

Now What...?

The How to Get Into Graduate School Workshop

Making the decision to go to graduate school is one that requires a great deal of planning and organization.

This presentation was designed to provide information, advice, and resources to help you along this process. We hope that you find this information helpful.

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Why Graduate School? (1 of 2)

Congratulate yourself for completing a bachelors degree and see where a graduate/professional degree can take you!

- **Specialization / Training**
 - To focus your area of interest - not just Civil Engineering, but Structural Engineering; not just History, but Ancient Civilizations
 - For licensing or certification – required by many clinical professions
 - To teach - to pursue a career as a university level professor requires a PhD; other teaching professions prefer or may require a Master's
- **Diversification**
 - How you learned and how you were taught while an undergraduate, will be will be different if you choose to go to another university for your graduate education.
 - A graduate education is more “self-directed”

Why Graduate School? (2 of 2)

- Personal Interest / Personal Fulfillment
 - Passion for the field or want to contribute to the field
 - To attain recognition
- Research
 - To expand your knowledge of a specific area that interests you
 - To explore research opportunities that were not available to you during your undergraduate career
- Employment and Salary Opportunities
 - Diversify what you know, more job opportunities, change your employment situation
 - Advance within your organization: Promotion and salary increases
 - Higher Degree = Higher Salary
 - The U.S. Census reports data annually about income, unemployment, and educational attainment

Selecting Your Graduate Program

What to look for:

- Programs Offered
- Support
- Size and Location
- Competitiveness
- Accreditation and Credentials

For more information:

Choosing a Graduate School

[Council of Graduate Schools](#) (pdf)

[Princeton Review](#) (website)

[PhDs.org](#) (website)

[GradSchools.com](#) (website)

Timetables for Applying to Graduate School

[Council of Graduate Schools](#) (pdf)

[Princeton Review](#) (website)

[UCF Career Services](#) (website)

Programs Offered

- Do they have what you want?
- Research the program you are interested in pursuing for free by going to your library, checking on the web (websites or newsgroups) or going to a local bookstore
- Talk to faculty - both at your undergraduate university and at a university you may be interested in going to... they are an excellent source for information!

Support

- Does the school you're interested in provide the necessary library resources for your area of interest?
- Are there faculty in the department that share your interest?
- Does the graduate program provide internship or post-graduate opportunities?
- Does the graduate program have job-placement information?

Size and Location

- Size and Location
- Consider where you want to live for the next two to five years?
 - Type of local and academic community: metropolitan or rural?
 - Weather (this is Florida, by the way...)
- Visit the school if you can
- Costs
 - Cost of living, aside from tuition and books
 - How will you pay for it?
 - Fellowships and Scholarships
 - Financial Aid
 - Personal Funds

Competitiveness

- There are those schools that will be long shot and then those that will be a sure thing. Don't limit yourself, if you can... go for both!
- The range of applicants varies from year to year, so don't discredit your qualifications to a school that you think is too competitive
- On the same note, don't "place all your eggs in one basket"... just because you have a GRE of 1600 doesn't mean you're guaranteed a spot in the only school you send your application.

Accreditation and Credentials

- Important in some professions, crucial in others (medicine and law, for example)
- Do your research! It may not be common knowledge:
 - Institutional Accreditation: 6 regional associations that accredit universities and colleges as a whole
 - Programmatic Accreditation: 35 specialized agencies that accredit programs in their specialties
- Credentials
 - Are they accredited? Do they have to be? Is that important?
 - Do you need a degree from an accredited graduate program to pursue your goals? Will you?
- What type of institution are you interested in attending?
 - Private? Public? Big 10?
 - Historically Black College/University?
 - International?

What Can I Do Now? (1 of 3)

If you are currently enrolled or if you've been out of school for a while, there are definitely things you can do now to strengthen your credentials for graduate school...

- Study
- Course Selection
- Research
- Involvement: Clubs and Organizations
- Volunteer/Internship/Work Experience

What Can I Do Now? (1 of 4)

Study: Maintain a good GPA for admission and funding opportunities

- How you are doing in your classes now (freshmen and sophomores) effects your GPA later.
 - A good GPA will give you a better chance for admission
 - A good GPA will make you more competitive for awards and funding
- Your study habits now will help you with preparing for the GRE (or other standardized tests) later.
 - Are you a visual learner? an auditory learner? Do you study best in a group?
 - Here are a couple online "test" to identify your learning style:
 - [What's Your Learning Style?](#)
 - [Index of Learning Styles](#)

What Can I Do Now? (2 of 4)

Coursework

- In preparing for graduate school, are there prerequisites that you can (or should) be taking now?
- Is there an independent study that you can work on to enhance your knowledge of your chosen field?
- If you are not currently a student, are there preparatory or pre-requisite courses that you can enroll into at a local college/university?

What Can I Do Now? (3 of 4)

Research

- Working as a Research Assistant or participating in a study will provide you the experience and exposure to the research process.
- Additionally, you may be involved in research that interests you, thus solidifying your graduate area of interest.

Involvement: Clubs and Organizations

- Involvement in Clubs, Organizations, Interest Groups, and Honor's Societies show your personal involvement and activity outside of the classroom
- Roles within these clubs/organizations show your ability for leadership and organization. Were you an officer?
- This involvement can foster your academic interest and provide networking opportunities

What Can I Do Now? (4 of 4)

Volunteer / Internship / Work Experience

- Provides hands-on experience and exposure to work in your field of interest
- These opportunities may also evolve into employment and will provide networking opportunities

Extracurricular activities while maintaining a good GPA show that you have the discipline to balance extracurricular and academic activities.

All of your involvement inside and outside of the classroom will expose you to individuals (faculty, supervisors, etc.) who could become a great source for a letter of recommendation

Letters of Recommendation (1 of 2)

Whom to Ask for Letters

- Faculty, employer, supervisor, research supervisor, independent study faculty - anyone who can attest to your ability as a future graduate student or researcher.
- Avoid asking the professor of the course where you had 300+ classmates - do they really know you?
- Making the Request: Ask those that you know will write a good letter for you.
- Give them plenty of information (see next page)
- Give them plenty of time - these letters need to be written according to your deadlines, not theirs
- Waive your right to review the letter. *Depending on who you speak to about this, you will get varying opinions on whether or not to do this.*
 - It is my recommendation that you waive this right. It shows you trust the recommendation will be written in your best interest and there is no need for you to review it in advance of it being sent.

Letters of Recommendation (2 of 2)

[Recommendation Packet](#) (click for more information!)

Give your letters writers everything they need to write the best possible letter about you. You should consider providing them with:

- Personal Statement
- Resume/Vita
- Transcripts/Audit/Program of Study
- Deadlines
- Any of the university's required forms
- Mailing Addresses, Websites, E-Mail Addresses
(where what needs to go and by when...)
 - If it's mailed, provide them with anything that they need to make this happen (ex: stamped and addressed envelopes)
- Anything else?
 - Include any additional information that you think will help them write this letter for you, such as assignments from a class you had with them, copies or examples of products you've created or research you have completed, etc...

Resume and Vita

Resume vs. Vita: What's the difference?

- Resumes are usually brief (1-2 pages) highlighting education, experience, and skills
- A Vita (which is Latin for *life*) provides a greater range of information, in much more detail. There is no specific limit to length
- Presentation and Organization
 - Take advantage of the services provided by your university
 - [UCF's Career Resource Center](#)
 - [UCF's University Writing Center](#)
 - It should be neat and legible - don't get passed over for a messy resume, and definitely make sure your spelling is correct!
 - Tailor the document to your audience
 - If you're applying to a research-based program, you'll want to highlight this experience
 - If you're applying to a program that's looking for experience, provide them with a document that gives them this information.

Standardized Testing

Four Types Tests Required for Admission to Graduate-Level Programs...

- Most graduate programs require that you take one of the following standardized test to gain admission.
- Evaluate your comprehension of what you have learned and your preparation for a graduate education.
 - Graduate Records Exam (GRE)
 - Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT)
 - Law School Admission Test (LSAT)
 - Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)

GRE

- Graduate Records Exam (GRE) – for general admission
- Six sections:
 - Two Verbal (multiple choice)
 - Two Quantitative (multiple choice)
 - One Written Analytical
 - One Experimental Section (verbal, quant, or written)
- Scoring:
 - Verbal & Quantitative (130-170 scale)
 - Written Analytic (0-6 scale, .5 intervals)
- The experimental section is un-scored and is included to test questions for future exams.
- Subject Test
 - Available and possibly required for more specialized programs

GMAT

- Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT)
- Measures verbal, mathematical, and analytic writing skills.
- Three tested sections:
 - Analytic Writing Assessment
 - Quantitative: Problem Solving, Data Sufficiency
 - Verbal: Sentence Correction, Critical Reasoning, Reading Comprehension
- Scoring:
 - Verbal and Quantitative (200-800 scale)
 - Analytic (0-6 scale, .5 intervals)

LSAT

- Law School Admission Test (LSAT)
- Assesses reading comprehension, logical reasoning, and verbal reasoning.
- Six sections:
 - Two Logical Reasoning section (LR)
 - One Reading Comprehension section (RC)
 - One Analytical Reasoning section (LG)
 - One Writing Sample
 - One Experimental Section (LR, RC, or LG)
- The overall score (normalized scale of 120-180)
- The experimental section is un-scored and is included to test questions for future exams.

