This guide is designed to get you started in your graduate school quest. Career advisors and faculty at Oberlin College are available to discuss additional questions and provide guidance on pursuing a graduate or professional degree.

**Is Graduate School Right for You?**

Graduate school is a decision that should be based on an individual’s need for the degree. Many students lacking a career objective believe graduate school is a good alternative to entering the job market. However, the high cost of the degree, intense workload, and small rate of student completion, can make graduate school a costly decision. The cumulative debt graduate students incur typically ranges from $30,000 to $120,000, and many students do accumulate even larger amounts of debt (www.finaid.org). Nationally, nearly 50% of doctoral students fail to finish their degrees.

Knowing what to expect can help ensure success in graduate school. There are many differences between graduate and undergraduate education. Many master’s and all doctoral programs leave the structure of the program up to the individual. Students are responsible for selecting their advisor and thesis topic, studying for oral exams, and making job search contacts for post graduation. While grades may be the primary focus for getting accepted, teaching classes, publishing papers, presenting departmental seminars, serving on committees, and interacting collegially with faculty are also expected during the program.

**To Work Or Go To School First?**

Reasons to work prior to graduate school:
- Recharge your batteries

Reasons to go straight to graduate school:
- High enthusiasm and motivation
- Certain fields recommend continuation (i.e. if you want to be an English professor, it is probably best to try and go straight to graduate school – talk to your faculty advisor)

**Master’s vs. PhD?**

Questions to consider when deciding between a Master’s or PhD
- What is needed for my career?
- Within a single department, are master’s students able to apply to the PhD program?
- Is it easier to get into the PhD program if you are already a master’s student in the program as opposed to applying from the outside?
- How does financial aid compare between the two degrees?

**PhD Degree**

A PhD program usually requires students to attend courses on a full-time basis for at least one year. At the end of the second year, qualifying exams are given and may take several days to complete. In addition, students are often required to teach undergraduate courses and/or assist with research and complete a language requirement prior to degree completion. A thesis/dissertation proposal, paper and defense are also required to obtain a PhD.

**Factors to Consider When Selecting a Program**

- Emphasis and specialties of the department
- Research interests of the faculty
- Culture of the department
- Prestige of the department
- Financial support available
- Extra-years support
- Attrition policy
- Estimated completion time
- Placement statistics
- Technical resources
- Teaching requirement
- Language requirements (may add a year)
- Social climate

**Choosing an Advisor**

Finding an advisor at your intended graduate school during the application process is crucial for some fields and programs, but is not necessary for others. Talk with your faculty at Oberlin in order to determine whether and when you should look for a graduate school advisor in your field of study.
If you do need to choose a graduate school advisor, here are some characteristics to seek:
- Career maturity and tenure
- Active and respected in their field
- Academic eminence; well respected
- Political clout
- Will be able to spend significant time with you

When choosing an advisor, put together a short list of possible candidates before you apply to any programs. Talk to your current professors for possible advisor suggestions and university departments. Look for individuals conducting cutting edge research that you have discussed in class or heard at a conference. Go to the departmental website and read through faculty descriptions of potential advisors at graduate schools. Contact prospective advisors and set up an interview while visiting universities.

Interact with your preferred program/school often and build a relationship with them. To get to know the potential advisor, sit in on one of their classes or attend a conference where they are presenting. Talk to one of their current graduate students to learn about the individual. All the while, keep in mind the level of comfort you feel with the person. Do not choose someone who makes you feel uncomfortable or nervous.

**Suggested Planning Timeline**

**Junior Spring – Prepare to Apply**
- Request catalogues, and research programs and institutions
- Obtain GRE Information Bulletin & download sample test
- Talk with your advisor and faculty mentors about programs
- Identify and contact potential graduate supervisors
- Begin to solicit letters of recommendation

**Summer Before Senior Year – Prepare to Apply**
- Accelerate process of choosing schools
- Obtain applications and financial aid materials and note materials required for each one
- Note deadlines and rolling admissions policies for each program

**Senior Year**
- Budget application expenses (application fees, cost of entrance exams, transcript fees, etc.)

**Fall - Apply**
- Complete financial aid applications
- Begin filling out applications as soon as they are available from the institution
- Finalize personal statement
- Follow up with professors who are writing you recommendation letters, but haven’t submitted them yet
- Take graduate admissions exams as needed
- Send completed applications, with all required documents, as soon as possible. Many graduate schools consider applications in the order they are received, so be sure to apply no later than one month prior to the deadline. Many others have application deadlines as early as December 1. Keep copies of all applications for your records
- Complete FAFSA in January

**Spring – Post Application**
- One or two weeks after submitting your application, and well before the deadline, verify with each institution that all materials have been received and your application is complete
- Schedule interviews as needed
- Visit institutions where you have been accepted

**Recommendation Letters**

Contact faculty or professionals knowledgeable about your personal strengths and abilities. Once you have selected a professor, schedule a time to discuss your future plans and goals. Provide the professor with a copy of your most current resume and your personal statement so he or she may refer to your accomplishments in the letter. If you haven’t had a class with your letter writer recently, it may also be helpful to provide a copy of a high quality assignment you completed for him or her. Be sure to provide a reference form if the program includes one with the application materials.

