

Graduate School Basics

Deciding to go to graduate school

Attending graduate school is a big decision. It takes a great commitment on your part in terms of time, money, work and determination. People go to graduate school for a variety of reasons, some of which are listed below. Take time to seriously consider your reasons for attending graduate school.

- A graduate degree is required for going into certain professions: law, health care, teaching, school administration, social work, engineering and scientific research to name a few.
- A graduate degree can help you improve your professional position economically or in terms of responsibility. An advanced degree is *likely* to help you but *not automatically*.
- Advanced training in a discipline or profession will give you greater flexibility in the marketplace. You can move to different jobs within your field more readily or change your career entirely, taking with you the knowledge and strategic skills you have acquired.
- A graduate degree can give you the personal satisfaction and confidence derived from advanced learning.

Examine information on your field in Occupational Outlook Handbook (listed under web resources) to learn about training requirements for the direction you hope to go with your degree.

Questions to ask yourself

Graduate school can be both challenging and satisfying. You will be expected to do extensive reading and writing and often present your work in classes. You will also have the opportunity to study in depth in your area of interest. Take the time to yourself some important questions that will influence your decision:

- How goal oriented am I?
- How strongly do I care about the career I am considering?
- How important is an advanced degree to my future career track?
- How hard am I willing to work? Can I motivate myself to study intensively at this time?
- How willing am I to live with fewer comforts and less financial security than I presently enjoy?
- Do I have the aptitude for and intellectual attraction to the field I am contemplating?
- Did I enjoy my undergraduate academic experience?
- Am I ready for more focused, intensive academic work?
- Do I have a good understanding of various graduate and career options?
- Have I done enough exploration to feel confident about the choice I am making?

And again, do research on your field, talk to professionals in your field, and visit your potential program.

Preparing for graduate school

If you have a strong reason for attending graduate school and you have seriously considered how it will affect you, use the following steps to prepare yourself for admissions:

1. Identify yourself as a potential teacher, manager, entrepreneur, or other professional. Make sure you are suited by temperament, aptitude and values for a particular graduate program. Use Self-Assessment exercises to evaluate your experiences, values, interests, strengths and skills and learn how they point you toward a career and occupation you will find satisfying.
2. Create or update your resume. Use this opportunity to take an inventory of your skills, strengths, and knowledge before you begin your application.

3. Create a timeline for your application process and include important test and application deadlines.
4. Learn about the different aspects of graduate education and the admissions procedures to determine your preparedness for entrance. Talk to friends and students currently enrolled in the program you want to attend. Talk with your professors and UHWO staff about what you can expect of graduate school.
5. Explore graduate program opportunities and the variety of degree offerings to determine whether particular graduate training can put you in a stronger career position. Review information on your field in the Occupational Outlook Handbook and learn about occupations that pertain to your graduate program or job search.
6. Assess your academic qualifications for graduate school. Find out if you need additional credits in subjects related to the field in which you plan to study. Talk with graduate school representatives at their campus, at career fairs, and graduate panels.
7. Find out if a standardized test is required for admission to your program and then make time to prepare for it. If required, your score often plays a big part in the admission process. Get test prep books at local bookstores or libraries.
8. Prepare a strong personal statement, essay, or set of objectives. Take time to clarify your educational goals for graduate school and describe them in your statement. Like your research papers, plan to take your writing through several drafts and have others read and edit it.
9. Get “real world” experience in a job, internship or practicum to gain hands-on-knowledge in your field. For some programs, you may be required to have experience in the field before you apply.
10. Market your strengths to admissions committees. They appreciate candidates who present themselves fully and honestly, and do not display false modesty. Request an interview from the admissions chair if they don’t require one and prepare beforehand much as you would for a job interview.
11. Examine the many ways to finance your graduate education. Find out about scholarships and financial aid for which you may be eligible. Be sure you are willing to undertake debt, if necessary, and will be able to manage it.
12. Prepare your applications carefully, limiting essays to the required length. Keep a file of dates of transcript submissions and of correspondence with faculty or employers who are sending references or letters of recommendation to the admissions committees.

Adapted from Greene, H.R. & M.W. Greene, *Making It Into a Top Graduate School*, New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Application Requirements for Graduate School

The following are items that may be required in your admissions application. ***Be sure to check requirements so that your application is complete.***

- A complete application, often one to the university and another one to your graduate program department.

- Current transcripts.
- Application fees.
- A personal statement (you may be directed to write about a specific topic or you may write more generally about your academic and career goals).
- Standardized test results (GRE, LSAT, MCAT, GMAT, DAT, or MAT).
- Letters of recommendation from former faculty or administrators.
- A personal interview. If the program is interested in your application, the departmental dean or a faculty member will interview you over the phone or in person to get a better sense of your fit with their institution and program. If your program does not require an interview, call and request one. Prepare and present yourself as you would in a job interview.

