you have the motivation required to succeed in the field (especially true for medical school interviews!)

Types of Interviews:

- Closed – the interviewer has not seen the application of the candidate beforehand
- Semi-Open – the interviewer only sees the personal statement of the applicant
- Open – the interviewer has the application there with him or her during the interview
- Group – usually consisting of three interviewers and three candidates

Preparing for the Interview:

- Talk to current students to find out what their interviews were like
- Rehearse (try a mock interview)
- Be well prepared, review the information that you put on your application and in your personal statement
- Prepare questions to ask the interviewer

Tips for the Interview:

- Be pleasant to the office staff
- Give examples or tell brief stories wherever appropriate (past performance = future performance)
- Dress appropriately
 - Pay attention to your body language: give a strong handshake at the beginning and end of the interview; maintain eye contact; smile when appropriate
- Be honest! If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, never lie!
- Be aware that you may be asked "trick questions" which are designed to see how well you think on your feet
- Ask for a business card at the end of the interview – make sure you have the correct names, titles, and addresses of the person or people interviewing you
- Write a thank-you note immediately after the interview
- Try to relax and be confident!

Letters of Recommendation

- Choose someone who truly knows you and who can give examples of your achievements
- Do not choose someone solely based on their title or stature
- Try to choose people who have known you in an educational or employment setting
- The goal of a letter of recommendation is to give new information about the candidate that could only be obtained through the writer of the letter
- Check spelling and grammar
- The writer should state how they know you and for how long and should talk about your character and past performance
- Share information with the writer beforehand about your experiences and the school's requirements so that he or she has a good idea of what should be included

International Students

Obtaining a Student VISA:

There are three types of Student Visas:

1. F-1 Status: granted to non-immigrant aliens who will pursue full-time studies at academic or language institutions
 2. J-1 Status: granted to an exchange visitor
 3. M-1 Status: granted to those who are pursuing studies at a vocational or a recognized non-academic institutions
- It is important to find out if your chosen school is eligible to accept and register F-1 students
 - Most colleges/universities require international students to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), scores range from 200-667
 - To register for TOEFL you need to fill out the form in the Bulletin of Information, available free of charge from:
TOEFL/TSE Publications
PO Box 6154
Princeton, NJ 08541-6143
USA
 - Check to see that you have a valid passport
 - All J-1 and F-1 students attending school in the United States are required to obtain an insurance policy (in many schools it is mandatory to enroll in their school insurance plans)

Tuition/Financial Aid/Loans

Students should research loan/financial aid/scholarship information approximately 18 months before the start of school. Before doing so, a budget should be prepared which outlines what you can realistically pay yourself, through employment or savings, and what you can realistically borrow. Try to project a post-graduate budget, to approximate how much income you will have after graduation. Keep in mind, though, that this figure is only a hypothetical at this point. When you have all of these figures in front of you, Research many schools, the most expensive school may not be the right one for you.

Loans:

In order to establish eligibility for government subsidized loans, each student must complete a federal financial aid application. An example of a government loan is the Stafford loan, which allows graduate students to borrow up to \$18,500 a year. Many different institutions offer loans to students, including colleges and universities, banks and state agencies. In addition, organizations sometimes provide loans to students in exchange for a commitment to work for that organization for a specified length of time. If the student does this, the loan can be reduced or considered paid. If the student does not fulfill the contract, the loan must be repaid with interest.

Loans must begin to be paid six months after graduation. Some lenders will reduce interest rates if you make the first 48 payments on time or if you set up electronic withdrawals from your bank account.

Make sure that any loan you take is a subsidized loan, meaning interest free while a student is in school.

As per the 1997 Taxpayer Relief Act, graduates in their first year of repayment can deduct \$1,000 in interest payments on student loans from their federal taxes as long as their income is under \$40,000 per year. The deduction ends five years after graduation.

Keep in mind that the longer the term of the loan, the less your monthly payments will be, but the more you will have to pay in the end. Students should look for scholarships and grants before borrowing, which should be seen as a last resort.

Scholarships:

Scholarship information can be found in the reference section of most public libraries, as well as college and university libraries. In addition, information can be found on the Internet. Never pay a company to do this research for you!

Contact civic, fraternal, religious, government, and business organizations in your community. They may offer scholarships or might be interested in creating one.

Assistantships:

Many colleges and universities have assistantship programs where you may work for the university and, in exchange, receive a tuition stipend. Usually students are required to work 15-20 per week and are prohibited from working at any other job at the same time. You must apply to the individual institution to receive information about these positions.