MCAT

- Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)
- Assesses problem solving, critical thinking, written analysis, writing skills, and knowledge of science concepts and principles
- Four tested sections:
 - Physical Sciences (PS – multiple choice)
 - Verbal Reasoning (VR – multiple choice)
 - Biological Sciences (BS – multiple choice)
 - Writing Sample (WS – 2 short essays)
- Scores range from 3-45 for multiple choice and the essay is rated on an alphabetical scale from “J” (lowest) to “T” (highest).

The MCAT will change with the 2015 testing season...

Test Taking and Strategies

How do YOU study best?

- Study for this just like you would any other test - but keep in mind that this is a comprehensive type of test that has specific focuses.
- Determine the areas that you need to concentrate most on and focus your study efforts accordingly.
- Consider the Financial AND Time Commitment of a fee-service that prepares you to take a test.
 - Registration fees and study materials can be costly
 - Time needed to complete the study course (most are several weeks)
- Registration and Test Locations
 - How soon before your application deadline should you register for the test?
- When will your scores actually arrive at the university?
- Know where you're going and what your test-taking environment will be like - the less stress you have surrounding taking the test, the better...

Study Materials

- Software / Books / Courses / Workshops
 - Do your research before you lay down any additional money
 - Courses and Workshops: Financial and time commitments
 - How much does it cost? (some study programs cost as much as \$3000.00)
 - How long will you need to take the course - 3 weeks or 3 months?
 - Outcome measures
 - Did those who completed the course actually improve? Or would they have improved their score anyway by simply re-taking the test?
- Free Materials
 - [SARC](#) (Student Academic Resource Center) offers free practice tests to UCF students.
 - [OPPA](#) (Office of Pre-Professional Advising) offers practice MCAT tests to pre-professional students.
 - Various websites provide free information and practice tests - you may be able to find everything you need to study on the web.
 - Check out your Library or Bookstore
 - Finally, Your Department or Your College's Graduate Office will have information about preparing for these exams.

Personal Statement (1 of 5)

Writing Your Way into Graduate School: The Personal Statement

- Personal Statement Writing
 - If it isn't hard, you're doing it wrong...
 - This is not a document that you'll "bang out" overnight, write it, set it aside, read it, revise it, and revise it again...
- Limited Length
 - You don't want to write a novel of your personal history, focus on the intent of what you're writing, and why...
- Broad Writing Prompts
 - Prompts are the questions that you need to answer as a part of your application
 - Identify the questions being asked and how you want to respond to them
 - Some graduate programs simply ask for a "personal statement", a "statement of intent", or a "statement of research" without specific questions
- Your Task: Setting yourself apart
 - What makes you different from everyone else?
 - What makes you the best person to select for their program?

Personal Statement (2 of 5)

First priority, consider the prompt

- If you were provided with specific questions, read them multiple times.
 - Make sure you understand what's being asked and how you should answer it
 - Note what you are required to address, versus what you may address
 - Don't provide a long essay that has no guidance or direction, make sure you've addressed what the graduate program is asking
- If you were asked for an open-ended essay, design a strategy that emphasizes your strengths and highlights what sets you apart from others.
 - When did you become interested in your chosen field?
 - What specific experiences furthered your interest in this graduate program?
 - What are the most compelling reasons for School X to be interested in you?
 - What personal characteristics, skills, etc. will enhance your prospects for success

Personal Statement (3 of 5)

Personality, a sense of uniqueness

- The personal statement can be the most important part of the application
 - The application asks all the routine questions
 - The Letters of Reference provide someone else's perspective of you
 - Your Transcripts and Scores are the numbers the university needs
 - The Personal Statement is **YOUR** document...
- Give personal, relevant information
- Don't ignore your weaknesses...explain them away
 - Have you faced any unusual hardships?
 - Are there any snags in your record that you should explain away?
- Describe plans, goals, and dreams...concretely
 - DO NOT begin with: "I want to be a doctor because I want to help people" or some similar statement. This has been written (many times) before...
 - Give a reason: What or who inspired you? When was the turning point of discovery for you?

Personal Statement (4 of 5)

Specificity: Details, Details, Details

- Use specific examples
 - Avoid broad statements that could apply to anyone
- Elaborate on items glossed over in application
 - Concretely describe experiences that strengthened your interest in your given field
- Refer to relevant experience
 - Avoid information that does not fit into the scheme of what's being asked
- **DO NOT** simply restate material already provided as a part of your application.
 - The application will provide your test scores and GPA
 - Your transcripts provide your grades
 - Your resume provides your educational history
 - What else can you talk about?

