Graduate Application Timeline

Use this timeline as a template while you navigate graduate school applications

General Tips:
• Plan ahead, it's a 1.5 to 2 year process to explore programs and apply
• It's okay to take longer/shorter to research; you know what type of pressure or time management limits you have

Fall & Spring of Year 1
• Research programs, and talk to faculty, mentors, and a career advisor about your goals and interests
• Create list of programs to apply to, find out about application parts, and record deadlines
• Develop your own list of tasks/timeline for the application process
• Write a rough draft of a general personal statement and your resume
• Research test prep programs and resources, and begin to study
• Arrange visits, Skype or phone meetings with students and faculty at programs you want to apply to
• Research assistantships, fellowships, and other school and program specific funding and record deadlines
• Start to identify recommenders

Summer between Year 1 & 2
• Meet with faculty members and writing center to revise
• Draft tailored personal statements according to each program’s instructions
• Meet with faculty and career center to revise and tailor resumes
• Take the admissions tests (International students may need to submit TOEFL scores)
• Visit institutions of interest

Fall of Year 2
• Order your transcripts from all post-secondary schools you have attended
• Retake tests (if needed)
• Request letters of recommendation, provide all forms/info at least 2-3 months ahead of deadline
• Complete and submit applications (some schools will ask them to be sent to the program & school so watch the fine print)
• Apply for assistantships, fellowships, and scholarships according to deadlines
• Obtain appropriate interview attire and do practice interviews for the program or for assistantships
• Develop Plan B for if you do not get into graduate school on your first try
• Submit all application materials earlier than their deadlines

Spring of Year 2
• Visit campus and/or interview if required
• Accept offers or withdraw
• Submit FAFSA if eligible
• Write thank you’s to those who helped you throughout the process
• Research outside scholarships and funding

Post-grad summer
• Make arrangements for orientation programs, housing, healthcare, transportation
• If you don’t have one yet, continue networking and looking for assistantships or part-time jobs
grant, and then to do a certain kind of job to keep the grant from turning into a loan.

Federal Work-Study (FWS) Program—The Federal Work-Study Program provides part-time jobs for undergraduate and graduate students without financial need. This program allows you to earn money to help pay education expenses. The program encourages community service work and work related to your course of study.

Federal Pell Grant—A Federal Pell Grant, unlike a loan, does not have to be repaid. You may be eligible to receive a Federal Pell Grant if you are enrolled in a postbaccalaureate teacher certification program. Amounts change yearly.

How do I apply for aid?
To apply for federal student aid, you first need to complete the FAFSA™. Many states and colleges use your FAFSA data to determine your eligibility for state and school aid, and some private financial aid providers may use your FAFSA information to determine whether you qualify for their aid.

Don't Pay Money to Complete the FAFSA!
The FAFSA is free. Apply online at fafsa.ed.gov. Do not pay anyone to complete your application.

What other types of financial aid can I receive?
Aid From Other Federal Agencies
To find out about funding from agencies other than ED, visit StudentAid.gov/types.

State Aid
Many states offer assistance for graduate or professional school. Find state grant agency contact information at www.ed.gov/grants.

School Aid
Statistics show that schools may provide nearly as much student aid as the federal government does. To find out what aid your school offers, contact the financial aid office as well as a faculty member in your area of study.

Where else should I look for funding?
Check out the following sources for additional funding:
- The Internet (there is a free scholarship search from the U.S. Department of Labor at www.careerinfonet.org/scholarshipsearch)
- The reference section of your school or public library
- Foundations, organizations (e.g., religious, community, professional, ethnicity-based), local businesses, and civic groups
- Your employer
- Your state vocational rehabilitation agency, if appropriate (a list of state agencies is at www.ed.gov/sv and at www.disability.gov)

Key points to consider when taking out a student loan
- Finance your education with free money first (scholarships and grants), then earned money (work-study), and, finally, borrowed money (federal student loans).
- You don't have to repay scholarships, grants, or work-study funds. When accepting the aid offered by your school, keep in mind that you don't have to accept the full loan amount offered. You may request and borrow a lower amount.
- Don't forget to research the potential tax benefits of higher education at the Internal Revenue Service's website at www.irs.gov.

What are the eligibility requirements?
To qualify for federal student aid (grants, loans, and work-study funds), you must meet certain requirements. Some of our general eligibility requirements are that you must demonstrate financial need (for most programs), be a U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen, be enrolled or accepted for enrollment as a regular student in an eligible degree or certificate program, and more. Make sure you're familiar with our basic eligibility requirements and, if you have any questions about whether or not you qualify, contact your school's financial aid office. Learn more about the basic eligibility requirements for federal student aid at StudentAid.gov/eligibility.

