

Career Services Office Southwestern College

❖ Is a graduate degree needed for your professional and occupational goals?

What can you do with a bachelor's degree in your major? Talk to professors, advisors, and professionals in your field about career opportunities. Think about where you want to be in 5 or even 10 years. If you need a graduate degree to get there, then it is probably a good idea to get one.

❖ Do you know what you want to do as a career?

If you don't, then graduate school is probably not the place to go to find out. Graduate school programs are very specialized and will not give you an opportunity to explore multiple options.

❖ How will your personal values and goals fit into graduate school life?

Prioritize your values for your life. What is important to you? Are marriage and family important to you? These are questions that you will need to ask yourself before applying to graduate school. Depending on what type of degree you are working toward, be prepared to spend 2 or more years past your undergraduate degree working towards your goal.

❖ Assess your self!

How is your stress management? Can you work well in a situation with very little structure from professors? Can you motivate yourself? You will not have very much feedback as you go along, so it is important that you can keep yourself going in the right direction.

Are you assertive? In graduate school, you will be in charge of making sure you get everything finished without professors reminding you or helping as much as you are used to. You need to be assertive and confident!

Online Resources

- ❖ www.gradschool.com
- ❖ www.petersons.com
- ❖ www.kaplan.com
- ❖ www.review.com
- ❖ www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/beyond/bchome.htm
- ❖ www.allaboutgradschool.com
- ❖ www.gradschools.com

- ❖ **Where do you want to study? Do you want to be on a coastline or in the Midwest? Geographic location is important because you will be living there for at least two years.**
- ❖ **How much does the school cost?**
- ❖ **What types of degrees are offered? For example, if you only want to receive a master's degree, does the program offer that?**
- ❖ **What is the emphasis of the program? Is it on practice or research?**
- ❖ **What are the professor's interests? Are they similar to your interests?**
- ❖ **Talk to current students, if you can. Are their interests and experiences similar to your own? Are these people you want to spend a lot of time with? You will have classes and have to interact with these people for at least two years.**
- ❖ **Is practical experience possible? Can you gain experience through internships or a practicum?**

Masters and Doctorate Degrees

These are the phases of work that a student goes through in the course of earning their degree.

THE MASTER'S CANDIDATE

As a master's candidate, you'll spend about two years at graduate school, depending on your program of study. The purpose of this program, in the university's eyes, is to give you a solid education in the specialized field of scholarship. You may study part-time at many universities while working to support yourself. You'll receive less financial help than declared doctoral candidates do; in many cases, you may receive none at all.

YOUR FIRST YEAR: You'll take courses much as you did in college, fulfilling the coursework requirements of your degree. The workload is heavier, the course topics are more specific, and much more is expected than was in college. You'll either be assigned or get to choose an advisor at the beginning of your program. With your advisor's help, you'll begin to develop an academic focus. A number of professors may supervise the work you do.

YOUR SECOND YEAR: You may take further courses to complete your degree requirements. Deciding on your research focus, you'll direct more and more energy toward your concentration. Taking one semester or an entire year, depending on the program, you will complete either a master's thesis, a portfolio, a manuscript, or sit for comprehensive exams. The purpose of this is to demonstrate mastery in your field. If you show promise, you may be encouraged to continue toward the doctorate.

THE DOCTORAL CANDIDATE

The doctoral candidate spends four to six years at graduate school, depending on whether you are a part time student or not. The purpose of the program, in the university's eyes, is to give you an extensive knowledge of your field, train you to do original and meaningful research, and prepare you to function as a member of a teaching faculty.

YOUR FIRST THREE YEARS: You'll take courses to satisfy your degree requirements and gain a broad knowledge of the field. If you're fortunate, you'll gain valuable experience by securing a research or teaching assistantship. You'll gradually focus your research interests, working with an advisor usually appointed at the beginning in your areas of interest. At the end of your second or third year, you'll take comprehensive exams and possibly start preparing a dissertation topic. The exams will help demonstrate your qualifications to continue with your doctoral work.

YOUR LAST THREE YEARS: Coursework becomes a much smaller part of your academic work, and may end altogether as you work at conceptualizing and completing your doctoral dissertation. Your dissertation must constitute a new and meaningful contribution to knowledge in your field. You'll teach more and more classes, and may even teach a course of your own design. You'll collaborate increasingly with faculty members, who may rely on you for research and who will inform you of their own work. You will probably become closely associated with a single professor who will become your dissertation director. You'll devote more and more energy to your own research. Your program culminates in the completion of your dissertation, which may include an oral defense of your work before a faculty committee.

Questions to consider

- ❖ **Are there night/weekend classes?**
- ❖ **Is the Library open at night and on weekends?**
- ❖ **What about the campus computer center? The Lab?**
- ❖ **What sort of financial aid, if any, is available for part-timers?**
- ❖ **Do professors work with part-timers' special needs?**
- ❖ **Are current part time students available to discuss their experiences?**
- ❖ **Are the course offerings the same as in the full-time program?**
- ❖ **Do the same faculty members teach as in the full-time program?**

- ❖ **Do part-time students get the same priority as those in the full-time program when registering for courses? Often full-timers have an earlier registration, meaning some courses could be filled before part-timers get a chance.**
- ❖ **Are the admissions standards for both the same? If part-time program has different admission or faculty standards, investigate the program more carefully. It may not be up to the standards of the full-time version.**

Funding a program of study

In seeking financial aid for graduate study, leave no stone unturned. In many cases, you will not have to pay for tuition at all. Assistantships often pay for tuition, and can consist of teaching, research, or other positions in offices related to your program. Most assistantships also have stipends, which vary. Ask about assistantship opportunities before accepting a program to explore all your options.

The best place to begin is with the financial aid offices at the schools you are considering. Ask about Federal Student Aid Programs, State Aid Programs, private foundation scholarships, and the financial aid program of the university or graduate school. When contacting individual schools for information, inquire about these programs as well as fellowships, grants and teaching, research, and graduate assistantships.

Below are essential principles to follow when applying for financial aid:

- ❖ Your application and supporting materials must be submitted well in advance of the application deadline date. It would be wise for you to make inquiries regarding admission and financial aid a year in advance of the date of your anticipated enrollment.
- ❖ A prerequisite for a successful application for financial assistance is careful reading of the application form coupled with a scrupulous effort to provide all of the requested information.
- ❖ If you receive two or more awards, examine their actual cash value to be sure that you understand what you would receive in each case. Some fellowships have a very small face value, but carry additional benefits such as tuition and fees.
- ❖ If your stipend is not enough to carry you through the year, look into opportunities for borrowing money. Loans are granted to students by the federal government and financial institutions. Compare the different interest rates and terms of repayment before committing yourself to a particular loan.

- ❖ Two important considerations in financial aid are residency and your dependency status with your parents. Residency is determined by the length of time you have lived in a state or county without attending school. A student is considered independent status for financial aid purposes when they apply for graduate school.

Faculty

- ❖ How many faculty members are in the department?
- ❖ How many are full-time? What non-teaching experience have they had?
- ❖ What is considered a full-time graduate teaching load?
- ❖ How many full-time faculty members hold doctorates?
- ❖ What post-doctorate learning experiences have the faculty had and when?
- ❖ What is the faculty's commitment to professional activities?
- ❖ What is the breakdown of the faculty according to age, gender, and race?
- ❖ Did the faculty earn degrees from a variety of institutions?
- ❖ How long has each faculty member been at this institution?
- ❖ What academic ranks are held (how many are tenured?)
- ❖ How often can students see or talk with faculty and advisors?

Resources

- ❖ Does the program have any planned practical experiences? Where and doing what?
- ❖ What assistantships and scholarships are available? How likely am I to receive one?
- ❖ What is the estimated cost for tuition, general fees, books, and living expenses?
- ❖ What is the nature and breadth of research facilities and how are they funded?
- ❖ What is the size of the library holdings in your field?
- ❖ What career services, counseling, medical, and housing facilities are available?
- ❖ What student support groups are available in the department?
- ❖ What sort of community, social, cultural, academic, and entertainment resources are there?

Admission

- ❖ Which admissions qualifying tests are required?
- ❖ What is the average undergraduate GPA of students admitted in the last 12 months?
- ❖ Of the students who were admitted, what proportion of them dropped out on their own?
- ❖ How many students were dropped for academic reasons in the past year?

Curriculum

- ❖ What specific degrees are offered?
- ❖ Will the curriculum allow for tailoring degree plans to meet specific career goals?
- ❖ What areas of concentration are offered?
- ❖ What are the required courses in each program and how many electives are offered?
- ❖ What type of thesis, oral and written comprehensive exam is required?
- ❖ What is the average length of time it takes to complete the degree?
- ❖ What are the program's philosophical or theoretical principles?
- ❖ What values, attitudes, and knowledge are considered outcome goals for the program?
- ❖ How is student progress evaluated on cognitive and affective dimensions?

Student Body

- ❖ What are the career goals of currently enrolled students?
- ❖ What is the percentage of students working in their field of study?
- ❖ What is the size of enrollment in the school, the graduate school, and your department?
- ❖ How many students are part-time and full-time?
- ❖ What is the breakdown of the student population by geographical origin and undergraduate institution?

What is the breakdown of the present student body according to age, gender, and race?

Timeline for preparing

Junior Year and Summer before Senior Year

- ❖ Start browsing through guides to graduate programs and deciding where you would like to apply. Call, write, or email schools to request catalogues. Determine test requirements, application deadlines, test dates, etc.
- ❖ Meet with advisors, faculty members, and career counselors to discuss programs.
- ❖ Sign up for required standardized tests and practice for them.
- ❖ Begin budgeting for the application process. It can become costly.
- ❖ Start a checklist of school/programs to which you wish to apply. The application requirements, test requirements, fees, and deadlines.

September and October of Senior Year

- ❖ Review your checklist of schools/programs, application requirements, test requirements, fees, and deadlines.
- ❖ Take standardized tests.
- ❖ Write draft of statement of purpose. Include career goals and areas of interest.
- ❖ Research financial aid sources, fellowships and assistantships.
- ❖ Request letters of recommendation from faculty members. Provide these people with your personal statement.
- ❖ Begin figuring out possible budgets based on financial aid, costs of school, and cost of living.

November and December of Senior Year

- ❖ Order official transcript from Registrar's Office. Also ask the office if they can send a transcript with your fall term grades in time to meet the deadlines of the programs.
- ❖ Finalize your statement of purpose according to the question(s) asked on the application.
- ❖ Mail applications.
- ❖ Apply for fellowships, grants, and assistantships.

January through March of Senior Year

- ❖ Contact the schools about the possibility of visiting and scheduling an interview.
- ❖ If you are taking out student loans, fill out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) or the GAPSFA (Graduate and Professionals School Financial Aid). You need to find out which one the schools require. You need to have a copy of your federal income tax returns to fill out the information.

➤ You can find more information in the Financial Aid Office at Southwestern College (295-6262)

April of Senior Year

- ❖ Discuss acceptances, rejections, and other career options with a faculty member, advisor, or a member of your college's career services office. (295-5832)

Entrance Exams

There are a number of different tests graduate schools use for admission, so it is very important to know exactly which test each school you are applying to requires. Scores on these tests are used not only for admission, but also for fellowships, grants, and assistantships. Time spent becoming familiar with the format of the exam can greatly improve your test-taking confidence and scores. There are many books, computer programs, courses, and practice tests that can help you prepare.

- ❖ **GRE** – www.gre.org This exam is taken for admittance into many different graduate programs. It is broken up into three parts; verbal, quantitative and analytical. Each part is used to measure your ability to evaluate the different skills. The GRE also offers subject tests.
- ❖ **GMAT** – www.mba.com This exam was designed to help business schools assess the qualifications of applicants for advanced study in business and management. It measures verbal, quantitative, and writing skills.
- ❖ **LSAT** – www.LSAC.org This exam is required for admittance into law school. It tests verbal and verbal reasoning skills that law schools may use to assess applicants.
- ❖ **PCAT** -- www.aacp.org This exam helps identify qualified applicants for admission into pharmacy school. It measures a general academic ability and scientific knowledge necessary for the commencement of pharmaceutical education.
- ❖ **MCAT** – www.aamc.org This exam is used for admission into medical school. Applicants are required to submit test scores before applying for admission to a program. It assesses problem solving, critical thinking, and writing skills in addition to knowledge of science concepts and principles prerequisite to the study of medicine.
- ❖ **VCAT** – www.eckerd.edu This exam is not always required for admission into veterinary school, so check with each specific program. Some programs prefer the GRE or the MCAT. The exam test verbal skills, biology and chemistry knowledge, quantitative skills, and reading comprehension.
- ❖ **GSFLT** – (Can be taken at school to which you are applying.) This is an exam designed to test a student's skills in a foreign language. It may help a student to test out of a requirement.
- ❖ **MAT** – www.milleranalogies.com This is a standardized test of verbal analogies that some graduate programs use to assist in their admission process.
- ❖ **TOEFL** – www.toefl.org The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) measures the ability of nonnative speakers of English to use and understand North American English as it is used in college and university settings. Scores on the test are required by more than 4,300 two- and four-year colleges and universities, professional schools, and sponsoring institutions.
- ❖ **AHPAT** – www.gradview.com/testing/ahpat.html While not necessarily a graduate-school admission test, the AHPAT can be required for advanced study in some health fields. The Psychological Corporation, which administers the test, primarily sends scores to universities, but also medical centers.
- ❖ **DAT** – www.unh.edu/premed-advising/dat.html Dental applicants take a computerized DAT at a Sylvan Testing Center. Though the computerized DAT can be taken at the student's convenience, it is recommended that applicants take the DAT in the spring of their junior year (or the spring of the senior year if you plan to take a year off after graduation).
- ❖ **OCAT**-- www.gradview.com/testing/ocat.html Just like the LSAT, MCAT and other professional-school admission tests, the OCAT attempts to weed out those who, most likely, can not withstand the rigors of graduate coursework. It evaluates general academic ability and scientific knowledge.

