

Graduate & Professional School Handbook



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GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL RESOURCES & SERVICES

Career Development and Alumni Engagement offers assistance with graduate school resources, preparation, and the application process. The following overview of the graduate school application process provides you basic information. If you find you have additional questions, please [schedule an appointment](#) with a Career Counselor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. <i>Selecting a Degree</i>	2
2. <i>Research Graduate & Professional Schools</i>	3
3. <i>The Application Process</i>	4
4. <i>Financing Your Education</i>	7
5. <i>CSUCI Resources</i>	8
6. <i>Contact Information</i>	9

Graduate and professional schools offer an opportunity for you to undertake advanced study in areas of interest and/or to accomplish a career goal. Some professions require an advanced degree such as law, medicine, and postsecondary teaching. If you are uncertain about your career goals, you should give careful thought and consideration before applying to a program. Making an informed decision about pursuing a graduate or professional degree requires an in-depth self-analysis, research of schools, and development of a plan. We recommend that the planning and preparation begin approximately 18 months before expected entrance. This would include a self-analysis, graduate school research, and a plan of action.

I. SELECTING A DEGREE

There are generally two types of graduate school degrees awarded; Master's and Doctoral degree. Professional schools commonly award advanced degrees in law, health and the medical field. The timelines in completing degree programs vary by:

- Degree sought
- Number of classes taken in a semester or quarter
- Required fieldwork experience
- If a comprehensive exam, thesis or dissertation is a requirement
- Residency requirements
- A Professional Master's gives you a specific set of skills needed to practice in a particular field, such as education, business, engineering or other profession requiring specialized training. It is generally a final or "terminal" degree, and often involves an internship, practicum or fieldwork.
- A Research Master's provides experience in research and scholarship, and it may be a final degree or a step toward a Ph.D. A master's degree usually takes one or two years of study.



WHY GO TO GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL?

- Requirement for entry into the field (e.g., law, medicine, speech therapy, teaching, counseling)
- Professional growth
- Career change
- Personal growth, fulfillment
- Potential for increased income

Your decision should be based on your personal situation and long-term goals. Careful reflection on your reasons for pursuing an advanced degree will help to ensure you select appropriate programs aligned with your career and educational goals.

FACTS TO CONSIDER WHEN THINKING ABOUT GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL:

- Values
- Interests
- Personality
- Strengths/Talents
- Self-discipline
- Motivation
- Persistence
- Tenacity
- Career Path
- Intellect

A personal assessment will help in clarifying your career goals and directing you to a graduate program that will be a good match. In addition, your self-assessment can be valuable during the application process, in particular, when writing your personal statement and in the event, a personal interview is part of the application process.

QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION:

What is your commitment level to pursuing graduate school?

How does attending graduate school align with your career goals?

Where do you see yourself in the next five years academically and professionally?

A Professional Doctorate: The M.D. for medical practice and the J.D. for law are the most common types of professional degrees. There are also practical-based doctorate degrees in the Social Sciences fields such as a Doctorate in Education, Psychology or Sociology.

A Research Doctorate: The Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) is the primary credential for college-level teaching. The Ph.D. typically involves both course work and a major research project. The Ph.D. usually takes a minimum of four to six years of full-time study.

2. RESEARCH GRADUATE & PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

Thoroughly researching graduate schools will significantly enhance one's ability to make a good decision, and help to prioritize which schools match an individual's educational and career goals. Make a list of criteria that are important to your decision. Although no absolute criteria are available for judging graduate or professional schools, the following may serve as a checklist of criteria to consider:

- School offers degrees in your area of interest
- Strength and reputation of the academic program
- Geographic location
- Meets your goal(s)
- Required entrance exams
- Demographic makeup of campus population
- Cost of tuition, books, relocation, housing
- Financial aid availability
- Number of applicants vs. Number accepted
- Application deadline
- Faculty to student ratio
- Undergraduate preparation
- Size of institution
- Program accreditation
- Program reputation
- Length of time to complete program
- Program Mission and Values
- Campus culture
- Placement record of program's graduates
- Completion rate

Many schools include websites and virtual tours that can introduce you to their school and programs. If you have some schools in mind and do not know their website address, do an Internet search by going to any search engine (Yahoo, Google, etc.) and typing in the school name. This should connect you to the school's website.

