

GRADUATE / PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL TIPS AND TIMELINE

The most important element in choosing the right graduate program is the specific career goal that the program helps you achieve. This knowledge is critical in order to make a good decision. Many students make the mistake of going to graduate school without knowing specifically what they are trying to achieve professionally; they hope that the program will help them figure it out. While it is true that your program will contribute to career decision-making, the more prudent approach is to wait to attend graduate school until you know which skills and knowledge you need to further your specific career goals.

MASTER'S VS. PH.D.?

- A component of selecting the right graduate program is deciding on whether you want to pursue a master's or a doctoral degree.
- Master's programs typically take one to two years and they are designed for those desiring course work in specialized fields. Most master's-prepared students will seek work after getting their degree; some continue or will return for a doctoral degree after a few years.
- Doctoral programs typically take five to six years, or more, to complete and involve the development of an area of expertise in your field. Candidates spend the first two to three years taking courses and then they engage in independent research that culminates in a dissertation. Often, there is a teaching component to a doctoral program. Doctoral students are trained for a life in academia, but these students also have the skills to pursue satisfying careers in alternative fields, such as business, government and non-profits.

TIMELINE AND CHECKLIST

Once you have established your goals for going to graduate school, here are a few factors to consider:

- **Reputation/Status in the Field** — How is this program thought of by the people who will be evaluating you after you complete your studies?
- **Competitiveness** — How difficult is entry into the program and how do your qualifications match up with those of the school's typical student?
- **Profile of the Student Body** — What jobs/industries are most students pursuing? What is the average student age? What is the ratio of part-time vs. full-time students? Lastly, how do all of these answers fit with where you are?
- **Career Planning Assistance** — When you are finishing up the program, in what ways can the institution support you in finding a position?
- **Program Cost** — Are scholarships, assistantships or other sources of aid available? In most cases, you will be expected to borrow a significant amount of money to cover tuition, fees and the cost of living during a master's degree program. Doctoral programs often come with funding in the form of a teaching or research assistantship. However, doctoral students must sometimes borrow to cover a portion of their costs.

GRADUATE / PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL TIPS AND TIMELINE

TIMELINE: SPRING / SUMMER

- **Speak with your faculty advisor and other faculty in your field.**

Conventions for applying to graduate school vary from field to field. One of your first steps in understanding both the application process, as well as what a master's or doctoral program entails, is to speak directly with those who live the academic life. Brown faculty will advise you on what distinguishes programs; how and when to make contacts with potential advisors (particularly for doctoral programs); questions to consider when determining fit; and whether to consider pursuing a master's or doctoral programs.

- **Research graduate/professional school programs and their requirements.**

The following links will aid your search:

- www.graduateguide.com
- www.usnews.com/rankings
- www.gradschools.com
- www.petersons.com/graduate-student.asp
- www.kaplan.com

- **Research financial aid sources, scholarships, and fellowships**

Assistantships are the most common method of funding graduate study. They can consist of teaching, research and other types of administrative or professional assistantships (such as the library, residence halls or student services). Teaching and research assistant positions are most often available through the department in which you study.

Many fellowships and scholarships are also available. Here are some resources for you to search:

- **The Brown Fellowships Office**
- **Fastweb.com**
- **Gradschools.com** — an extensive list of graduate fellowships, including government agencies and independent organizations
- Other university sites

- **Learn about application procedures**

Use the addresses in the web sites listed above. In most cases, you will use an individual school's online application to track all of the aspects of your application. You can contact graduate schools and/or departments directly if you need more information.

- **Determine test requirements, test dates and application deadlines.**

Admissions materials will indicate the tests needed for the application and the school's final deadline schedules. For registration information, see "National Graduate/Professional School Test Information" on the next page.

Once the information is known, complete each test registration form and take the appropriate tests.

GRADUATE / PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL TIPS AND TIMELINE

- **Request letters of recommendation.**

In many cases, you will need letters of recommendation from faculty. In addition, some programs may also want letters from others who know you in a supervisory, mentoring or coaching capacity. You can compile these documents on [Interfolio](#), an online dossier service. To learn more about this service and to set up an account, see [CareerLAB's FAQ page about Interfolio](#). If you need assistance using Interfolio, contact their Help Desk at 1-877-773-6546 or help@interfolio.com.

- **Write application statements/essay**

Application essays and personal statements should be targeted to each specific program that you apply to; it is probable that you will write multiple essays. These essays should state why you are a good fit and why you want to attend that specific program. To show that you have done your research, make sure to refer to the program's unique characteristics in your essays. Personal statements for doctoral programs often involve indicating your research interests.

Many Brown resources can be helpful for this area of the application. Sources that can provide you help include CareerLAB, [the Writing Center](#), and Brown's faculty and deans.

Also check:

www.thoughtco.com/graduate-school-admissions-essays-4132539

TIMELINE: FALL / WINTER

- **Submit applications, letters of recommendation, transcripts and required fees by deadline.**

Be sure all materials arrive at the school by the deadline. In most cases, schools will allow you to track online which materials they've received. However, you should feel free to call the schools to which you've applied if you are unsure about the status of any of your materials. Keep a record of online application confirmation emails. Note that during peak times, transcript requests can take up to 10 business days.

- **Attend graduate/professional school forums and presentations.**

Graduate school fairs are held regionally during the fall. Additionally, many admissions officers visit Brown to provide application and financial aid information.

TIMELINE: SPRING

- **Visit schools and contact current students and alumni of program.**

Once accepted, try to visit the schools, attend classes and talk with current grad students or alumni to discover in-depth information pertaining to graduate student life and future career possibilities.

- **Discuss acceptances and career options.**

Call on faculty, deans and CareerLAB staff for different perspectives.

GRADUATE / PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL TIPS AND TIMELINE

RESOURCES OF THE WEB

- **The Princeton Review**
Test tips, financial aid and related links for Graduate, Business, Law and Medical School.
- **Peterson's Education Center**
Search over 30,000 graduate programs and 900 MBA programs.
- **MBA & GMAT Information**
Excellent comprehensive website for general MBA information.

NATIONAL GRADUATE / PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL TEST INFORMATION

Test registration information is available on the following web sites:

- **Princeton Review**
- **Kaplan**
- **LSAT**
- **MCAT**
- **GRE (Subject)**
Offered each November, December, and April (Not always at Brown).
- **GRE (General)**
Available year-round at test centers worldwide.
- **GMAT**
Available year-round at test centers worldwide.

For more support, set up an appointment with a Career Counselor through Handshake.