

# PREPARING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

You should take some time to think about why you are considering pursuing a graduate degree. There is no right or wrong reason to pursue graduate school, but it is critical that you understand your motivation and know the facts, finances, and timelines before committing to your decision.

## Ask yourself:

- Why do I want to go to graduate school?
- What are my short- and long-term goals? How can a graduate degree help me achieve them?
- Do I want to enter a profession that requires an advanced degree (e.g., Medicine, Law, Teaching, Advanced Research)?
- Do I want a higher salary? Will a graduate degree help me achieve this?
- Am I putting off making a career decision?
- Am I applying to graduate school because “everyone else is doing it” or because I am being pressured into it?
- Am I applying to graduate school because I don't think there are other career options?
- What will I give up by attending?
- What will I gain by attending?
- Is this the right time for me to pursue graduate school?

Undergraduate and graduate schools differ in many ways. In graduate school, you must be committed, intellectually curious, hard-working, and willing to take initiative. You will get to know your faculty and form stronger relationships with them, and you will have less of a connection to the social scene on campus. Peers will be called upon to help you with ideas, criticism, and collaborative initiatives. Graduate school is meant for

people who have a passion and devotion to a particular topic or field, as they will be researching this area in depth. There will be a lot of writing, research, and intellectual discussion.

## Ask Yourself:

- Have I identified an area in which I am interested in becoming an expert and advancing my career goals?
- Will I be able to focus on one topic or a narrow range of topics for the next 2-7 years?
- Am I comfortable initiating and carrying out independent research?
- Am I willing and able to invest the time, energy, and money associated with going to graduate school? Have I thoroughly investigated these costs?
- Am I prepared to spend the majority of the next 2-7 years studying while living on a limited budget?
- Do I need a break from school?

Consider the options of a master's degree versus a doctoral degree. PhD's are typically for people interested in careers in university teaching or advanced research. Master's degrees are a good option if you want to get more specific knowledge in a particular area, if your undergraduate major was very broad, or if you are hoping to change careers or fields of interest. If you are interested in pursuing a PhD but feel it would be beneficial to strengthen your academic experience, consider pursuing a master's degree before a PhD.



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There are two different kinds of Master's degrees. A Master of Science degree enables you to pursue a degree and take courses within your specific area of study. A Master of Engineering degree allows you to gain knowledge in an area of interest, yet also take courses in management or other areas that might compliment your degree and provide additional skills.

If you are thinking about pursuing a graduate or professional degree, the CDC Staff can meet with you to discuss your interests and career options. Your advisor can also provide some in-depth advice and suggestions based on your current field of study and academic performance.

For additional information on pre-professional programs, such as **Pre-Health** (Medicine, Dental, Physician's Assistant, Veterinarian), please contact

the Office of Academic Advising (**academic-advising@wpi.edu**) and ask for the Pre-Health Advisor.

For information on WPI BS/MS programs, please contact the office of Graduate Admissions (**grad@wpi.edu**).

For information on an advanced degree in Business, such as an MBA or Master's in Management, Marketing & Technological Innovation, Information Technology, or Operations Design and Leadership, contact the Foise School of Business (**business@wpi.edu**)

For more information on specific pre-professional programs, see the CDC's tipsheets for **Medical School**, **Law School**, **MBA**, **Dental School**, or **Veterinary School**.

### Planning Timeline for Graduate/Professional School

The following is a list of suggested activities to help you plan your application process. Note that different graduate programs may have earlier timelines that will require you to start some of these activities sooner.

#### Freshman Year

- Begin accumulating good grades
- Start cultivating relationships with your Insight Faculty Advisor during the fall, and your Academic Faculty Advisor in spring
- Join professional associations and clubs related to your field of interest (<https://wpi.campuslabs.com/engage/organizations>)
- Pursue summer research or internships related to your field of interest

#### Sophomore Year

- Prepare your resume and practice interviewing to have a strong application to be competitive for the Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP)
- Continue accumulating good grades and building relationships with faculty
- Pursue summer research or internships related to your field of interest
- Attend CDC workshops on graduate school

#### Junior Year

- Continue accumulating good grades and building relationships with faculty
- Communicate and develop a strong relationship with your Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP) advisors. Talk to him/her about your areas of interest and thoughts on graduate school
- Consider enrolling in a BS/MS program or taking graduate classes in your senior year
- Talk with seniors in your major who are going through the graduate school application process



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## Planning Timeline for Graduate/Professional School (continued)

### Junior Year (continued)

- Meet with your faculty advisor to begin discussing graduate school options
- Begin researching available programs and schools
- Access applications and catalogs on graduate program websites
- Start exploring financial aid resources
- Take a practice test through Kaplan or Princeton Review related to the GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT
- Attend CDC workshops on graduate school
- Take required standardized test (GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT)

### Summer between Junior and Senior Year

- Conduct summer research or do an internship related to your field of interest
- Continue to research graduate programs
- Visit universities that interest you
- Make a tentative list of schools to which you plan to apply
- Contact potential reference writers such as professors, supervisors, etc.
- Connect with WPI alumni who have pursued graduate studies in areas of interest via the WPI alumni network and LinkedIn. Conduct Informational Interviews to learn more about the application process, programs, and future career paths. For more information, please see the [Networking, Informational Interview, and LinkedIn](#) tipsheet.
- Take required standardized tests (GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT)

### Senior Year

- Organize applications and related information for each school
- Finalize and select list of schools to apply to, including both reach and safety schools
- Write a first draft of your personal statement and get it critiqued for content by your Faculty Advisor and the Career Development Center, and for grammar/spelling from the Writing Center
- Order official transcripts, after B-term grades are posted if possible by visiting the WPI Registrar
- Request letters of recommendation from faculty. Make sure to allow plenty of time for your advisor to write you a letter of recommendation. You should share an updated copy of your resume and personal statement with your references, along with having continued conversations around your career/graduate school goals.
- Write a final draft of your personal statement and have it critiqued again
- Retake graduate school admission tests, if necessary
- Complete application forms
- Apply for financial aid and assistantships, fellowships, and scholarships
- Follow up with schools to make sure your file and application is complete
- Prepare for on-campus interviews, if required
- Send thank you notes to reference writers
- Let your reference writers, professors, and everyone who has assisted you know where you got in and where you decide to attend. Please also let the Career Development Center know about your graduate school plans by filling out the Post Graduation Survey.

