Chapter 6 - Choosing & Applying to Professional or Graduate School

What is Graduate School?
Unlike undergraduate programs which provide a broad education in a wide range of subjects, a graduate curriculum involves concentrated research and coursework in a specialized area. The graduate degree you decide to pursue depends on your personal and professional career interests and goals.

Master’s Programs
A master’s degree may take one to two years of full-time study. Part-time programs are available and are often a good option for those who will continue working throughout their studies. People choose a master’s program for the following reasons:
• Required for a professional career (Teaching, Psychotherapy, some healthcare specialties)
• Higher earning power/more competitive job applicant
• Greater knowledge in their career field
• Advancement in their current position
• Stepping stone to a doctoral degree
• Strong interest in the field

A master's degree can be unrelated to your undergraduate degree. Typically, pre-requisite courses are needed. In some cases, this coursework must be completed before you apply; in other cases, you may be admitted on the contingency that the courses will be completed prior to the start of the program.

Standardized tests are generally required; typically, the GRE or GMAT (business programs). The culmination of the Master’s program requires a thesis or comprehensive exam.

There are many different study options for master's degree programs, as well as variations within the same academic field. Review program websites to learn more about these programs, application requirements, and deadlines.

Doctoral Programs
The doctoral degree usually requires a minimum of four to six years of full-time study. The first one to three years will be spent on coursework, followed by “qualifying” examinations to demonstrate factual and theoretical knowledge of your field. After passing the exams, you will then be permitted to move on to independent research and begin work on a doctoral dissertation. Like the master’s program, there are different types of doctorate degrees.

Professional Doctorate
The most common degrees required for professional practice are the MD for medicine, and the JD for law. For psychologists, the PsyD is an option as is the more research-oriented PhD. Educators may consider earning an EdD for career advancement.

Research Doctorate
Requirements for this degree usually involve coursework and an independent research project. The degrees awarded, the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) or Doctor of Education (EdD), are designed as preparation for creative activity and sometimes original research, often in association with college or university teaching. Although many PhDs pursue careers in an academic environment, numerous career options are also available in corporate and government settings. For example, a PhD can lead to research and development positions in companies where state-of-the-art products are a priority, and to positions with government agencies where the skill to analyze large amounts of complex data is essential.
Is Graduate School Right for You?
The decision to attend graduate school is not one to be taken lightly. It is a huge time and financial commitment, so ask yourself what your motivations are for attending graduate school. Being honest with yourself is the best way to establish if graduate school is right for you.

The Right Reasons to Attend Graduate School
• You have a clear sense of the career you want to pursue and an advanced degree will boost you in that field.
• You have a love for scholarly pursuits and don’t mind that you’ll be studying and doing research for several years.
• You are a career changer whose new interests have little connection to your undergraduate major. A graduate degree could add to your marketability in the job market.

The Wrong Reasons to Attend Graduate School
• You think that taking time off between your undergraduate and graduate studies will be viewed negatively by admissions counselors. In fact, most admissions counselors say that spending time working in your field, conducting research, volunteering or travelling are regarded positively, because applicants gain valuable skills and knowledge through these experiences and become more self-aware and mature individuals.
• You haven’t decided what kind of career you want to pursue and would rather go back to school to “find yourself” or to postpone the “real world.”
• You’re getting pressure from your parents, friends, or professors.
• You think graduate school is a last resort because you won’t be able to get a job. Don’t buy into this myth.

Attend graduate school if you are working toward a goal. Don’t use graduate school as an excuse to postpone making a career decision or to avoid looking for a job.

UCLA has equipped you with many skills that employers seek when hiring entry level job candidates. You will discover that your problem solving, critical thinking, teamwork, and communications skills are highly valuable in the job market.

Questions to Ask Yourself
• What do I want to accomplish in my lifetime?
• What are my long term and short term professional goals?
• Is graduate school necessary for me to achieve these goals?
• Am I simply postponing my career planning and decision making?
• Will the amount of time and money spent on a program ultimately translate into greater career mobility and financial possibilities?
• Am I willing to meet the extensive research, course work, and major paper demands of another academic program?
• Would continuing education alternatives, such as University Extension, vocational school, community college, or professional seminars and workshops assist in achieving my goals?

Graduate School Timetable
The guidelines in this timetable are general recommendations to follow when planning for graduate or professional school. Most deadlines for the Fall’s entering class are between January and March of your senior year. Some schools follow a different time schedule, so be sure to check with your prospective program for specific deadlines and adhere to them carefully.
Junior Year

- Attend The JumpStart Series® events to meet admissions representatives from various graduate and professional programs and working professionals from respective occupations, who share their career journey and provide great advice on how to prepare for a career in their field.

- Review your career goals before considering enrollment in a graduate program.

- Research graduate schools and specific programs in your field through books, online services, and discussions with your advisor, faculty, and current graduate students.

- Write for catalogues and application materials to individual schools.

- Attend UCLA’s Graduate & Professional School Fair in the Fall on Wednesday, October 30, 2013, and other on campus events and start using our resources.