FACULTY, STAFF, STUDENTS & MENTORS

Faculty from your college, alma mater or local institutions can be another excellent source of information. Discuss your interest with experts within the industry you seek, and ask them to suggest potential graduate school programs that align with your goals. Currently enrolled students are another great resource. Conduct informational interviews with students and ask questions

ONLINE RESOURCES

Please keep in mind that selecting a college or university is more complex than simply relying on school ranking. We recommend that you critically review and analyze each institution to find the best fit for your needs.

- Graduate Guide
www.graduateguide.com/
- Cal State Graduate School
www2.calstate.edu/attend/graduate
- Petersons
www.petersons.com
- Grad Schools
www.gradschools.com
- Grad Profiles
www.gradprofiles.com
- Council of Graduate Schools
www.cgsnet.org
- Association for Support of Graduate Students
www.asgs.org
- National Association for Graduate-Professional Students
www.nagps.org
- US News
www.usnews.com
- My Plan
www.myplan.com/
- The Princeton Review
www.princetonreview.com

regarding campus environment, accessibility of faculty, diversity within the program, employment opportunities, and other questions that will factor into your decision.

RECRUITING EVENTS/FAIRS

Plan to attend the annual Graduate & Professional School Fair hosted by Academic Advising in the fall semester. For more information about this event, please visit the [Graduate & Professional School Fair website](#).

After gathering information, it is best to narrow your selection to four or five potential schools. Your visit to each of the prospective schools is an important part of the decision-making process. There are often factors that you can only accurately assess by visiting each school in person. If you are unable to visit all of the institutions you are considering, prioritize your top two or three and visit only those schools.

TYPICAL ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS

- A baccalaureate degree
- A minimum grade point average (often of 3.0 or better). Your major GPA rather than your cumulative GPA might be used to meet this criterion.
- A minimum score on an entrance examination (GRE or specified test)
- Some preparation in the proposed field of study (i.e., internship, research)
- Experience relevant to the proposed field

Admissions requirements can vary depending on the program. It is important to discuss program requirements directly with admissions representatives and faculty associated with the program to maintain up-to-date admission requirements.

3. THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Application policies vary greatly among institutions and even among departments within the same institutions. Make sure you have obtained the most recent information from schools to which you are applying. The way you present yourself and your achievements should be tailored to each specific program. You may be required to supply the following in order to be considered for admission to a program:

- Completed application
- Official undergraduate transcript(s) from the Registrar's office
- Personal essay/statement of purpose
- Required entrance examination scores
- Letters of recommendations (minimum 3)
- Writing sample, portfolio, link to website, and audition as requested
- Application fee (typically ranges from \$50.00 to \$85.00)
- Personal interview

TESTING INFORMATION

- Graduate Record Exam (GRE)
<http://www.ets.org/gre/>
- Miller Analogies Test (MAT)
www.pearsonassessments.com/graduate-admissions/mat/
- Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)
<https://www.lsac.org/>
- Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT)
<http://www.mba.com/gmat>
- Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT)
www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/
- Dental Aptitude Test (DAT)
www.ada.org
- Veterinary Aptitude Test (VAT) www.aavmc.org
- Optometry Admissions Test (OAT) www.opted.org
- Pharmacy College Admissions Test (PCAT)
www.pcat.info
- Teacher Testing (PRAXIS)
www.ets.org/praxis

Prepare to take the appropriate entrance examination during your junior year or at the latest during the fall of your senior year if you plan to go on to graduate school immediately after college.