- ❖ To get more information about these tests, call the Center for Student Success at 295-5822 or view the website information.

The Princeton Review

- ❖ www.review.com
- ❖ You can take classes in person (8 people or less in each class) or sign up for online tutorials. Cost varies by location.

Kaplan

- ❖ www.kaplan.com
- ❖ You can take classes in person or have a personal tutor.
- ❖ Online tutorials are also available.

Books

GRE

- ❖ **How to Prepare for the GRE Test with CD-ROM** -- by Sharon Weiner Green (Author), Ira Ph.D. Wolf (Author)
- ❖ **Kaplan GRE Exam 2004 with CD-ROM** -- by Kaplan (Author)
- ❖ **GRE Prep Course (with Software)** -- by Jeff Kolby, Scott Thornburg

GMAT

- ❖ **Cracking the GMAT with Sample Tests on CD-ROM, 2004 Edition** -- by Princeton Review (Author)
- ❖ **Verbal Workout for the GMAT (The Princeton Review)** -- by Douglas French (Author)

LSAT

- ❖ **Official LSAT Pretests: 10 Actual (LSAT Series)** -- by Law School Admission Staff (Editor)
- ❖ **Master the LSAT** -- by Jeff Kolby, Scott Thornburg
- ❖ **The PowerScore LSAT Logic Games Bible** -- by David M. Killoran

PCAT

- ❖ **Kaplan PCAT : 2004-2005 Edition** -- by Kaplan (Author)
- ❖ **How to Prepare for the PCAT: Pharmacy College Admission Test** -- by Marie A. Chisholm (Author)
- ❖ **Pcat Success 2004: Test Prep (Pcat Success, 2004)** -- by Greta A. Gourley, D. R. H. Gourley

MCAT

- ❖ **Kaplan MCAT Comprehensive Review with CD-ROM, 7th Edition : 2004 Edition** -- by Kaplan (Author)
- ❖ **Examkrackers MCAT Physics** -- by Jonathan Orsay

GSFLT

- ❖ **Graduate School Foreign Language Test (Gsflt (Admission Test Series))** -- by Jack Rudman

MAT

- ❖ **Barron's How to Prepare for the Mat: Miller Analogies Test (Barron's How to Prepare for the M A T. Miller Analogies Test, 8th Ed)** -- by Robert J. Sternberg, Robert J. Steinberg
- ❖ **Cracking the MAT, 3rd Edition** -- by Marcia Lerner (Author)
- ❖ **Kaplan MAT : 2004-2005 Edition** -- by Kaplan (Author)

TOEFL

- ❖ **TOEFL Test Preparation Kit (Book & CD-ROM)** -- by Educational Testing Service (Editor), Educational Testing Services
- ❖ **Delta's Key to the TOEFL Test (Book and CD-Rom Edition)** -- by Nancy Gallagher
- ❖ **How to Prepare for the T.O.E.F.L.: Test of English As a Foreign Language (Barron's How to Prepare for the Test of English As a Foreign Language T.O.E.F.L.)** -- by Pamela J. Sharpe

AHPAT

- ❖ **AHPAT: Complete Preparation for the Allied Health Professions Admission Test, 2001 Edition: The Science of Review** -- by Aftab S. Hassan
- ❖ **Allied Health Professions Admission Test (Ahpap): The Betz Guide (Serial)** -- by Betz Guide

DAT

- ❖ **Kaplan DAT with CD-ROM, Second Edition** -- by Kaplan (Author)
- ❖ **How to Prepare for the Dental Admission Test (DAT) (Barrons 1999)** by Richard A. Lehman

Ocat

- ❖ **Practice Examination 1: Optometry College Admission Test: Ocat** by David M. Tarlow

Statement of Purpose

The application essay (also known as “statement of purpose” or “personal statement”) has two basic purposes. First, the essay is used as an indicator of your writing ability. Second, personal statements provide an opportunity for you to articulate your goals and reasons for applying to graduate school in your particular area of study. The essay is a chance for you to create a more detailed, human portrait of yourself and the assets you could bring to a graduate program beyond your test scores and undergraduate transcripts.

Different graduate schools may ask you for very different essays. Writing an excellent essay entails examining the essay question carefully. Generally, schools will ask you to articulate why you should be admitted to their particular program, so writing a “one-size-fits-all” essay is not the correct approach. The key to writing your essay is to match your abilities and goals specifically to the individual program, which entails researching the program as well as knowing your own goals.

Knowing Yourself and Your Goals

Before writing your essay, take the time to assess your skills, experiences, and achievements. Which of these set you apart? How do your experiences translate into successful completion of graduate school? Be sure to give concrete examples if you list characteristics about yourself (e.g., motivated, critical thinker), and be able to give specific, detailed examples of those characteristics in your past actions. Another important facet of presenting yourself in your essay

is giving an overview of your goals, and how attending graduate school will enable you to reach those goals.

Knowing the Graduate School

The other half of writing an excellent essay is matching your clearly defined goals and abilities to the program to which you are applying. Check out the school's website to learn more about the specifics of the program and the research interests of the faculty. Link your goals to the mission of the university or program.

Remember to have at least one other person carefully review your essay and PROOFREAD it! With a little preparation and self-assessment, writing the graduate school essay does not have to be an ordeal.

Some graduate and professional programs require students to submit a statement of purpose or a personal statement before being accepted to the program. Some recommended resources are:

- ❖ *Graduate Admissions Essays – What Works, What Doesn't and Why* by Donald Asher
You can also find information about this at www.jobsmart.org/hidden/asher.htm
- ❖ *Winning Personal Statements* by Petersons
- ❖ *How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School* by Richard Stelzer
- ❖ gradschool.about.com/education/gradschool/msubessay.htm
- ❖ www.essayedge.com
- ❖ www.writingweb.com
- ❖ www.winningpersonstatement.com
- ❖ www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/apessay.html

TIPS

- ❖ **Do not just state the obvious.** For example, do not just say that you are studying education. Talk about why you are studying education.
- ❖ **Do not list all of your accomplishments and clubs.** Pick one or two you can talk about that will make an impact on the reader.
- ❖ **Show that you can challenge yourself.** Challenging yourself is great even if you do not do well. It shows you are willing to try something new and difficult.
- ❖ **Pick one or two qualities about yourself to show why you deserve this position.**
- ❖ **Sometimes less is more.** Organize your essay under a unifying theme.
- ❖ **Do not wait until the last minute to start writing your essay.** It will take longer than you expect.
- ❖ **SPELL CHECK!!!!**

- ❖ Inappropriate undergraduate curriculum
- ❖ Poor grades or lack of academic prerequisites
- ❖ Low admissions test scores
- ❖ Weak or ineffective recommendation letters
- ❖ Missed deadlines
- ❖ Incomplete application or files

1. Apply earlier
2. Apply to more schools
3. Apply to schools with lower admissions standards
4. Visit and wow 'em
5. Go to summer school in a targeted subject to increase marketability
6. Take one class at a time in targeted subject and do excellent work
7. Get volunteer or internship experience in the targeted field
8. Work in a “real job” in the targeted field

- ❖ It is important to keep a checklist of information about each school you call or apply to, so you can keep yourself organized.

School _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____ Contact Person _____

Specific Program of Interest _____

Degree(s) Offered _____

Estimated Degree Completion Time _____

Types of Financial Aid Available _____

Application Deadline _____

Special Application Requirements (ex: GRE subject test, minimum GPA, etc.)

Other Notes _____

Choice # _____

Completion Checklist

___ Application Mailed

___ Financial Aid Form Mailed

___ Test Scores Sent

___ Letters of Recommendation Mailed

___ Personal Statement/Portfolio/Audition Tape Mailed