The Office of Career Services has implemented a partnership with Interfolio to maintain reference and credential files electronically for current students and alumni. This service has replaced the former method of maintaining paper-based files through the Reference Service/Student Academic Services. For more information visit [www.oberlin.edu/career](http://www.oberlin.edu/career).

**Financing Options to Research**

**Graduate School Level**
- Merit based awards may be offered based on the department’s recommendation

**Departmental Level**
- Admission committee decides who receives funds, typically not based on financial need
- May be able to negotiate offer
- Scholarships, grants and fellowships available (not required to pay back or work)
- Teaching and Research Assistantships are more common for PhD support, but sometimes available for master’s students
**Financial Aid Office**
- Typically need based
- Federal Loans are the largest source of graduate financial aid
- Deadlines are often earlier than application
- Federal aid is based on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
- Four types of loans are available:
  - Perkins – interest accrues after completion of the degree
  - Subsidized Stafford – interest is paid by the government until the completion of the degree
  - Unsubsidized Stafford – interest begins during your time in the program
  - PLUS – interest begins during your time in the program
- Loan repayment assistance programs are available in some professions. Generally, these programs are intended to encourage public service, work with nonprofit organizations, or work with underserved populations. Check the graduate school’s website to see if the school offers loan repayment assistance, and with professional associations to find out if federal or state loan repayment assistance is available in your intended profession.

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### Grad School Testing Information

**All Test Information & Schedules are Available Online**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRE General - <a href="http://www.gre.org">www.gre.org</a></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tests are given year-round at designated testing centers. Register early to get your preferred testing date, and to avoid the busy period of November-January. Schedule your appointment online as soon as you know when you would like to take the test.</td>
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<tr>
<th>GRE Subject Tests - <a href="http://www.gre.org">www.gre.org</a></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
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<td>Computer Science</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Dates</th>
<th>Registration Receipt Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 10, 2009</td>
<td>Sept. 4, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 10, 2010</td>
<td>March 5, 2010</td>
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<th>MCAT - <a href="http://www.aamc.org">www.aamc.org</a></th>
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<tr>
<td>24 times in 2009, with most test dates occurring in the spring and summer.</td>
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<tr>
<th>LSAT - <a href="http://www.lsac.org">www.lsac.org</a></th>
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<tr>
<td>See Carol Sedgwick, the Health Careers Advisor for additional Medical School testing and admissions information.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Test Dates</th>
<th>Deadline to Register</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sep. 26 &amp; 29, 2009</td>
<td>Aug. 25, 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 5 &amp; 7, 2009</td>
<td>Nov. 3, 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 6 &amp; 8, 2010</td>
<td>Jan. 5, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>June, 2010</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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**GMAT**

www.gmat.org

Tests given all year, please see website for details and locations.
Recommended Reading and Online Resources

**Library Resources, Office of Career Services (Stevenson Hall – Longman Commons)**

*Getting What you Came For: The Smart Student’s Guide to Earning a Master’s or PhD,*
  Robert L. Peters, PhD
*Financing Graduate School,* Peterson’s Guides
*Don’t Miss Out,* Anna and Robert Leider
*Grants for Graduate Studies,* Peterson’s Guides
*The Graduate Scholarship Book,* Daniel Cassidy
*Strategies for Writing Successful Essays,* Nell Merriwether
*Graduate Admissions Essays: What Works, What Doesn’t, and Why,* Donald Asher
*The Real Guide to Grad School: What you Better Know Before You Choose – Humanities and Social Sciences,* by editors of Lingua Franca

**Online**

*Finding Schools and Rankings:*
  Petersons Guide: www.petersons.com
  Graduate School Guide: www.gradschools.com
  US News and World Report: www.usnews.com

**Entrance Exams**

GRE Information: www.gre.org
LSAT: www.lsac.org
GMAT: www.gmat.org
MCAT: www.aamc.org

**Finding Money**

Financial Aid Information Page: www.finaid.org
FAFSA site: studentaid.ed.gov
Sallie Mae: www.salliemae.com
Nellie Mae: www.nelliemae.com
FastWeb: www.fastweb.com
Financial Aid for International Students: www.edupass.org
Oberlin Nominated Fellowships Watson, Javits, Gates, Mellon, and more: www.oberlin.edu/career

**Entrance Exam Prep Courses**

GRE, LSAT, GMAT, MCAT:
  Kaplan: www.kaplan.com
  Princeton Review: www.princetonreview.com

GRE, LSAT, GMAT:
  Cleveland Sate University, Continuing Education
  Offers courses, visit www.csuohio.edu/ce or call 216.687.2144 for information/schedule

LSAT:
LSAT Intensive Review: www.lsac.org