YOUR BEST CHOICES FOR RECOMMENDERS

- Undergraduate professors (*in your major*)
- Other professors
- Professionals who have supervised you in volunteer or paid work related to your graduate field
- Employers

COMPLETED APPLICATION

Be sure that each application you submit is complete, accurate and on time. Applicants greatly outnumber the spaces available in graduate school, so the appearance of your application is as important as the information on it. Answer all questions and adhere to the deadlines.

TRANSCRIPT

An official transcript from the Registrar's office must be sent directly from the institutions you have attended to the schools to which you are applying.

**Make sure to give the Registrar advance notification to meet application deadlines.*

PERSONAL ESSAY/STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of the personal statement is to show the admissions committee how you think as well as your writing ability. Your goal in writing a personal statement is to create a portrait that is both persuasive and personal. It should be a concise, well-written essay about your background, knowledge of the field and your reasons for pursuing graduate study in the field or profession you have chosen. This is also an opportunity to show admissions how you align with their program's area of study and their mission.

ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS

Schools will designate which qualifying examinations are required for your chosen discipline. [Educational Testing Services](#) (ETS) provides information on a number of admissions examinations.

CSUCI offers a 6-session Graduate Record Examination (GRE) test prep course at a reduced fee of \$75. To learn more go to [GRE Test Prep Sessions](#)

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Most graduate programs will require three to four letters of recommendation. The letters should communicate your ability to study at the graduate level, undergraduate preparation, and commitment level to the proposed field of study. The individuals you ask to write your recommendations can have an impact on how you are perceived as an applicant.

It is strongly encouraged that you request letters from faculty who can comment on your undergraduate academic preparation, potential for graduate study, and commitment to your proposed field of study. If a professor is not well acquainted with you, provide him/her with a resume of your professional goals and academic background. Also, provide each with a stamped envelope addressed to the appropriate graduate school.

Letters of recommendation can rank very high on an admission committee's list of evaluation criteria. Be selective about who you ask.

WRITING SAMPLES, PORTFOLIOS, WEBSITES AND AUDITIONS

These items may be requested for consideration to enter specific programs. Be prepared to submit any additional information that is requested, in order to enhance your opportunity for acceptance.

Although professors are your best bet, other people can attest to your suitability for graduate school. These include:

- Colleagues
- Graduate students in your proposed field, or even in the program to which you are applying

APPLICATION FEE

A fee must accompany each application. Typically, fees are paid through the online application system using an e-check or credit card. If asked to mail your fees via USPS, we recommend sending a cashier's check or money order and request to send everything certified mail.

PERSONAL INTERVIEW

In some programs, an interview may be required before admission is granted. In addition to being an important factor in gaining admission, it provides you the opportunity of assessing the program. Prepare for the interview by participating in a mock interview with a Career Counselor.

SUGGESTED GRADUATE SCHOOL CHECKLIST TIMELINE

Six Months Prior To Applying:

- Research areas of interest, institutions and programs.
- Attend Information Sessions at the institutions you are interested in.
- Conduct Informational Interviews
- Register and prepare for appropriate admission tests.
- If appropriate, obtain letters of recommendation.

Three Months Prior To Applying:

- Take required admissions tests.
- Obtain application materials.
- Visit institutions of interest, if possible.
- Write a draft of your application essay.
- Get feedback from three academic professionals regarding your application essay (faculty and the writing center).
- If needed for medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry or law school, register for the national application or data assembly service.

Fall – One Year before Starting Graduate School:

- Take admission tests.
- Send in completed applications.
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the CSS Financial Aid PROFILE, if required.

Spring – One Semester before Starting Graduate School:

- Check with all institutions before the deadline to make sure your file is complete. Send a deposit to your institution of choice.
- Notify other colleges and universities that accepted you of your decision so that they may admit students on their waiting list.
- Send thank you notes to people who wrote your recommendation letters, informing them of your success.



FINANCIAL AID RESOURCES

- [Loan repayment estimator](#)
- www.studentaid.gov
- www.scholarships.com/
- www.fastweb.com/
- www.hsf.net
- www.jackierobinson.org/
- [Public Service Loan Forgiveness \(PSLF\)](#)

4. FINANCING YOUR EDUCATION

Graduate awards are usually given based on past academic performance and/or financial need. Financial aid for graduate and professional school is offered in three basic forms:

GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Grants and scholarships are usually awarded based on financial need and/or academic performance. This type of grant money does not obligate the recipient to repay the award. Check with religious organizations, foundations, labor unions, businesses or town and city groups for scholarships based on achievement, ethnicity, hobbies or talents. Armed forces may also offer financial opportunities. Your employer may also have an educational reimbursement program.

FELLOWSHIPS AND ASSISTANTSHIPS

Fellowships and assistantships are available through your department of study and/or they may be funded by the state. These types of awards may cover part or all of your tuition and provide stipends. There are a number of private fellowship offerings available based on merit, area of interest, and underrepresented populations. Apply with national fellowships including Fulbright Mellon, National Research Foundation, and/or National Science Foundation.

LOANS

Loans are available through a variety of private and government sources. Student loans must be repaid. Student loans feature lower interest rates and/or deferred payment options. Apply for loans at each institution to which you have submitted an application for admission through the Financial Aid office. Also, check with credit unions, or educational loan organizations for private loans.

FINANCIAL AID RESOURCES

FINAID www.finaid.org

Established in 1994, FinAid is possibly the finest single source for information and resources for all types of educational financial aid including military aid programs and prepaid tuition/529 savings plans. Under each category, visitors will find comprehensive information on various programs, advice on how to approach each one, important legislative information, warnings about potential problems or scams, and much more. There are numerous calculators to help students and families figure out how much is needed, the true cost of a loan, and almost anything else a user should ask. This is the premiere site for financial aid information online, and it is free.

STUDENT AID ON THE WEB www.studentaid.ed.gov

Federal Student Aid (FSA) programs. Available in English and Spanish, this site will guide the user through the process of preparing for college, from a variety of sources, attending college, and repaying loans. Information is available for high school, undergraduate, and graduate students as well as parents, international students, and other targeted student populations. The site links to FAFSA, the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) for easy access and application processing.

Some portions of the site require the user to create a login and password. This will allow the users to save profile information, store applications, customize areas for specific needs, and protect private and personal information as well. Users can review their extensive privacy policy from the link at the bottom of each page for information on how this data is used and protected. Under "Tools and Resources", there are links to additional funding resources, including StudentLoans.gov, the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS), and more. Here is their [quick reference guide](#) regarding financial aid. This is a one-stop center for U.S. Department of Education financial aid, scholarship and student loan information.

5. GRADUATE SCHOOL RESOURCES

GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION ADVISING

Meet with a Career Development and Alumni Engagement Career Counselor. [Click here to schedule an appointment](#) to discuss the graduate school exploration, decision-making, planning, and preparation process.

ACADEMIC ADVISING

Academic Advising offers CSUCI students a variety of graduate school resources and services to help students prepare, apply and plan for Graduate School. Academic Advising hosts the annual Graduate & Professional School Fair in the fall. For more information, please visit their [website](#).

WRITING & MULTILITERACY CENTER

Contact the Writing and Multiliteracy Center for support and guidance with your personal essay/statement. Call at 805-437-8934 or email at wmc.tutors@csuci.edu.

GRE TEST PREP SESSIONS

Register for CSUCI's GRE Test Prep Sessions. Students can register for a reduced flat fee of \$75 for 6 sessions. Go to [GRE Test Prep Sessions](#).

RESOURCES AVAILABLE ON THE CSUCI WEBSITE

- [Graduate School Bound Program](#)
- [Resume Resources](#)
- [Career Counseling](#)
- [Schedule an Appointment with a Career Counselor](#)
- [Graduate School Resources](#)

6. CONTACT INFORMATION

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

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