- Evaluate the programs and narrow down your choices.

- Check the application deadlines and rolling admissions policies.

- Register and prepare for appropriate graduate admission tests.

Summer Between Junior & Senior Year

- Participate in a summer research internship. These programs are offered at all ten UC campuses between the junior and senior year.

- Visit graduate schools that interest you the most.

- Write your personal essay.

Senior Year – Fall

- Take the required admissions test.

- Request letters of recommendation. Open an LOR file: career.ucla.edu/LOR.

- Order official transcripts from the Registrar’s Office.

- Mail your completed applications - the earlier, the better. Deadlines are important so check dates carefully. Don’t jeopardize your application by mailing it late or incomplete.

- Research fellowships, loans, assistantships, and work study options. Obtain and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Senior Year – Spring

- Check with all graduate schools before deadlines to verify that your application, letters of recommendations, and transcripts have been received.

- Schedule interviews and other campus visits.

- Select a school from those that have accepted you.

- Mail a deposit to the graduate school you decide to attend. Notify other graduate schools that have accepted you of your decision to attend another program.

- Send thank you notes to the writers of your recommendation letters and inform them of your graduate school plans.

For additional information and program specific timelines, please visit the Career Center’s website: career.ucla.edu/GradSchool
The Personal Statement

Your essay will be read by an Admissions Committee composed of members of your future profession or academic discipline. They will be seeking depth and substance, along with a true passion and commitment to your field of study. In general, the admissions committee hopes to learn about your personal characteristics, such as creativity, intellectual curiosity and achievement, ability to overcome hardships, recognition for exceptional performance, unique talents, initiative and motivation, leadership, persistence, service to others, and multicultural experiences. You should not attempt to address all of these factors. A better approach is to describe what is important to you, why it is important, and how you have demonstrated that importance in your life. Essay requirements will vary depending upon each institution's criteria for evaluating applicants.

Career Center Library/Lab Resources – Specialized Personal Statements

• Essays That Will Get You Into Business School
• Great Personal Statements for Law School
• Medical School Essays That Made a Difference
Need Help With Your Personal Statement?
Career Center Workshops on How to Write Winning Personal Statements
For the most current listing of workshops, go to career.ucla.edu/workshops.

Personal Statement Critique Sessions
New schedules are posted at the Career Center each quarter. Online registration required through BruinView™. Log in at career.ucla.edu.

Personal Statement Resources for Graduate and Professional Programs (located in the Career Center Library / Lab):
- Graduate Admission Essays
- How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School
- Perfect Personal Statements
- Real Essays for College and Grad School

Personal Statement Disclaimer
The personal statement critique sessions provided by the UCLA Career Center focus exclusively on content and thematic issues. Given the time constraints for these sessions, students should not anticipate intensive grammatical, spelling, and syntax revisions to take place during these meetings.

General
From Northwestern University Careers Services comes this Graduate and Professional School guide that contains a to-the-point section on the Personal Statement. www.northwestern.edu/careers/media/pdfs/PersonalStatements.pdf

Berkeley’s Career Center has created a well thought out step-by-step process on writing the personal statement. http://career.berkeley.edu/Grad/GradStatement.stm

Comments from Admissions Officials
Ever wonder what admission officials are really looking for? Perfect Personal Statements by Mark Alan Stewart (available in the Career Center Library/Lab) contains comments about the personal statement directly from admissions officials from top medical, law, and business programs!

Specifically for Medical School
For a very useful six step process to writing the personal statement and for sample essays utilizing various techniques and angles, go to www.studentdoctor.net/essays.

Essays That Will Get You Into Medical School, by Daniel Kaufman, et al. (Available in the Career Center Library / Lab)

Specifically for Law School
The University of Maryland provides an explanation of what they look for in the personal statement: www.law.umaryland.edu/prospective/applying/jd.html#statement.

Essays That Will Get You Into Law School, by Daniel Kaufman, et al. (Available in the Career Center Library / Lab)

Letter of Reference Services
The Letter of Reference Services allows UCLA undergraduates, graduate, and alumni (who pay an annual activation fee) to store their letters of reference for graduate and professional school programs with our department. Since these letters are solely for the purpose of supporting the application to graduate and professional school programs, we will send letters to admissions offices at universities and colleges, as well as to AMCAS, AADSAS, and LSAC (medical, dental, and law school services respectively). We will not send letters to support applications to scholarships, fellowships, or internships. Since the purpose of these services is to send letters to multiple graduate and professional schools, we can only accept non-specifically addressed letters. For more information, visit career.ucla.edu/LOR.
# UCLA Pre-Professional Services

## Referral Sheet

Pre-Professional program planning services are offered by the Career Center and Academic Counseling offices.

### UCLA CAREER CENTER

**What:**
- Pre-Professional Counseling, M-F, 10am-4pm (see [career.ucla.edu](http://career.ucla.edu) for exceptions)
- Test information for MCAT, LSAT, OAT, DAT, GMAT, GRE
- Application information for AMCAS, LSDAS, AADSAS
- Assistance with personal statements (Development and Review)
- Letters of Reference Service, [career.ucla.edu/LOR](http://career.ucla.edu/LOR)
- Pre-Professional Workshops (Navigating the Application Process / Writing the Personal Statement)
- Attend Pre-Professional JumpStart Conferences (Medicine, Law, Pharmacy, Psychology, etc.)
- [career.ucla.edu/JumpStart](http://career.ucla.edu/JumpStart)
- Pre-Health / Pre-Law Career information and timeline information
- Pre-Health / Pre-Law internship information
- Mock interviews for medical / professional school – register through BruinView™ at [career.ucla.edu](http://career.ucla.edu)
- Medical School Statistics for UCLA Graduates can be found at [career.ucla.edu/MedSchoolStats](http://career.ucla.edu/MedSchoolStats)
- Pre-Health student groups affiliated with the UCLA Career Center can be found at [career.ucla.edu/GraduateSchoolPreProfessionalServices](http://career.ucla.edu/GraduateSchoolPreProfessionalServices)

**Where:**
- Strathmore Building, Second Floor, 501 Westwood Plaza ([career.ucla.edu/HowToFindUs](http://career.ucla.edu/HowToFindUs))

### ACADEMIC AND COURSE ENROLLMENT QUESTIONS ARE HANDLED BY ACADEMIC COUNSELING STAFF

#### COLLEGE COUNSELING

**What:**
- Course planning for first and second year students

**Where:**
- AAP Students: 1209 Campbell Hall
- College Honors Students: A311 Murphy Hall
- Athletes: Morgan Center
- All other L&S Students: A316 Murphy Hall

#### DEPARTMENTAL COUNSELING

**What:**
- Course planning for third and fourth year students
- Recommended academic plans for application and entrance exam preparation
- Major and transfer requirements
- Articulation, transfer evaluations, and substitutions

**Where:**
- Check [www.registrar.ucla.edu/soc/counsel.htm](http://www.registrar.ucla.edu/soc/counsel.htm) for location and contact information regarding specific departments

**Email:**
- Email questions: Questions will be answered by the next school day
  - Pre-health related questions: prehealth@college.ucla.edu
  - Pre-law related questions: prelaw@college.ucla.edu

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First Year

- Attend pre-professional workshops at the UCLA Career Center.
- Check your My.UCLA homepage at my.ucla.edu and career.ucla.edu for details.
- Meet with a career counselor to explore all options. Check the UCLA Career Center homepage career.ucla.edu for details.
- Meet with your college counselor or counseling assistant for program planning and course selection.
- Begin extracurricular activities and participate in pre-professional student organizations.
- Develop a pre-professional course of study.
- Consider summer internship, work, or volunteer experience. (Register with BruinView™ at career.ucla.edu.)
- Open an LOR file in the Career Center at career.ucla.edu/LOR.
- Visit the AAP Mentoring Office. Attend workshops on pre-professional topics. 1202 Campbell Hall 310.794.4186
  www.ugeducation.ucla.edu/aap

Second Year

- Continue with extracurricular activities, including leadership.
- Fine-tune your college schedule.
- Maintain a strong GPA. Start thinking about taking the appropriate entrance exams (MCAT, LSAT, GMAT, etc.).
- Visit Internship and International Opportunities (2nd Floor) in the Career Center for information on preprofessional internships. Make sure you sign up for access to BruinView™ at career.ucla.edu to get internship leads.
- Apply for special summer pre-professional or research programs.
- Complete a practice AMCAS (American Medical College Application Service) or other professional school application.
- Get to know your professors.
- Explore entry-level research opportunities; apply for research scholarships (visit the URC-Humanities and Social Sciences or the URC-Science, Engineering and Math/Center for Academic and Research Excellence).
  www.college.ucla.edu/urc-care
  Email: urcem@lifesci.ucla.edu
- Visit the Center for Community Learning (A265 Murphy Hall) for information on service learning courses, community-based research, internships, the Civic Engagement Minor, and AmeriCorps scholarship programs
  www.college.ucla.edu/up/ccl

Third Year

- Study and register for your entrance exam - consider taking a preparation course or a practice exam.
- Meet with a career counselor to review timeline to apply.
- Meet with your major advisor and college counselors to fine-tune the academic plan.
- Research your graduate programs of choice - check websites, look for special programs, talk to current students, and visit early.
- Request letters of recommendation.
- Develop your personal statement.
- Obtain transcripts to take care of any pending changes or notations.
- Start applications this summer.
- Sign up for a mock interview at the Career Center (go to BruinView™ at career.ucla.edu).
- Apply for upper-division research scholarships.
- Prepare proposal for Honors Thesis or Departmental Honors research experience.
- Enroll in an academic, credit-bearing internship through the Center for Community Learning.
  www.college.ucla.edu/up/ccl

Fourth Year

- Maintain strong GPA - schedule courses carefully to work with the interview process.
- Complete appropriate secondary/supplemental applications.
- Meet with college and major advisors to review graduation requirements.
- Send in acceptance offers or keep track of waiting list results.