GRAD SCHOOL PLANNING GUIDE

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Need to update your resume? Exploring graduate schools and programs? Need help with your personal statement? We’ve got you covered.

Stop by 235 Schine for 15-Minute Drop-Ins or a one-on-one meeting with us about your resume, personal statement, networking, or narrowing your graduate school options.

We’ll help you connect your dots.

Monday: 12:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Tuesday: 12:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Wednesday: 2:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Thursday: 2:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

QUICK QUESTION? ONE-ON-ONE?
Schedule an individual hour-long confidential appointment by calling (315) 443-3616, stopping by 235 Schine, or schedule it online using OrangeLink.

Not in ‘Cuse? No matter where you are, we’re available via phone and Skype.

All web links are live in this guide

Syracuse University Career Services
CONSIDERING GRAD SCHOOL

Grad school is a big investment of your time and money. As such, it’s important to make sure you invest wisely in your future. When you begin a grad school search, take a moment to ask yourself:

WHY YOU WOULD LIKE TO ATTEND GRAD SCHOOL.

GOOD REASONS TO ATTEND GRAD SCHOOL
• You enjoy research
• You enjoy school/studying/your topic
• You need another degree to qualify for the job or career you would like

NOT SO GOOD REASONS TO ATTEND GRAD SCHOOL
• You can’t find a job
• To avoid the “real world”
• To delay student loan repayment
• You think you’ll never go back if you don’t do it right after undergrad
• You don’t know what else to do

If you’re not sure, or even if you are, come talk to us. We can ask questions and offer insight to help you evaluate your options for graduate school now and in the future.

WHEN YOU WOULD LIKE TO GO
Based on readiness, interest, funding, application requirements, and goals, you may consider attending grad school now or after you have gained some work experience.

Some graduate degrees require work experience before application, but even if not, work experience is helpful to decide whether a specialization is a good fit for you or not before investing the time and money.

HOW YOU WILL FINANCE IT
Financing a graduate education can be expensive. Master’s degrees are often self-financed or paid via loans. PhDs are usually funded with a living stipend but may still require you to take out loans.

WHAT YOU WANT TO STUDY
It is important to know what field(s) and specialties you are interested in—you will be studying it in more depth and with much fewer, if any, unrelated electives courses.

You may consider a professional degree such as an MBA or a master’s with a practicum or internship requirement if you are interested in qualifying for a higher or different position. If you enjoy conducting and analyzing research or studying your subject in depth, then an MS/MA or PhD in a special area of your field may be a good fit.

Make sure to educate yourself on what jobs or opportunities your degree will qualify you for and what they entail.

HOW TO FIND GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Once you have reflected on the reasons why you may want to pursue grad school, the resources below can help you get started:

US News & World Report
• Search for graduate schools and compare based on ranking and cost.

Peterson
• Find and evaluate grad schools based on location, specialization, and tuition.

Princeton Review
• Learn about prospective careers for specific graduate degrees, questions to ask potential grad schools, and find grad school matches.

PhD.org
• Evaluate grad school options for PhD programs based on rankings and research.

For more resources, visit careerservices.syr.edu

★ Work with a career counselor to learn more about how to educate yourself and talk to others in your field who can offer insight.

NARROWING YOUR OPTIONS

There are many reasons that contribute to why a particular program or institution may or may not be a good fit for you. Consider the following when narrowing down your options:

FUNDING
• What assistantships and funding opportunities do the programs offer?
• Are they guaranteed or do you have to apply and be offered a position?

Make sure to consider how you can fund your education from many angles. You can often find this information online, but sometimes may need to contact the department directly.

RESEARCH & FACULTY PUBLICATIONS

Look up the faculty and their CVs; read some of their recent publications to assess your interest and perspective on their research and if it aligns with yours. Excellent professors and researchers can be found at not-so-well-known universities and colleges, so consider more than just the name brand.

GRADUATE PLACEMENT
• Where do the graduates of each program end up after graduation?
• Where do they work and what do they do?

Some schools track and promote this information, while for others you may have to look on your own via LinkedIn or other sources. A career counselor can help you find and understand this information.

RANKING & REPUTATION

Universities and colleges are ranked as a whole as well as by degree program specialties. Find out what the school and program are known for. See the rankings for both aspects at http://law.jl/N9A2m.

Accreditation is also something you will want to check www.chea.org/search/.

COURSES

Check out the courses offered and required by each program.
• Do they sound interesting?
• Does the program require a practicum or internship?

Look at the specific programs’ websites and compare between schools to find a better fit for you.

ALUMNI & NETWORKING

The opportunity to build relationships with accomplished alumni can contribute greatly to job search success. Consider alumni networks when looking at grad schools.

LOCATION

Consider not only where you want to study, but also where you want to work after finishing your graduate education.

The connections you make and relationships you develop in grad school will contribute to your job search success and will likely be regionally influenced.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Look into pre-requisite course requirements as well as application requirements. For certain programs, you may not need to take a standardized exam like the GRE or GMAT.

Also, make sure you have great grades! Though not the only factor, graduate programs weigh your academic performance highly.
GETTING READY TO APPLY

When you are applying to schools, keep in mind that deadlines vary based on the graduate school and the program. The best thing to do would be to narrow your list of schools, note the deadlines, and plan accordingly.

The graduate application process is similar to the process you went through for college. In general, you will need to submit:

- Application
- Personal Statement
- Resume
- Letters of Recommendation
- Application Fee
- Test Scores
- Official College Transcripts
- Financial Aid Application

You'll want to tailor your documents for graduate school; read below for tips on how to tackle each part of the application process.

RESUME/CV

Make sure your resume or CV is tailored to graduate school and the programs to which you are applying! See page 6 for more tips and examples.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE/PERSONAL STATEMENT

Write the statement of purpose or personal statement based on the program’s prompt and tailor it specifically for each program.

Usually grad programs want to know why you are interested in the field, why their program/school, your goals, and what strengths and experience you will contribute. See page 7 for more tips.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ask professors, supervisors, or other professional references with ample time for them to prepare a recommendation letter; two months in advance at minimum.

Give them copies of your resume, personal statement, and prospective grad schools. Make sure to ask if they can give you a favorable recommendation and remind them of your performance in your class, the grade you received, or any other distinguishing factors regarding your class participation.

If you'd like a secure place to store your letters, we allow you to store references in a Credentials File through a program called Interfolio. You can store resumes, CVs, recommendations, writing samples, personal statements, and more.

TRANSCRIPT

Submit your official transcript by going to MySlice>Academics>Transcript Request.

EXAMS

You may be required to take the GMAT (business school), LSAT (law school), MCAT (medical school), or GRE (graduate school) to gain admission to a school.

Free practice exams are offered online and you can find study materials and classes online, in the library, or at a bookstore.

If you need help with your personal statement, both our office and the Writing Center are available to help you think through and edit your personal statement.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Grad school is a big decision and investment. Here are some additional tips and considerations to keep in mind.

APPLICATION TIPS

APPLY TO A RANGE OF SCHOOLS

Don't just apply to the top schools; choose at least one safety school, reach school, and one within your range. Also be sure you're willing to attend any school to which you apply.

TAKE INTO ACCOUNT FINANCING

Make sure you know how you’ll be financing your degree before you apply—putting it off until later only wastes your time and money.

HAVE A PLAN B

Consider options in case you can’t go to grad school immediately. Start looking into and applying to alternative options before you get your acceptances so you aren’t behind schedule if you need to take an alternative route.

START NOW

Whether you are a sophomore or a senior, there are things you can and should be doing now to prepare yourself for graduate school. Talk to a career counselor and get started as soon as possible.

DON’T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

It’s important to know beforehand about the job market in your field so you can be better prepared. Don’t assume that having a graduate degree will make it easy to get XYZ job or professorship.

TALK TO PEOPLE FIRST

Ask questions to alumni or others in the field to make sure that graduate school and your career path are a good fit. Ask them what they like and don’t like about their job and what tips they have for someone considering the field. If you’re interested in medical school or law school, make sure to visit the pre-health or pre-law advisors in 323 Hall of Languages.

ALTERNATIVES TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

Taking time from school can help you gain perspective and experience to get into graduate school later or to help you better understand your goals and interests.

WORK

Spend time working to gain skills and experience that will help you get into graduate school and learn whether a certain field is the right fit for you. Sometimes employers will even fund your graduate degree through tuition reimbursement!

PEACE CORPS, AMERICORPS, TEACH ABROAD, IN THE U.S., AND OTHER PROGRAMS

Structured programs for working or volunteering can be great options to gain professional and life experience while giving you time to figure out what to do next.

INTERNSHIP

Internships can be a great option even after graduation if you don’t have the experience or skills yet for the job you want. Perhaps you didn’t have the opportunity to have an internship in undergrad or you’re changing fields; an internship can help your transition.

POST BACCALAUREATE

A common option for students interested in medical school, post baccalaureates often help you to raise your GPA, take extra required courses, or confirm an interest in healthcare after finishing a bachelor’s degree.

Wondering how to follow up after a networking event through social media? We can help you in a 15-Minute Drop-In or in a one-on-one meeting.
SAMPLE RESUME

JULIE OLSON
46 Lancaster Avenue, Syracuse NY 13210 | (202) 439 - 5000 | jolson@syr.edu

EDUCATION
Syracuse University, The College of Arts and Sciences, David B. Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics, Syracuse, NY
• Relevant Coursework: Developmental, Social, and Abnormal Psychology, Child Development

PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH EXPERIENCE
Hutchings Psychiatric Hospital | Syracuse, NY
Student Intern | August 2015 to Present
• Worked closely for 15 weeks in a mental health day treatment facility with children ages 9 to 11 diagnosed with emotionally disturbed behavior
• Assisted with the therapeutic and socialization objectives set forth by the IEPs and Psychological support team
• Conducted individual research and comparison of case files to better develop understanding of treatment

Bernice M. Wright Child Development Lab | Syracuse, NY
Student Intern | August 2013 to May 2014
• Worked closely with 15 children, ages 3 to 5, in inclusive pre-school laboratory classroom
• Produced comprehensive new programming to be implemented in the lab classroom
• Completed in-depth developmental portfolio for three children, highlighting their progress in the cognitive, social-emotional, motor, and language areas; analyzed developmental portfolios and formalized into a paper

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Syracuse University Residential Life | Syracuse, NY
Resident Advisor | September 2013 to May 2016
• Served as lead resource of campus information, activities, and policy for 38 residential students
• Programmed and advertised educational and social activities based upon students’ requests or needs
• Referred students to relevant on campus services such as Academic Enrichment Services or the Counseling Center
• Facilitated conversations about roommate or floor conflicts
• Counseled students struggling with the adjustment to college life

Syracuse University Ambulance | Syracuse, NY
Field Supervisor | September 2012 to Present
• Train 70+ ambulance volunteers to follow policies and safety procedures
• Volunteer over 30 hours each week, developing extensive training program and supervising the overall operation and safety of an organization that receives over 1,200 calls annually

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS
American Psychological Association, September 2014 to Present
Society of Experimental Social Psychology (SESP), September 2013 to Present
• Attendee, SESP conference, 2014, 2015

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE OR PERSONAL STATEMENT

Writing a statement of purpose for graduate school is slightly different than the statement you wrote to become an undergraduate. This statement focuses more on where you see your career path progressing and how this degree will help you achieve it. The personal statement focuses more on where you’re going rather than how you got to where you are.

Personal statements usually involve these components:

STRENGTH INTRODUCTION
Consider your audience as you write your introduction. You want a beginning paragraph that grabs the reader’s attention right away.

WHY THIS CAREER PATH
An explanation of what you would like to study and why. Write about experiences, courses, accomplishments, or people who influenced your interest in the field or prepared you for graduate coursework.

YOUR GOALS
Describe your professional or academic goals and how the graduate degree will help you meet them:
• integrate relevant strengths or unique aspects about yourself that will set you apart from other applicants.

WHY THIS PROGRAM
A summary of your interest in the specific school or program—demonstrate why you chose to apply to the program or school with specific examples of professors you would like to work with or courses you look forward to taking.

STATEMENT TIPS

BE SPECIFIC
Give concrete examples to support statements about experience, strengths, goals, or influences to help the reader to understand you better and to visualize you in the program.

KEEP IT RELEVANT
Make sure everything in your statement is directly related to the graduate program or field to which you are applying. It is okay to integrate personal aspects, but it is not necessary or helpful to add elaborate stories or an autobiography; stick to the necessary points.

KEEP IT SIMPLE
Aim to write for someone who has a background in your discipline, but may not have your level of expertise.

GET FEEDBACK
It is absolutely essential to have your statement reviewed and revised multiple times. Take it to the Writing Center, career services, and professors to get help with content, grammar, and spelling.

* Be sure to answer all aspects of the prompt and follow the guidelines provided.