Additional Resources for Postgraduate Study
- Find a graduate school at www.nets.edu/collegenavigator.
- Learn about admissions tests for graduate/professional school at StudentAid.gov/prepforgradschool.
Who Takes It?
Prospective graduate and business school applicants from all around the world who are interested in pursuing a master's, MBA, specialized master's in business or doctoral degree take the GRE General Test. Applicants come from varying educational and cultural backgrounds and the GRE General Test provides schools with a common measure for comparing candidates' qualifications.

GRE scores are used by admissions or fellowship panels to supplement your undergraduate records, recommendation letters and other qualifications for graduate-level study.

When and Where Do People Take It?
The GRE General Test is available at more than 1,000 test centers in more than 160 countries. In most regions of the world, the computer-delivered test is available on a continuous basis throughout the year. In Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea, the computer-delivered test is available up to three times per month. In areas of the world where computer-delivered testing is not available, the paper-delivered test is available up to three times a year in October, November and February.

See Test Centers and Dates for all regions.

Who Accepts It?
The GRE General Test is accepted at thousands of graduate and business schools as well as departments and divisions within these schools. View this list (PDF).

See also:
- 2017–18 GRE® Information Bulletin (PDF)
- 2017–18 GRE® Paper-delivered Test Centers (PDF)
- MBA programs that accept GRE scores
- Help Schools Find You
Acquiring & Maintaining References

How many?
Plan to identify 3–5 people to use as references and then provide 3–5 for each position applied for, depending on who is the most relevant for each position.

Who to ask?
Full-time and part-time work supervisors, volunteer coordinators, peer advisors/mentors, professors and academic instructors, academic advisors, and any other person that can speak to your abilities related to the job you are applying for. Do not list parents, friends, family, significant others, etc.

What to ask?
Schedule a short meeting or phone call with this person (in-person meeting preferred) and ask them to be a positive reference for you. Talk about the position you want and your qualifications so that you and your reference are on the same page about what information is being presented about you. Make sure to ask this person for their preferred contact information so you can include it on your reference page, and remember to say thank you.

What to provide?
A copy of your current cover letter and resume, and anything else the reference may need from you. Note: Notify references when you apply to a position. They will appreciate the heads-up.

Reference Page
Use the same heading on the top of your reference sheet that you used on the top of your resume—they should match. Write “References” as your section heading and format it so it looks the same as the section headings on your resume.

List 3–5 references, in order of importance for the specific position being applied for. Include their name, relationship to you (i.e. Academic Advisor), their address (professional preferred), phone number, and email.

Sample Reference Page

Jackie A. Jorgensen
jackie-jorgensen@uiowa.edu
Present Address: 500 North Drive
Iowa City, IA 52240
(319) 351-0000
Permanent Address: 411 Windsor Drive
Dubuque, IA 52022
(515) 465-1234

References
David Jones, MA
Psychology Teaching Assistant
University of Iowa
4 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, IA 52240
(319) 400-5035
david-jones@uiowa.edu
*Teaching Assistant for Educational Psychology course

Carrie Kirk
Internship Coordinator
Great American Leasing
625 First St. SE, Suite 800, Cedar Rapids, IA 52401
(319) 363-0000
CarrieK@mchsi.com
*Former internship supervisor

Paul Parker
Manager
Olive Garden
24 Racine Ave, West Des Moines, IA 52693
(319) 344-0481
paul-parker@hotmail.com
*Current work supervisor
Does this professor have any special connection you are aware of to this company or place of employment? Or if it's a school, is s/he an alumnus? If so, include it. "I know that several pieces currently on display were acquired by you during your trip to the Amazon. I'm extremely hopeful that I might gain a position in a department with such a well-rounded collection to work with."

If your experience with this professor had any influence on your choice, say so: "I had not considered going into research until I took your cell biology class. That motivated me to get a part-time job in Dr. Jin's lab and now I'm excited about the possibility of doing stem cell research after grad school." However, don't force this if it's not true.

Use the third paragraph as an opportunity to hint at what you'd like the professor to say about you: You'll want to include any information about yourself which they may not be aware of. Some subtle ways of letting them know are:

"I believe that you're aware through our conversations and my participation in your course that I'm dedicated to the field of archaeology. I've completed my degree in Archeology as of June of this year. I was also able to intern at the museum under Dr. Marcus Brody, whom I believe you know. I also have extensive experience in cataloging items gained through my internship."

"My other references will be able to talk about my academic ability, but you are the only one who really knows how hard I worked on my senior thesis and some of the obstacles I faced. I was hoping maybe you could talk about how I handle stress and deal with setbacks, because those are qualities the selection committee wants to see."

Give them the details. Where does the letter need to go? Who should it be addressed to? What is the address of the receiving school, person, etc. (professional letter format requires them to have this information). And when do you need it?

You're already asking them to put themselves out and write the letter for you. Don't ask them to address it and put postage on it for you, too. You want to be the LEAST amount of trouble, so the professor is not annoyed by having to do work you could have done for them (and should have). Plus, this way you can assure yourself that it was sent. If they offer to mail it for you, let them. If they're always forgetting to do things like put items in the mail or grade exams, then tell them that you need or want to present it in person with other letters, or other materials. That way you can be sure you have it. But include this in the e-mail so they know the time frame.

Close with information about how you will follow-up: "I'll drop off the form and a stamped, addressed envelope in your faculty mailbox this week. I'll also send you an email reminder a week before the recommendation is due. Thanks again." Or, "I need to submit the letter of recommendation by August 3rd. If you're willing to write me a recommendation letter, please let me know and I'd be happy to come by your office any time to pick it up."

Thank them, whether or not they write the letter. "Thank you in advance for your time, and consideration. I also wanted to extend an additional thank you for the time I spent under your instruction. I really enjoyed your course, and I can't express how much I've taken away from Archeology 101." If they were truly that special teacher, you can be more effusive in your praise. "I know I'll take the things I've learned in that course, and apply them in my life's work. Your mentoring really had a positive impact in my life, and I can never thank you enough."

Follow through as promised by delivering necessary materials and sending a reminder. Follow up the e-mail with a phone call if you haven't heard anything in a week, two at the most. If you need to call, don't assume anything. First, see if they've even seen your e-mail. If not, be prepared to do your request verbally.
EMAIL ETIQUETTE 101

From: Heckel, Megan
Sent: Tuesday, July 07, 2015 3:11 PM
To: Smith, Gene
Cc: 
Bcc: 
Subject: Advising Meeting

Dear Dr. Smith,

Hope this message finds you well. My name is Megan and I am a freshman biology major at DePaul. I was wondering if you would have time this week to meet with me to discuss courses for next winter quarter. Whenever is most convenient for you would work for me as my schedule is wide open this week.

Let me know what time would be best or if I can provide any further information. Thank you in advance, looking forward to hearing from you!

Megan Heckel
DePaul University | 773-525-7191 | mheckel@depaul.edu

Check Cc and Bcc lines to make sure you are sending it to who it's supposed to go to.

Identify who you are writing to. Identify why you are writing to them.

Typically you are requesting something in an email...always make it easier on them by seeing if there is anything else you can provide or do.

Include a sincere goodbye. "I" are appropriate as long as they aren't excessive.

Send email at appropriate time of day: 9am-5:00pm. If sent outside "normal business hours" don't expect a response immediately. People are busy! Wait at least 24 hours in most cases to hear back.

A nice greeting sets for a nice tone.

Make sure signatures are concise and include contact info.

FIND CHECKS

IS THIS CONCISE AND TO THE POINT?
DID I SPELL EVERYTHING CORRECTLY?
DID I USE APPROPRIATE GRAMMAR?
IS ALL RELEVANT INFORMATION INCLUDED?
HOW IS MY TONE?

AVOID: BOLD, UNDERLINE, ALL CAPITALS. "PLEASE" AND "THANK YOU" GOES A LONG WAY.
Resources

- **The Writing Center** does in person and online reviews of personal statements and any writing samples. See [http://writingcenter.uiowa.edu/#services](http://writingcenter.uiowa.edu/#services) to make an appointment.
- See [http://writingcenter.uiowa.edu/resources](http://writingcenter.uiowa.edu/resources) for subject-specific writing help centers for business, history, and engineering.
- **Professors** and graduate teaching/research assistants in your field of interest are good resources for a review of your content, especially for statements referring to academic knowledge and research. In addition, professors and graduate students are good resources for feedback if a program asks for a portfolio of your work.
- Look at the tips and reflection questions in the Career Guide.
- Ask your career advisor to share Asher’s “Graduate Admissions Essays” with you to find examples.
- Learn about the different types of essays:
  - **Statements of Purpose**: [https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/969/02/](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/969/02/)
  - **Personal Statements**: [https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/)
  - **Research Statements**: [https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/983/1/](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/983/1/)
- The Academic Advising Center works specifically with pre-health professions: [https://advisingcenter.uiowa.edu/tips-writing-personal-statement](https://advisingcenter.uiowa.edu/tips-writing-personal-statement)