Personal Statement (5 of 5)

A second opinion

- You have written it, now it needs to be read
 - by readers who know you (family, friends, etc), to determine if the writing reads like something you would say.
 - by readers who don't know you (faculty, consultants, etc) to determine if the writing is correct, you've answered the questions, or you provided information that is relevant and important.
- UCF's [University Writing Center](#) consultants can assist with writing and reviewing.
 - Brainstorming or overcoming writer's block
 - Planning and organizing the personal statement
 - Help with finding your unique "hook"
 - Ensuring that the question(s) has been answered
 - Provide helpful texts and writing samples
- *Be sure to go to the University Writing Center's website for a number of helpful handouts that will assist you in writing your personal statement.*

The Application Process

When you are ready to start applying, be certain to:

1. Note Deadlines
2. Stay Organized
3. Contact the program
 - Add a voice to your file, or if possible visit (a face to the name...)
 - Every question you have (or that you have asked your self while reading this presentation) is a question you should be asking the program
 - Be courteous to the person who answers the phone - you will probably have the most one-on-one contact with them, and your interactions with them may influence how you are perceived within the department
4. Things to do before mailing or submitting your application:
 - Make sure everything that needs to be there, is there
 - Is everything spelled correctly?
 - Are there some things that are submitted separately? Do you know where to send them?

The Application Process

When you are ready to start applying, be certain to:

5. Have your letters of recommendation been submitted?
 - About a week before they are due to the institution, a good way to follow-up is to ask the letter-writer if they are in need of any additional information to complete your letter.
 - Asking this provides them with the opportunity to let you know if it has already been completed (or to remind them that it needs to be done...).
6. Do you know how to follow up with the graduate office to ensure that everything has been received?

Admissions Decisions

Has There Been a Decision on Your Application?

- Don't know? Call and ask when the program is expecting a decision to be made.
- Admission Offers:
 - Multiple Offers – Compare admission packages and use their competing offers to your advantage
 - Acceptances – If you accept an offer, treat it like a contractual agreement. Understand what you are agreeing to (tuition and living costs, non-academic requirements/commitments, award offers, employment offers, etc).
 - Most institutions request that you accept or decline their offer by April 15th...
- If you are admitted, make sure you **READ** the relevant sections of the university's graduate catalog and the program's manual
- Rejections:
 - Unless you have solid, documented evidence of something that was evaluated incorrectly, you should not challenge a rejection.
 - You can (and probably should) find out what you could have done to provide a stronger portfolio so that your next application may be better prepared

Paying for it All

Types of financial support

- Fellowships
- Assistantships
- Tuition Waivers
- Student Loans

Fellowships

- Fellowships are similar to scholarships. These awards are usually based on academic criteria intended to support your graduate education.
- Check with your graduate program to find out about university, college, and program awards.
- Awards can also come from the government, and local and community agencies.
- For more information about Fellowships Opportunities, make an appointment with your College Graduate Coordinator, or a UCF Graduate Fellowship and Financial Services officer.

To research other types of fellowships:

- [Office of Prestigious Awards](#) (website)
- [UCF Graduate College Fellowship Information](#) (website)

Assistantships

Working for and with your program

- Often when a program is evaluating an applicant for admission to their academic program, they are also evaluating the applicant for potential employment as a student researcher or teacher.
- Graduate Teaching (GTA)
 - Teaching lab sections or providing assistance with grading or lecturing
 - Independently teaching a course under the direction of a faculty supervisor (usually requires additional training prior to your standing in front of a classroom)
- Graduate Research (GRA)
 - Assist with a faculty project or research
- Funding for assistantships may come from various sources from individual faculty (usually with grant funding) or from the program, department or university.

Tuition Waivers

What you don't have to pay for...

- Who gets waivers?
 - Waivers usually accompany employment (assistantship) or a fellowship.
 - The amount of the waiver may depend on the Department, College, or University's budget, the hours of your employment, the number of classes you are enrolled into, the level of your assistantship, and other factors
- What might a waiver cover?
 - Matriculation (Tuition or Class fees)
 - Non-Resident (Out-of-State fees)
 - "Other" fees (ex: Athletic Fee, Student Activity Fee, Health Fee)
- If you are offered a tuition waiver find out the actual dollar amount that you'll be receiving (not a percent (%))

Successfully Competing for \$\$

- Check and university Fellowship Databases.
- Know the deadlines
- Financial and admission deadlines may not (and probably won't) be the same
- Organization is key
- Know the Rules/Guidelines

- Have you provided everything requested in the application?
- Do you need to ask for information, application items from other?
- Are you pursuing every available opportunity?

Summary

- Choose the program that is right for you
- Prepare for graduate school during your undergraduate career
- Present organized and complete information
- Research funding opportunities
- Take advantage of resources and services

Please visit the
University of Central Florida's
Online Graduate Catalog
for information
about our graduate programs.

GOOD LUCK!

I hope that the information we have provided here has been helpful. Remember that every question that you had while looking through this presentation is an excellent question for you to ask of your new or potential program.

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