## Researching and Applying to Graduate School Programs

### How do I get information about graduate schools programs?

- Network with faculty, advisors, alumni, and graduate students
- Look at catalogs, directories, and published guides:
  - Peterson's Guide for Graduate Programs
  - Professional journals and associations in your field
  - U.S. News & World Report Rankings
- Use online sources
  - [gradschools.com](https://gradschools.com)
  - [petersons.com](https://petersons.com)
  - [princetonreview.com](https://princetonreview.com)
  - Focus2 (accessible through Handshake)
- Talk to practicing professionals. Connect with individuals on LinkedIn by searching for programs of interest. Career Shift (located in your Handshake account) is another resource that you can search for contacts that have attended specific graduate schools.
- Attend graduate school fairs
- Arrange and plan for on-site visits
  - Meet with professors, students, and financial aid representatives

### How do I select a program?

Start by defining your interests and goals. Research programs that interest you to see if they match your goals, and if the curriculum will give you the skill set you want. You should also consider the prominence of the programs, including current research or projects, prestige of faculty, flexibility of curriculum, and type of enrolled students (required credentials and enrollment statistics and the percentage of students who enroll that complete the program). Other factors to consider are cost and financial opportunities, length of the program, and job placement success.

### The Application Process

- Get organized - narrow your search and rank your choices
- Be sensitive to deadlines and create a time line
- Study application and requirements carefully
  - Review a curriculum description
  - Tailor your correspondence
  - Include ALL requested materials
  - Keep copies of ALL documents
- Plan a budget including application fees, test fees, postage (if applicable), transcripts, etc.
- Request your letters of reference
  - Select people who can address the issues
  - Give ample time for them to think and write
  - Provide background information
  - Provide stamped and addressed envelopes or instructions to upload letters to an online application



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- Use institutional forms if provided
- Write a thank you note
- Request transcripts on time, but, if possible, hold off until important coursework is completed
- Write a powerful essay or personal statement
  - Address all requested issues
  - Be creative, assertive, and enthusiastic, and show depth of thought and preparation
  - Pay attention to instructions concerning the length of the document
  - For more information, see the CDC's **Personal Statement** tipsheet
- Take all required tests
  - Find out which tests are required and when your scores need to be submitted
  - Start taking the tests while you are researching programs
  - Prepare and refresh your knowledge before taking the test with books, videos, study groups, and faculty advisors
  - Select your best score to be sent
- **GRE Subject Tests**
  - For more information about exam dates and fees visit [ets.org/gre/subject/about](https://ets.org/gre/subject/about)
  - Subject Test Topics:
    - Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology
    - Biology
    - Chemistry
    - Literature in English
    - Mathematics
    - Physics
    - Psychology
- **GMAT**
  - For students interested in Business School
  - Sections include Analytical Writing Assessment, Integrated Reasoning, Quantitative Section, and a Verbal Section
  - For more information about the exam, fees, and dates visit [www.gmat.org](http://www.gmat.org)
- **MCAT**
  - Beginning in the spring of 2015, the AAMC will release the new MCAT2015 exam, which contains changes in content, format, length, and cost from the original MCAT
  - Sections in the MCAT2015 exam include Biological and Chemical Foundations of Living Systems; Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems; Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior; Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills

### Required Tests

- **GRE: General Test**
  - For more information about the exam, fees, and testing dates/locations visit [ets.org/gre/revise/general/about/content/](https://ets.org/gre/revise/general/about/content/)
  - Sections in Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Analytical Writing



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- For a tour of the new exam content, visit [aamc.org/students/services/343550/mcat2015.html](http://aamc.org/students/services/343550/mcat2015.html)
- The MCAT is offered only a few times a year. Please register early for the test date that you prefer, as test centers have limited capacity, and registrations are processed in the order in which they are received.
- For more information about the exam, fees, and dates visit [aamc.org/students/applying/mcat](http://aamc.org/students/applying/mcat)
- **LSAT**
  - For students applying to law school
  - Sections include Reading Comprehension, Analytical Reasoning, and Logical Reasoning
  - For more information about the exam, fees, and dates visit [lsac.org](http://lsac.org)

### Financial Aid Opportunities

Explore all avenues including:

- Fellowships, grants, and scholarships.
  - WPI has a great list of Fellowships located at <http://www.wpi.edu/Academics/FS/alphabetical.html>
- Teaching and research assistantships
- Residence director/assistant positions
- Graduate and professional aid service
- Corporate sponsorships
- Research centers (private scholarships)
- Professional and community associations
- Loans - this should be your last resource

**Career Development Center**  
Project Center  
508-831-5260 | [cdc@wpi.edu](mailto:cdc@wpi.edu)  
[wpi.edu/+cdc](http://wpi.edu/+cdc)