Websites for Graduate School:

General Graduate School Information

<http://www.mba.com/mba>

<http://www.gradschools.com/>

<http://www.petersons.com/GradChannel/>

http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/rankindex_brief.php

UH Manoa graduate programs

<http://www.hawaii.edu/graduatestudies/admissions/html/admissions.htm> includes requirements for admission to the university.

<http://www.hawaii.edu/graduatestudies/fields/html/fields.htm> includes departmental requirements for admission to program and description of program content.

UH Hilo graduate programs

<http://www.uhh.hawaii.edu/academics/graduate/>

Chaminade University of Honolulu graduate programs

<http://www.chaminade.edu/admissions/grad/>

Hawai'i Pacific University graduate programs

<http://www.hpu.edu/index.cfm?contentID=281>

On-Line Graduate Programs

<http://distance.gradschools.com/>

General Career Information

Career Kokua, <http://www.careerkokua.org>. Information on professions in Hawai'i. Also materials on preparing for your job search. **Username: uhwo, Password: zawru2e9.**

Occupational Outlook Handbook, <http://www.bls.gov/oco/>. Click the A – Z index to get national information on various occupations.

Preparing for Standardized tests

Your first step is to contact publishers at the following websites to get bulletins or sample tests. The sites direct you to registration information, what's included on the test, how best to prepare for the test, and samples you can download.

GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test) - <http://www.mba.com/mba/TaketheGMAT>

GRE (Graduate Record Examinations) - <http://www.gre.org/ttindex.html>

LSAT (Law School Admission Test) – www.lsac.org

MCAT (Medical College Admission Test) - <http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat/>

DAT (Dental Admissions Testing) - <http://www.ada.org/prof/ed/testing/dat/registering.asp>

You can prepare for your exam in a number of ways. You can get help from commercial test preparation centers such as The Princeton Review and Kaplan Test Centers. They assist people with group courses, online courses and individual tutoring. These may be fairly expensive. UH Manoa Outreach College also offers test preparation. Tutors in the general public may have experience in test preparation and can help you study for your exam. Using these options will cost but they will pay for themselves once you're out in the workforce.

Many people choose to study on their own. If you decide to go this route, check the websites listed above for free test preparation software and materials. You can also go to Borders or other bookstores and find study materials published by different companies. However you choose to prepare, start well in advance so you have ample time to review concepts and get accustomed to the test-taking process. If you're working on your own, take a practice test (about 3 hours) and after scoring it, find your weak points and practice to overcome these. After taking 4 or 5 practice tests, you'll be surprised at how much you've learned and how smoothly you can now go through the complete test process.

Financing Graduate School

Graduate school is a major investment, frequently requiring students to take out loans to pay for the cost of their program. Some students work for several years to save money to pay for school; others borrow up front and pay back their lender after they've completed their degree.

Tuition costs vary depending on the type of university and the program. Local examples include the following and are **approximates, based on 2006 figures**:

UH Manoa – General - \$243/credit	Nursing - \$385/credit
MBA - \$454/credit	Law - \$537/credit
Medicine - \$761/credit	

UH Hilo – \$180/credit

Argosy University – MA Clinical Psychology/ PsyD Psychology – \$884/credit
MA Marriage & Family/ MBA - \$546/credit
MA Education - \$546/credit

Chaminade University of Honolulu – \$465/credit

Hawai'i Pacific University – \$520/credit

University of Phoenix - \$480/credit

All universities have Federal financial aid available. The primary source of federal aid at the graduate level is loans and some work study. Scholarships and fellowships are available through university

programs and are primarily offered on the basis of merit and outstanding overall achievement. Private foundations and organizations also offer scholarships based on merit and/or need. Some student work study is available to graduate students, as are departmental graduate assistantships (teaching, research, and graduate). Some employers will cover the cost of tuition for their employees. Take time to learn about funding available to you.

Each type of financial aid has its own deadline and requirements for application. The earlier you apply, the more likely you will get funds if you are eligible. For Federal aid, apply early in January. See deadlines for private scholarships and make application several months prior. Below is a preliminary list of websites to search for scholarships.

Local Scholarships:

Hawaii Community Foundation:

<http://www.hawaiicommunityfoundation.org/scholar/scholar.php>

College Connections:

<http://www.collegescholarships.com/>

Kamehameha Schools

<http://www.ksbe.edu/finaid/>

National Scholarships:

FastWeb:

<http://fastweb.monster.com/>

American Educational Guidance Center

<http://www.college-scholarships.com/100college.htm>

Networking for graduate school

As you talk with faculty, advisors, and students, both at community colleges, UHWO, and the program you hope to attend, you are creating a web of support for yourself. The relationships you have developed as an undergraduate will help you as you transition to graduate school. Take time to get referrals for your new campus from friends, family and staff at UHWO. Listen carefully to what people say. Use information from your contacts and your own research to help you with your decision. Follow-up with your contacts and nurture those relationships that seem vital to your future education and career.

Next Steps

Take some time to review the twelve steps on page 2. What can you do now to begin making your decision about graduate school? How can you begin preparing for admissions?

Next steps I'll take:	When I'll take them: