



Oregon State University  
**Cascades**

## Graduate & Professional School

### *OSU-Cascades Career Development Center*

[Self-discovery](#) and [researching career options](#) are essential steps in the graduate and professional school decision making process. Graduate school is not a good “Plan B”. Although an advanced degree is necessary in areas like medicine, law, and higher education, it is not necessary for every field and can be a costly mistake if you don’t take the time to thoroughly investigate your options.

### Explore Your Options

[Peterson’s](#), [GradSchools.com](#), and [Affordable Colleges Online](#) are a few good resources for researching graduate programs and schools. Additional resources such as the [U.S. News & World Report Graduate School Rankings](#) and [The Top American Research Universities](#) can also be helpful to understand program reputation and credibility.

Faculty members are a great resource when researching graduate school options. They will be aware of some of the best programs in your field, and with an understanding of who you are, may be able to suggest universities that would be a good fit for you both academically and personally.

A few things to consider:

- Time commitment (2 vs. 4 year program)
- Part-time vs. full-time programs
- Private vs. public institutions
- Entrance requirements
- Program approaches/specializations
- Research opportunities
- Faculty and teaching methods
- Program reputation/rank
- Placement success of program graduates
- Tuition cost and financial aid availability
- Housing/living expenses
- Available student resources

Use your research to choose 5 to 10 program possibilities and narrow down your list by talking to faculty, alumni and professionals in the field. You can also schedule a campus visit or meeting with a faculty member at the school.

### Admissions Exams

Graduate and professional programs require exams similar to the SAT/ACT you took when applying to college. The exams differ depending on the focus of the program that you are applying for. Some exams can be scheduled to take at a time that is convenient for you, however, some have pre-scheduled dates that you are required to register for and attend. Below is a list of the most common exams, but not an exhaustive list of all exams that are available:

**GRE:** general programs: <http://www.ets.org/gre>

**GMAT:** business programs: <http://www.mba.com/>

**MCAT:** medical school: <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/>

**LSAT:** law school: <http://www.lsac.org/>

There are several resources to assist in preparing for these exams including classes, print and online resources. [Princeton Review](#) and [Kaplan](#) are two reputable companies that offer these resources.

### Completing Applications

In addition to the admissions test, most programs will ask you to submit a [resume](#) or CV (curriculum vitae) and a [personal statement](#), in addition to some short answer or essay questions. A CV is a longer version of your resume that displays more of your academic success (classes, research, presentations, conferences, etc.). A personal statement is a brief essay highlighting your motivation to go into the program, what skills and experience you will bring, and what you aspire to do with your degree upon graduation. See our Personal Statement Guidebook for more information.

Some programs will also hold [interviews](#) on-campus with faculty, current students and admissions representatives. You want to prepare for these interviews the same way you would for a job. See our Interviewing Guidebook and schedule a mock interview with a staff member in the Career Development Center.

## Letters of Recommendation

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Most schools will also ask for two or three letters of recommendation. These recommendations need to come from people who know you well enough in an academic or professional setting to be able to speak to your strengths and experience. Your best resources will be faculty members, advisors, and professional supervisors.

Once you have identified who you would like to write letters for you, take time to meet individually with each person. Explain your goals, why you want to pursue a particular graduate program, and why you chose them to write a letter for you. Giving each person a copy of your transcript, resume, and related projects or research papers can help them to put together a strong letter for you. Be sure to also bring the official recommendation forms from the graduate program (if needed) along with a stamped and pre-addressed envelope for convenience.

## Funding Your Education

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Funding opportunities are available through OSU graduate programs as well as numerous external programs for fellowships and scholarships: <http://gradschool.oregonstate.edu/finance/fellowships-and-scholarships>

Graduate assistantships are typically offered at graduate schools and can include research, teaching assistant positions and administrative jobs. Assistantships can then cover part, if not all, of your tuition. Contact the graduate programs office at the institutions that you are interested in to inquire about assistantship opportunities.

## Application Timeline

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Be aware of application deadlines. Most programs collect applications between December and March, however, not all. Many schools also use rolling admission in which they review applications up until the deadline. In this case, the sooner you submit your application the better. The following is a general timeline to follow but check each schools specific deadline first to make sure that you are handing everything in on time:

### Spring of Junior Year/Summer Before Senior Year

- Schedule date to take the required admissions exam and request that your scores be electronically sent to each school where you are applying. If taking the MCAT or LSAT, take the test in spring of your junior year.
- Request application information from the schools you are interested in

### Fall of Senior Year

- Retake admissions exam if necessary
- Update and finalize your resume/CV
- Write and review several drafts of your personal statement or essay
- Meet with the Career Development Center to review your resume/CV and personal statement/essay
- Ask a faculty member to review your personal statement/essay
- Schedule a time to talk with faculty and ask if they are willing to write a letter of recommendation for you
- Request copies of your transcript be sent to each school you are applying to from the Registration Office
- Submit completed applications and application fees for each school before the published deadline

### Winter of Senior Year

- Check-in with schools to make sure that they have received everything in your application
- Request scholarship/fellowship/assistantship information from each school you applied to
- File your Federal Income Tax Return in order to apply for FAFSA
- Complete FAFSA application forms online
- Prepare for admission/assistantship interviews by scheduling and appointment with Career Development
- Attend preview days/information sessions/interviews for each institution

### Spring of Senior Year

- Follow-up with schools that you have not heard from and make your final decision
- Submit commitment forms and/or fees to the institution you have chosen and register for classes
- Send thank-you notes to people who wrote your recommendation letters, informing them of your success