

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Evaluating & Applying

14 Points to Consider

- Admission Requirements
- Programs Offered
- Faculty
- Philosophy of Education
- Reputation
- Multicultural Opportunities
- Library Resources
- State Regulations & Residency Requirements
- Physical Facilities
- Cost
- Geographic Location
- Size
- Career Assistance
- Networking Contacts

Why Consider Graduate School?

Some of the best reasons for enrolling in a graduate program include the love of a particular subject area and the desire to study it in depth, as well as the need for an advanced degree to enter the profession of your choice.

While some students may consider graduate school as a way to temporarily delay career decisions, students who are apprehensive about searching for employment should carefully evaluate their decision to enter graduate school. In some instances, an advanced degree will increase your marketability while in other instances additional work experience in your field will be more relevant. Graduate school is self-directed in nature; therefore, a student who is not self-motivated and unsure of their goals will face a bigger challenge in successfully completing a graduate program.

Are you interested in graduate school but unable to decide on a degree program?

You will want to spend some time defining your interests before graduating from your undergraduate program. Talk with Career Advisors and faculty members, study graduate program options, and consider an internship in your field of interest. If those exercises aren't helpful, you may want to consider gaining a year or two of work experience to help clarify your perspective and firmly determine your long-range goals.

Have you determined your long-range career and lifestyle goals?

Whatever your motives are for attending graduate school, it is a good idea to think about the impact this decision will have on your life. **Will the degree prepare you for a specific occupation or career field?** If so, what is the employment outlook for that field? Make arrangements to talk with professionals in that field about the benefits and potential drawbacks of that path. Currently enrolled graduate students can often provide useful information.

What funding is available?

Fellowships or scholarships may be awarded by individual departments or institutions as well as outside organizations. Institution-based aid most frequently takes the form of a graduate assistantship. Graduate, Teaching, or Research Assistants work part-time in exchange for a stipend and tuition reimbursement. Federal loans are also available to many graduate students. Make sure you investigate these options carefully before making any decisions.

Application Timetable

16-24 months prior to intended admission (typically fall)

Research programs available in your desired field of study.

Review college catalogs, consult reference books, visit the campus(es).

13-16 months prior to start date (typically summer/early fall)

Speak with faculty about programs and your goals.

Identify references to write letters of recommendation.

Receive application/materials.

Take required admission test(s) and have results sent to desired college(s).

9-12 months prior to start date (typically fall)

Give your information to recommendation letter writer such as reference forms, addresses, goal statement, etc.

Complete and mail application(s) and transcripts - get them in early!

Contact college(s) for financial aid information.

Goal Statement

Use the following suggestions to write an effective goal statement:

Remember, graduate school committees are interested in knowing more about you as a person. Be sure to answer the questions asked, watch for grammatical and spelling errors, and avoid canned answers.

Academic Experience: Don't be repetitive by describing a project you previously described. Talk about what you have learned from working on the project and how this has peaked your interest in further research. This may also be the place to mention any personal qualities you feel would make you a good researcher, but be sure to back up these statements with specific examples documenting your skills in these areas.

Research Interests: This is most appropriate for individuals applying to a research program. Be as specific as possible and point out how this particular program fits with your research interests.

Co-Curricular Experiences: This may be particularly important in business and law, where leadership qualities are given priority. Again, don't just describe experiences; show how these experiences relate to your goals and what they have taught you about your skills in these areas. Look for any experiences which set you apart from the crowd.

Career Goals: Indicate how you plan to use your graduate training. You don't need to have your life mapped out in detail, but be able to delineate some general goals. Admissions committees are interested in knowing that you have thought about what you want to do with your life, that a graduate education fits in with these plans, and how your goals are congruent with the training you will receive in that particular program.

Personal Attributes and Special Circumstances: This is the place to mention anything special or unique about yourself (i.e. minority or non-traditional student status) and any special circumstances (i.e. reasons for a low GPA in a particular semester). The important point to remember is to explain yourself in a non-defensive, non-apologetic manner.

Creating Your Essay

The following suggestions should assist you with writing an effective essay to accompany your application for graduate admission. Visit the **KSU Writing Commons** (4th Floor Library) for assistance with writing and proofing your essay.

Free Writing

- Free write for 10-30 minutes.
- Extract the main points and list them at the top of another page.
- Free write on some or all of these points.
- Again list the topics and subtopics.

Preliminary Organization

- Choose the ideas you will use. Keep in mind: desired length, relative importance of ideas, and specific application instructions.
- Put your ideas in a rough sequence.
- Consider specific examples and/or details (to help you avoid generalizations).

Writing, Organizing & Editing

- Write a draft essay - don't worry if it doesn't follow your planned organizational pattern at this point.
- Read your essay out loud - are you addressing your audience? Is your message clear? Does the essay reflect your intent? Do your sentences flow?
- Edit and rewrite.
- Avoid wordiness, generalizations, and clichés. Watch for overuse of passive voice. Make sure your grammar and spelling are perfect.
- Have a friend or advisor read your essay and provide feedback based on the considerations above.
- Make final revisions and proofread carefully.
- Have someone else proofread your near final essay.

Application Checklist

- _____ Complete Essay/Goal Statement
- _____ Take Admission Test
- _____ Secure Letter(s) of Recommendation
- _____ Request Transcripts
- _____ Submit Application(s)
- _____ Complete Financial Aid Forms