

Graduate School

Graduate school is an opportunity to dive deeper into material you've explored while completing your Bachelor's degree. If you are interested in pursuing graduate school, you may have many questions about selecting programs, securing funding, or how to submit a strong application. While getting started with a post-graduate experience can feel overwhelming, this guide is intended help make the process of applying to graduate school a little bit easier.

How do I know graduate school is right for me?

If you are considering doing a graduate degree, it is important to understand how this next step fits in with your plans for the future. Here are some important things to consider before applying to a graduate program.

Types of Graduate Degrees

Masters Degrees

Masters degrees tend to be 2-3 year-long degrees that help students specialize in particular field or profession. Degrees such as *Masters of Business Administration* (MBAs), *Masters of Public Policy* (MPPs) *Masters of Education*, and *Masters of Engineering* are all degrees that will help you focus your knowledge and provide you with higher qualifications when entering the workforce for those respective fields. Masters degrees can be tertiary degrees, or a final level of education. However, Masters Degrees can also be stepping stones to doctoral programs.

Doctoral Programs

Individuals looking to enter academia as professor, researcher, and/or clinician generally hold a doctoral degree. Doctoral programs are usually longer in length; the most common doctoral degrees are *Juris Doctor-JD* (3 years, granted upon completion of law school), *Doctor of Philosophy-PhD* (5 years, granted to doctorates in most fields), and *Doctor of Medicine-MD* (4-7 years, including medical school, internship, and residency).

Prerequisite Coursework

Many graduate programs such as med school, law school, and dental school require prerequisite coursework. Some of these prerequisites can range from specific courses to a minimum number of credits in areas such the natural sciences and humanities. For example, [the University of Michigan School of Medicine](#) emphasizes the need for applicants to have a background in

Quick Links

[Career Center](#)

The Career Center offers both [in-person advising](#), as well as online resources such as [this guide](#) to prepare for graduate school.

[LSA Psychology](#)

The Psychology department has useful webpages on preparing for a [graduate degree in psychology](#), as well as how to search for [grad programs in other fields](#).

[LSA Opportunity Hub](#)

The Opportunity Hub helps students connect their liberal arts education to their aspirations and goals. Not only do they offer career planning services, but they have [many events](#) for students considering graduate education, including an annual [Grad School fair](#).

biochemistry and basic physics, but also encourages students to study philosophy and psychology so as to better understand principles such as ethics and values. These requirements can also vary from university to university, so be sure to look at the admissions requirements of every program you are considering applying to.

What Are My Future Plans?

Grad school is great for...

...doing a deep dive in a subject or field you are passionate about or need further training in. For example:

- You desire more responsibility at a certain company; an MBA might give you tools to be a more effective leader and to implement best business practices.
- You want to become a project leader in developing new software for a tech firm; a Master's degree is both a great credential and way to improve your depth of knowledge that might win you that promotion
- You love Psychology so much that you hope to teach at a university; a PhD could help you achieve this goal.

Grad school is not great for...

...figuring out long term professional plans if you are unsure about what type of career you would like to pursue. If you are not sure exactly what you would like to do after your undergrad degree: this is completely normal! There are many opportunities you can pursue that might help you determine a few things you do enjoy, and others you can rule out, such as:

- Pursuing volunteer work or community service
- Applying for a service learning scholarship or fellowship abroad
- Finding an internship or apprenticeship

How do I start applying to graduate school?

Plan Ahead/Research Programs

The application process for graduate programs generally take around one year from the time the application window opens to the time you actually step foot on campus. Therefore, it's good to take 6-12 months before starting your grad school applications to research programs, begin gathering necessary application materials (including taking required exams) and saving money to pay any application fees. If possible, you may also want to visit potential schools as well, to get a feel for the location and people in your future department. Some departments even provide funding for admitted students to visit campus before making a final decision on whether to accept an admissions offer. Be sure to also look up faculty research, as this will give you an idea of potential mentors for the future, and also help strengthen your application!

Typical Components of Applications

- Online/Paper Application Form
- Statement of Purpose/Research Statement

A statement of purpose is a 1-2 page essay discussing how your professional and academic interests and experiences, as well as your goals for the future, relate to the program. Be specific about your interest in the department to which you are applying!
- Writing Sample

Graduate programs that require writing samples are looking to see how clearly and articulately you can express your ideas, as well as assess how proficient you are at specific skills in your discipline. A quality submission would be a substantial piece of writing (such as a term paper, research article, or thesis) that you are proud of and was well regarded by a professor.
- Recommendation Letters

Most graduate programs require 2-3 recommendation letters. For some Masters programs, such as an MBA program, although at least 1-2 of your letters should come from professors who can speak to your abilities as an academic, it is not a bad idea to have at least one reference who can address your professional experiences. This is particularly helpful if you held an on-campus job or had an internship that tied in with your studies or allowed you to apply knowledge from the classroom.
- Official Transcripts

Many universities will accept unofficial or in-progress transcripts during the application process, particularly if you are still completing an undergraduate degree. However, most offers of admission are contingent upon receiving your final, official transcripts.
- GRE/MCAT/LSAT/GMAT Scores

There are many standardized tests that your graduate program could require, examples include:

 - MCAT – typical for admission to medical school
 - LSAT – typical for admission to law school
 - GMAT – typical for admission to business school
 - GRE - widely required by many other grad programs (although many schools are placing less importance on GRE scores due to issues of equity)

It is your responsibility to check whether your future grad program requires any of these exams, and what scores are required for admission. It is also good to take these exams well in advance of submitting your application, so you have time to retake the test if you receive lower scores.
- TOEFL/IELTS

TOEFL/IELTS exams are often required for non-native speakers of English. However, universities have varying policies about waivers for these exams. Be sure to email the admissions office to ask if you are required to take the exam, and leave plenty of time to take the TOEFL if this requirement is not waived for you.

Financing Graduate School and Hidden Costs

Funding Packages

Paying for graduate school often looks very different than paying for an undergraduate degree. Here are some of the typical components of a graduate level funding package, and how they may vary between Master's-level and Doctoral-level programs.

Tuition Waivers/Funding

Funded graduate programs will often pay for part or all of your tuition. This is money that is added directly to your account, and not paid out to you.

Stipends

Stipends are offered to grad students to offset room, board, and transportation costs. They are often paid out bi-weekly or monthly, as wages at a job would be.

Scholarships/Fellowships

These awards are generally offered based on merit or other qualities from your application. Scholarships and fellowships may be either directly applied to your bursar account, or paid out to you directly, depending on the nature of the award.

Assistantships

As part of your stipend, you may be offered an assistantship. This can take the form of a Teaching Assistant (TA), Research Assistant (RA), or a Graduate/Professional Assistant (GA). TAs often help teach undergraduate, introductory-level coursework (100/200 level). In a PhD program, grad students may also have the opportunity to teach their own courses as the sole instructor. RAs are usually assigned to a research advisor (usually a faculty member in the department) and assist this advisor with their research projects (this is a great way to get co-authorships on publications). GAs often work in student services offices around campus, and help with administrative duties as well as programming.

Student Loans

If you need additional tuition/expenses support during your graduate program, you may be offered federal or private loans.

Hidden Costs

Graduate School can be very expensive. Even if the program is funded and/or you have started saving for tuition costs, there can be many other unanticipated costs. Here is a list of common expenses during graduate school and how to potentially mitigate them.

Application Fees

Application fees can range from \$50-100. This can add up if you plan to apply to multiple programs. However, if you are having difficulty paying application fees, you can reach out directly to the graduate admissions department to request an application fee waiver.

Conferences/Workshops/Networking Events

After you have begun your graduate program, you will probably have the opportunity to attend many extracurricular events and programs. Your department may even expect you to participate

in some of these events. However, there may be registration fees or other travel expenses that arise from attending these events. You can ask your department or graduate college if there are professional development/conference funds available that you could apply for. Also check with the host organization to see if they have any scholarships or funds as well.

Transcription/Translation/Equipment

If your graduate research involves extensive instruments, a project in another language, or conducting interviews, you may need to pay to translate or transcribe your data or other materials (such as consent forms, interview protocols, research proposals, etc.). However, research grants may cover some of these costs. Be sure to look for grant and scholarship funding in advanced of a project that may need these services.

Compensation for Subjects

If you are conducting research with human subjects, many researchers offer incentives such as gift cards or even cash/checks for participation. Again, research grants may help cover these costs if you are carrying out an experiment for a research assistant.

Professional Clothing

You may find you need to update your wardrobe for professional settings, such as conferences or colloquiums. New clothes can be costly; check with your university's career center, as they may have special events at local stores that offer discounts to students.

Health Insurance

Graduate student health insurance fees are often included in your tuition bill. If you are under the age of 26 and still covered by your parents insurance, be sure to check with your university if your student health insurance requirement is waived.

Textbooks

Just like in an undergrad program, textbooks can be incredibly costly. The library is a great resource for finding textbooks. There may be a class reserve for a textbook, or the library may have an interlibrary loaning program where you can also find your books.

Printing

Printing fees can add up in grad school, especially if you normally print your readings or drafts of papers to edit. You may also have to print materials for a class you are teaching. In this instance, you should check with your department to see if you can use their printer instead of digging into your wallet, or see if they offer financial support for assistantship related costs.

Housing/Transportation

Most graduate students tend to live off-campus. Be sure to budget your stipend wisely, as this is mostly intended to offset room, board, and transportation costs! If there is public transportation or a shuttle system, take advantage of it. For example, Ann Arbor city busses are free to anyone with a U-M ID card, so see if your grad institution has a similar program. This is a great way to save on parking passes.