

QUICKSTART GUIDE TO...GRADUATE SCHOOL

ASK YOURSELF THE BIG QUESTIONS

- Graduate school is a big commitment of time and finances, so it's important to be able to articulate to yourself and others why you want to go:
 - What subjects, courses, and projects have you been passionate about?
 - What questions or problems related to your field inspire you?
 - Is a graduate degree necessary for what you want to do in your career?
- What type of program will you attend? There are two types of graduate degrees: academic (Master of Arts, Master of Science, PhD) and professional (MBA, JD, MD, MSW, PsyD).
 - Academic programs focus on communicating new ideas through original research.
 - Professional programs stress the application of knowledge and skills.
- Do you want to go to grad school right after college or would you like to gain work experience first?
- How will you afford graduate school?
 - There are many options for scholarships, loans, research and teaching assistantships, and fellowships. Pursue your funding options early as many are competitive and require preparation in advance of starting your graduate program.
 - See the *CDC Guide to Financing Graduate & Professional School* for more information.

PREPARING TO APPLY

- Most graduate programs will require standardized admissions testing. Requirements vary by type of programs and school, but common exams include:
 - Graduate Record Exam (GRE) www.ets.org
 - Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) www.mba.com/the-gmat.aspx
 - Miller Analogies Test (MAT) www.milleranalogies.com
 - Law School Admission Test (LSAT) www.lsac.org/jd/lsat/test-dates-deadlines.asp
 - Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/reserving/
- If English is not your first language, you may be required to take an exam such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

COMMON COMPONENTS OF THE APPLICATION

- **Personal Statement.** Your statement allows the admission committee to picture you as an individual and understand your goals. See the *CDC Guide to Writing Personal Statements*.
- **Letters of Recommendation.** Develop strong relationships with professors and supervisors throughout your undergraduate years and keep in touch after graduation: these are the people you will be asking to write you a recommendation.
- **Interviews.** Some graduate schools may invite you to interview with them upon reviewing your application. You can practice interviewing with career counselors at the CDC!
- **Transcripts.** You will need to send your undergraduate transcripts from Macalester
- **Application Forms and Fees.** Each form should be thoughtfully filled out and carefully proofread. Fees are often associated with applications, but may be able to be waived by the school's department of financial aid.

ALTERNATIVE PLANS

- Consider the possible outcomes for your application process. If you need help working through any stage of your decision making (for example, your top choice school hasn't responded yet, but your second choice made you an offer), CDC counselors are happy to help.
- If you do not receive an offer that suits you, consider if you will apply again next year or not. If you apply again, consider gaining relevant job, internship, or volunteer consider experience; also consider studying for and re-taking an admissions exam.

The Graduate School Application Checklist

Though each school has a wide variety of requirements in their application process, the following checklist provides an outline of materials required for most programs. Note, law school and medical school often have significantly different application requirements and schedules. Speak with your pre-med or pre-law advisor for more information specific to that application process.

12 to 15 Months before Enrollment

- _____ Research schools and funding options
- _____ Seek advice from faculty and professionals in your field, including Macalester alumni
- _____ Register for, prepare for, and take admissions tests
- _____ Request letters of recommendation
- _____ Draft your personal statement

9 to 12 Months before Enrollment

- _____ Revise your personal statement
- _____ Confirm your letters of recommendation
- _____ Submit application forms and fees
- _____ Request and submit transcripts
- _____ Prepare for and conduct interviews
- _____ Follow up with each program

6 Months before Enrollment

- _____ Complete financial aid applications
- _____ Consider your options

(Adapted from "Planning for Graduate School" by Bowdoin College Career Planning Center).