

GRADUATE SCHOOL PLANNING- Tip Sheet

The timeline below represents a common checklist that most students may follow. However, always check with the institutions and programs you are interested in for specific deadlines.*

Junior Year, Fall & Spring

- ___ Research areas of interest, institutions, and programs. Also, determine if you are interested in an online or on-ground program.
- ___ Talk to people (advisors, faculty, professionals) about your area(s) of interest.
- ___ Investigate if an integrated bachelor/master's program is available. Some deadlines to enter these programs may be as early as your junior year. In addition, some deadlines for early admittance programs may be even earlier.
- ___ Plan to take relevant courses no later than fall of senior year (since transcripts will be sent then).
- ___ Register and prepare for the appropriate graduate admissions test: GRE (graduate school), GMAT (business), LSAT (law), and MCAT (medical).
- ___ Consider taking a practice graduate/professional school test.
- ___ Begin researching scholarships, grants, assistantships and fellowships and make note of relevant deadlines.
- ___ Attend local/regional graduate and professional school fairs, if available.

Junior Year, Summer

- ___ Take graduate admissions tests. Learn whether schools accept your highest score or an average of all tests taken.
- ___ Contact schools for application materials and make note of deadlines.*
- ___ If possible, visit schools of interest.
- ___ Begin working on your application essay or personal statement.
- ___ Note application deadlines and policies.
- ___ Law school applicants should register for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) used by most law schools (www.lsac.org).

Senior Year, September/October

- ___ Explore schools and programs of interest. Online resources are included on the following page.
- ___ Attend graduate and professional school fairs, if available.
- ___ Register for and take graduate/professional school tests, if not yet completed: GRE (graduate school), GMAT (business), LSAT (law), and MCAT (medical).
- ___ Ask faculty members and others who are familiar with your work and strengths to write letters of recommendation.

Senior Year, November

- ___ Continue researching graduate/professional school options, graduate assistantships and fellowships.
- ___ Write your application essays and have them reviewed by your success coach and/or a faculty member.
- ___ Speak with advisors, faculty and alumni of the institution(s) regarding program strengths and reputation.
- ___ List tentative decisions about your future and develop several realistic scenarios (whether or not to apply to graduate schools, what to do if the schools you are interested in wait-list you, etc.).

Senior Year, December

- ___ Talk with alumni, networking contacts, or faculty who may have attended graduate programs you are interested in attending.
- ___ Complete and submit applications.

Senior Year, Spring

- ___ Send in completed applications, if not yet done.
- ___ Apply for financial aid. (Complete a FAFSA and have the information sent to the schools you applied to.)
- ___ Check with all institutions before the deadline to make sure your file is complete. (Some schools may require you to send in all materials at one time.)

- _____ Consider conducting a practice interview with your success coach, as many schools use interviews in their selection process. You may also utilize Big Interview to practice admissions interview questions, categorized by program type and school. Access Big Interview at www.rmu.edu/css.
- _____ Visit institutions that accept you.
- _____ Send appropriate information to the school you have selected.
- _____ Send a deposit to your institution of choice.
- _____ Notify other colleges and universities that accepted you of your decision, so they can admit other students on their waiting list.
- _____ Send thank you letters to people who wrote you recommendation letters or helped you in the application process.

* A FEW WORDS ABOUT DEADLINES

- Most application deadlines fall between January and March (for enrollment in the fall).
- Deadlines can be as early as August 1 (for following fall enrollment) for early decision programs of medical schools using the American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS), to late spring or summer (for fall enrollment) for a few programs with rolling admissions.
- For programs with rolling admissions, it is to your advantage to apply early and NOT wait until the last minute to apply.

APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL – TIPS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Note: The following steps contain a number of resources and links for informational purposes. RMU does not endorse nor support any one program or enterprise.

1. EXAMINE YOUR GOALS. Before applying to and attending graduate school, and in order to make an informed decision, you should first examine your reasons for wanting to attend. Are you applying because your desired field of employment requires a master's degree to enter or advance? Or, have you been unsuccessful in your job search and are considering graduate school as another option? Attending graduate school is a commitment of time and financial resources. It is important to examine how the program fits into your personal and professional goals.

- Grad School Guide Book - <https://www.gograd.org/graduate-school-guide-book/> - a website that covers the basics for those considering graduate school

2. RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS AND AREAS OF STUDY. Some online resources to assist in your search include the following. The first four permit free searches, while the last resource is fee-based.

- Graduate Guide - <http://graduateguide.com>
- GradSchools.com - www.gradschools.com
- Studee, Universities Abroad - studee.com
- Peterson's Guide to Graduate Study - www.petersons.com/graduate-schools.aspx
- CollegeSourceOnline - <https://cso.collegesource.com> - subscription-based service that features graduate and professional school catalogs in complete, cover-to-cover, original page format

3. PREPARE FOR ENTRANCE EXAMS. While test scores may not be the main factor in your acceptance to graduate school, many schools may have set a minimum score to be considered. Take advantage of free practice tests, workbooks, and other programs that may help you to achieve your highest score. Some informational resources include the following:

- Official GMAT Exam Website - www.mba.com/us
- ETS GRE - www.ets.org/gre/
- LSAT - www.lsac.org
- AAMC: Taking the MCAT Exam - <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/taking-mcat-exam/>
- Kaplan Test Prep - <https://www.kaptest.com>
- The Princeton Review - <https://www.princetonreview.com/promo#!Test-ACT>

4. COMPLETE ACCURATE APPLICATION AND COMPELLING ESSAY/PERSONAL STATEMENT. Just as a cover letter and resume are critical in your consideration for a job, the application, resume, and essay are essential documents in applying to graduate school. On the application, follow directions, complete all sections, and attach all required documents. For your essay or personal statement, provide examples showing how you would be a good fit and asset to the graduate program, incorporating your research of the institution. This is your opportunity to stand out from other applicants, sharing your unique story, including accomplishments and goals. Resources to help you develop your personal statement include the following:

- Essay Edge: How to Write a Personal Statement - <https://www.essayedge.com/blog/great-personal-statements/>
- Peterson's: Write a Grad School Essay that Will Knock Their Socks Off - <https://www.petersons.com/blog/write-a-graduate-school-essay-that-will-knock-their-socks-off/>

5. SECURE STRONG RECOMMENDATIONS. Seek recommendations from those who are very familiar with you, your work ethic, skills and goals. Professors and work supervisors are two examples. Familiarize them with the program that you are seeking, so they can tailor their recommendations. Be sure to give them at least several weeks to write the letter.

6. RESEARCH OPTIONS FOR FINANCING GRADUATE SCHOOL. Some institutions offer graduate assistantships that may pay all or part of tuition, a stipend or some other assistance toward the cost of graduate school. Also, a current employer may provide assistance for graduate school, particularly if it will add to the employee's skill sets for the current or future position. In addition, other resources offering information on scholarships, fellowships, and other aid include the following:

- Federal Student Aid: Office of the U.S. Department of Education - <https://studentaid.gov/>
- Scholarships.com - www.scholarships.com
- Gradschools.com - www.gradschools.com

Center for Student Success Resources

1. Graduate Guide - also available at www.graduateguide.com
2. U.S. News & World Report - also available at <https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools>