

Graduate School Guide

Graduate school is a significant investment of time, money, and resources. Before applying to programs, you need to determine:

- If graduate school is right for you
- How to select a program
- What the application process involves
- When to apply
- How to finance the costs of your graduate education
- What resources the Center for Career Services provides for each step

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Graduate school is an extensive commitment of time, money, focus and hard work. Professional school programs such as law or architecture school generally take three years to complete and cost in excess of \$100,000. PhD programs are seven years or more in length and may be as or more expensive than professional school. Given the high level of investment on your part, it is vital that you thoroughly consider all relevant factors in deciding if you should go, when you should go, where you should go, and what you need to do to achieve your goals.

Is Graduate School Right For You?

Making an informed decision about pursuing a graduate degree requires in-depth self-assessment and long-term goal setting. The following questions will help you assess how your needs, interests, values, skills, and goals compare with the demands of a graduate education:

- What are my long-range and short-range career goals?
- Is graduate study necessary for me to achieve these goals?
- Do I have the interest and abilities to be successful in a graduate program?
- What type of value, if any, do I place on attaining a graduate degree?
- Am I mentally and physically prepared to undertake a long-term academic commitment?
- Do I have other needs that conflict with pursuing a graduate degree?
- Can I realistically invest the time and money required to pursue another academic degree?

We recommend you speak with faculty members, alumni, graduate students in your planned program of study, and professionals working in your intended career field to get their input about the need and timing for graduate study. We can work with you in identifying appropriate questions to solicit the information you need to know.

Selecting a Graduate Program

For post-graduate education, it is the program itself, not the institution, that is more important in the selection process. Make sure to speak directly with faculty, alumni and other individuals about the specific programs and degree you are exploring. Consider the following:

- Prominence and/or accreditation
- Length of the program
- Course selection
- Theoretical or pragmatic approach to the subject matter
- Clinical experiences and/or practical applications of studies
- Philosophical and professional attitudes of the faculty members and the department
- Current research, publications, and professional involvement of the faculty
- Specialties and interests of the faculty
- Required background and credentials of students
- Availability of career services and academic support services
- Financial aid opportunities, cost, and residency requirements
- Student and campus culture
- Size, geographic location, and type of community
- Availability of housing
- Alumni success

We recommend that you consult websites and graduate bulletins from each institution. Most materials include a summary statement and admissions information with the profile of accepted candidates from the previous year. You also can request a placement/outcomes report from the admissions office with information on where graduates of their program are working.

Consult professional journals and association publications to find out which professors are conducting research and publishing in your area of interest. A faculty contact at the school you are applying will be essential to the application process.

NOTE: Some graduate programs require that candidates complete pre-requisite coursework, research, observation or work experience before applying to or matriculating in a program. Make sure you determine all requirements for each of your programs of interest.

Resources for program selection

Career Services' Graduate and Professional Schools webpage (<http://www.colgate.edu/offices/support/careerservices/graduateprofessionalschools>) is an excellent place to gather information on graduate programs, with several searchable databases; we also have a collection of print resources in our library. Many academic departments have resources on graduate school programs for their specific majors and minors. Additionally, each year representatives of several graduate programs visit campus to discuss their programs.

Rankings of graduate and professional school programs, such as *Princeton Review's The Best Colleges*, and *U.S. News & World Report's School Rankings*, are other sources for identifying and evaluating programs. However, keep in mind that it is your fit with the program that is more important than a ranking.

Standardized Admissions Tests

Most graduate schools require that you take a standardized exam as part of your application. Which test you need to take – GRE, GMAT, Miller Analogies Test – depends on which degree you plan to pursue and should be prominently indicated on the program website and application. The weighting of standardized tests in the application process varies by program, but you want to do the best you can, regardless of its import.

Links to learn about and register for standardized exams are located on our website. Read the test makers' websites carefully for explanations of the test and examples of the types of questions. The majority of tests are computer-based, so seek out resources that allow you to practice the exam on the computer. Free programs are offered occasionally at Colgate for students to familiarize themselves with the admission tests and take a practice test.

Whether or not you should enroll in a prep course can only be answered by you. You are the best judge of your ability to master the material and apply your knowledge in a timed test. Career Services' Advisors can assist you in analyzing the pros and cons of taking a prep course. Classroom prep courses range in cost from \$1200 to \$2000.

The Application Process

Applying to graduate school is similar to applying to college, with the primary differences being the emphasis on strong recommendations and clearly articulated goals on the part of the applicant in the application form, statement of purpose, and personal statements.

Application requirements differ substantially among programs, so read each set of instructions thoroughly to make sure you file a complete and timely application. Deadlines range from August before senior year to late spring for fall matriculation. We recommend you develop a checklist of requirements, with all pertinent deadlines, using the “Application Checklist” on page 6 of this guide. Application materials for graduate programs generally include:

- Application forms
- Official academic transcripts
- Letters of recommendation
- Standardized admission test scores
- Personal statement and/or statement of purpose
- Résumé or curriculum vitae
- Portfolio
- Writing samples
- School-specific financial aid/scholarship forms
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
- Personal interview

Application Forms

- Follow instructions carefully and provide accurate information.
- Tailor your materials to specific aspects of the graduate program.
- Complete the forms online.
- Include all requested documents and materials: résumé, fees, personal statement, etc.
- Make copies for your records before sending in the application.
- Create a file for each graduate program to which you are applying, with an application checklist (see page 6) and copies of the application, personal statement, scholarship and financial aid documents, and correspondence.

Transcripts

- Submit official transcripts from all institutions at which you have taken college level courses. You must contact the registrar at each institution in writing to have your transcripts sent.
- Directions for securing Colgate University transcripts are available at <http://colgate.edu/registrar>.
- Admissions committees review transcripts with regard to the overall academic record, not just the GPA, as well as the reputation of the undergraduate institution, rigor and types of courses taken, and course load per semester.

Standardized Admission Tests

- Plan and register for the relevant standardized exams well in advance of the deadlines for your programs. The admission test is an important component of your application and a file will not be complete nor reviewed without this test score.

Letters of Recommendation

- Most post-graduate programs require at least three letters of recommendation from individuals who can speak to your interest in and ability to succeed in a program. Specifics on who, when, and how to ask for a letter of recommendation at <http://www.colgate.edu/offices/support/careerservices/graduateprofessionalschools/credentialfileguidelines/lettersofrecommendation>
- Colgate has a credentials service which holds letters of recommendations for students and alumni for up to ten years after graduation. For details about our credentials service and required forms, See: <http://www.colgate.edu/offices/support/careerservices/graduateprofessionalschools/credentialfileguidelines.html>

NOTE:

Select graduate fields have a centralized collection process for letters of recommendation. You can determine if this is applicable or not to your field from your research.

Personal Statement and Statement of Purpose

- The writing component is a very important element of your application as it allows you to express your interest in and readiness for being part of the program to which you are applying. Additionally, it is an example of how you think and write, a reflection of your personality and intellect, and one of the best ways for you to distinguish and differentiate yourself.
- You must tailor your written materials for each program. Never submit a generic personal statement. For ideas on how to develop your personal statement and essays, see

www.colgate.edu/portaldata/magegallerywww/9aa10602-773e-4ca2-9eb7-2c722f9a1ff7/ImageGallery/writingpersonalstatements.pdf

Interviews

- Interviews are an integral part of the application process for many graduate school programs, yet others may not require or offer interviews. Even if an interview is not required, however, graduate schools encourage you to visit the campus and set up appointments to speak with a admission officers, faculty and current students.
- If an interview is required, we encourage you to review the our Interviewing Guide and schedule a mock interview with a Career Advisor. You can also use Optimal Resume's Interview Prep at <https://colgate.optimalresume.com/> to record a mock interview and get tips on specific interview questions.

Writing Samples and Portfolios

- Many programs, particularly in the creative fields, request samples of your work as part of the application process. Samples may include articles for journalism programs; film scripts, treatments and video work for film school; digital portfolios for media programs or arts programs. Make sure to know exactly what you need, and in what format you need to provide it. You may need to create new materials if you do not already have the requested pieces, so it is critical that you know in advance the

If You Are Not Going Directly to Graduate School

If you are planning to work, volunteer or pursue other opportunities before graduate school, you should still complete several of the steps recommended under the timeline for juniors and seniors on page 6 before you graduate. These include:

- Ask your recommenders to write your letters and submit them for our credentials service if you will be applying within a year of graduation. If you are planning to apply to graduate school two or more years post- Colgate, let your mentors and faculty advisors know of your intention to go to graduate and ask if they will serve as a reference. Maintain a relationship with them through regular e-mails, phone calls, or letters and keep them informed of what you are doing.
- Determine when would be best for you to take the required admission tests. You may feel more confident taking the tests while you are in the structured academic environment, or you may want to wait until after graduation to fully focus on the test preparation. Admission tests scores are usually good for three to five years. Some graduate school programs require more recent admission tests, within the last two years, even if the admission testing service maintains that scores are valid for five years.
- Gather information about programs. It is very convenient to secure information about post-graduate options while you are still on campus, especially with such ready access to faculty members, your classmates, and visiting graduate school representatives.

Financing Your Graduate Education

A major concern in pursuing an advanced degree is the financial obligation. To cover the cost of your graduate education, you may need to pursue a variety of funding avenues. Financial aid information can be found on most graduate/school websites and departmental brochures. It is your responsibility to seek out the information and call the admission and/or financial aid offices with your detailed questions.

You need to complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) to be considered for funding at most schools. Visit <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>. ***Be aware that financial aid deadlines are most often earlier than the graduate program application deadlines.***

Consult with the graduate school's financial aid office on the application processes and eligibility for scholarships and grants available to first year students, then keep researching funding opportunities once you matriculate. Seek out scholarships through civic, professional and fraternal organizations, as well as state agencies; search FASTWEB at www.fastweb.com; and ask the financial aid offices at the schools you are considering for a list of other private scholarship resources.

There are several books on financing your graduate education in our in-house library, including *The Harvard College Guide to Grants*, *Grants for Graduate and Postdoctoral Study*, *The Complete Guide to Postgraduate Funding Worldwide*, and *Foundation Grants to Individuals*. Additionally, you can access a number of financial aid websites at <http://www.colgate.edu/offices/support/careerservices/graduateprofessionalschools/FinancialAid>.

Loans

Most institutions have loan programs for graduate students for private, state, and federally sponsored opportunities. You may need to submit supplemental forms or school-specific applications in addition to the FAFSA.

For federal financial aid purposes all graduate students are considered "independent." However, a graduate school may require your parent's or guardian's financial information for state or institutional funding.

Teaching and Research Graduate Assistantships

Teaching and Research Graduate Assistantships usually carry full or partial tuition remuneration plus a stipend for a commitment of 15- to 25-hours per week. Typically, assistantships are available through the specific department to which you are applying; however, many related areas of study might also have opportunities available.

Competition for these awards can be intense. Apply early and always submit a résumé with your inquiry. If possible, visit the department and arrange a personal interview.

Administrative Graduate Assistantships

Depending on the institution, there may also be Resident and/or Administrative Graduate Assistantships, which would require you to work in a residence hall or administrative office. You will need to inquire directly with the respective office to determine availability and the application process.

Additional Employment

Finding employment at graduate schools is a daunting task. Jobs will not always be openly advertised or presented to you. You MUST take the initiative and approach the different departments and offices that might have employment openings. Talk to people around campus, classmates who are closer to graduation, professors, and other office staff who know of opportunities.

Timeline

Following is a general timeline for the required steps in the graduate school decision-making and application process. Keep in mind, though, that each program has its unique deadlines that you must meet.

Junior Year

- Consult with your professors on their expertise in the graduate school search process.
- Talk to graduate school advisors about application requirements.
- Connect with faculty, administrators or others who you will ask for letters of recommendation.
- Be fully aware of prerequisite courses required to enter your intended graduate school program and be working towards those prerequisites.
- Use the CCS Library to identify programs.
- Research areas of interests, institutions, and programs.
- Speak with alumni, faculty, parents, and friends about their graduate experiences.
- Narrow your list of graduate schools.
- Contact the graduate schools for materials about their programs.
- Research, register, and prepare for appropriate graduate admission tests.
- Investigate national fellowships and scholarships.

Before Senior Year

- Request letters of recommendation from faculty and other individuals who can speak to your abilities and interests.
- Secure application materials and financial aid information for selected schools.
- Check on application and financial aid deadlines and rolling admission policies.
- Register for national application or data assembly service, if available.
- Visit institutions of interest if possible.
- Register for fall graduate admission tests.
- Study sample test questions. Enroll in a test prep course if needed.
- Begin applying for fellowships and scholarships.
- Draft application essays and personal statements.

Senior Year: Fall

- Take graduate admission test(s) if you have not already done so.
- Manage your letters of recommendation by providing additional information and follow up. If utilizing the CCS credentials service, please request letters be sent to CCS as soon as possible so they are available to submit before the deadline.
- Apply for assistantships, fellowships, grants, or other means of aid.
- Complete any required financial aid or scholarship applications for the individual graduate schools.
- Mail completed applications.
- Request that transcripts and letters of recommendation be mailed if you have not obtained them to include in your packet.
- Check with institutions before the deadline to ensure your file is complete.
- Make plans to visit select institutions during winter break.

Senior Year: Spring

- Complete the FAFSA and Financial Aid Profile, if required.
- Send official transcript with fall semester grades
- Check with institutions before the deadline to ensure your file is complete.
- Keep track of acceptances, wait lists, and denials.
- Visit institutions to which you have been accepted.
- Evaluate offers of admission and make your decision.
- Send a deposit to the institution of your choice.
- Be sure to notify the schools you have not selected so they can go to their wait lists.
- Send thank-you letters to your recommenders informing them of your success.

requirements.

