



# Graduate School Preparation

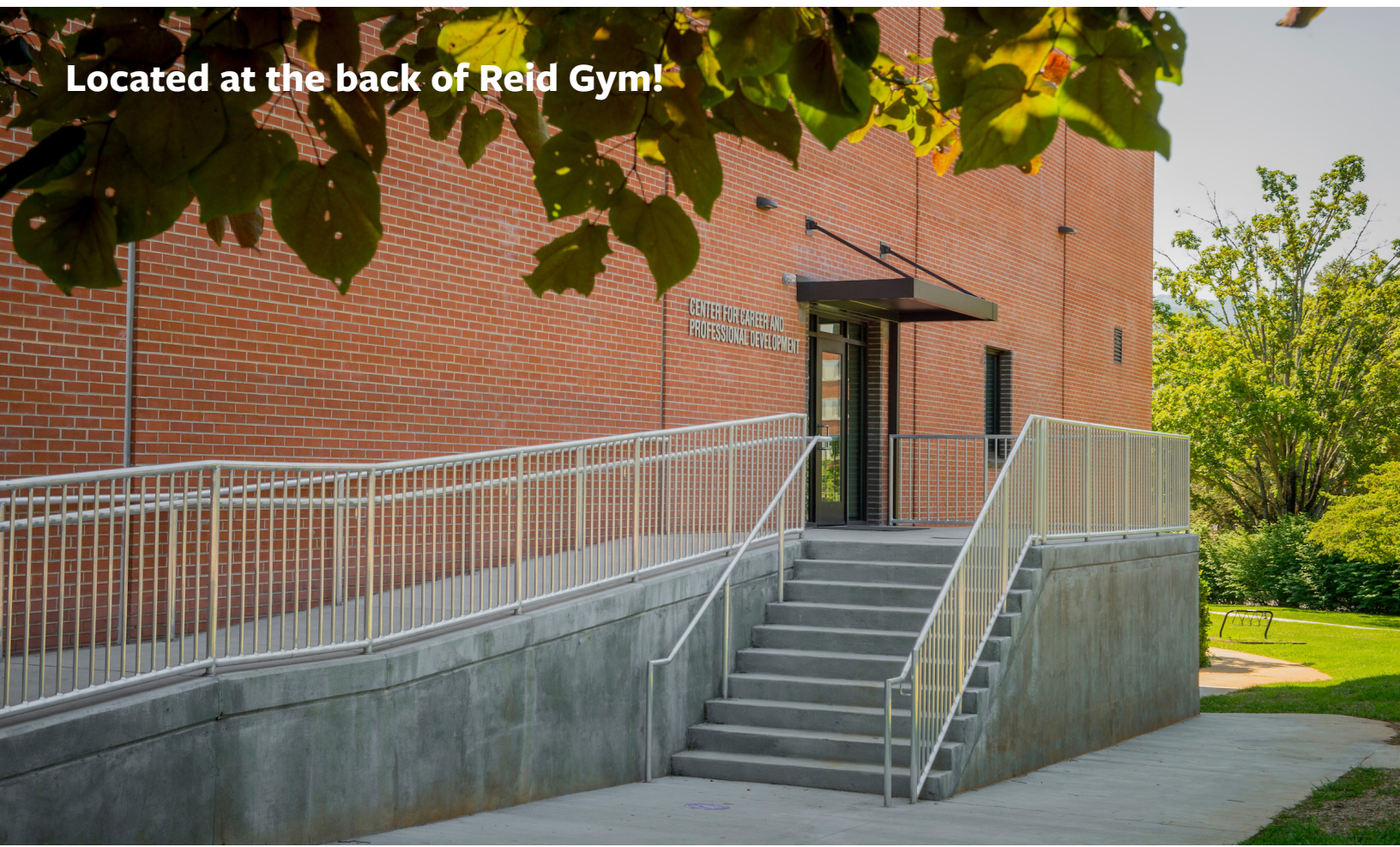
Thinking about graduate school? Hey, we can help with that, too!  
Read on to evaluate if and when you should apply for graduate  
school and learn about application materials.

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**Located at the back of Reid Gym!**



# Is **GRADUATE SCHOOL** right for me?

This can be a daunting question for many people, with many factors to consider before making and committing to a decision. A graduate degree can mean the opportunity to earn higher pay, advance in your desired field, and gain specialized knowledge in your chosen subject. But there are several questions you should answer that may help you determine if graduate school is correct for you.

## **Do I need this degree to work in my desired field?**

One of the first things to consider before applying for graduate school is whether this degree is required for your career goals or if a graduate degree would be beneficial to you in the long-run. This is a wonderful time to speak with professors, professionals in your field, and a career counselor to learn about the benefits of a graduate degree within your career field.

## **How long will it take me to complete my degree? Will I be a full or part-time student?**

The time commitment for a graduate degree is steep. Will you be able to dedicate the time necessary to complete your degree? Would you be a full- or part-time student? What works best for your educational needs and other aspects of your schedule? These are all things that need to be considered before attending graduate school, especially if you want to work while obtaining your graduate degree.

## **Can I afford this degree?**

Graduate programs can be expensive, grants, loans, and graduate assistantships can help offset costs, but some people have to work full-time while pursuing their graduate degree. Look at the overall financial cost of a graduate degree, and consider any other debt you may have either from your bachelor's degree or other items (credit card debt, mortgages, etc.) before enrolling.

## **Why am I interested in this degree or program?**

What are your motivations for applying to or seeking out a graduate degree? Have you been in the workforce for several years and are hitting a wall? Do you need an advanced degree to continue on an upward path? Or are you not looking forward to graduating from your bachelor's and want to stay in school? Do you have a legitimate interest or passion for the field/profession the graduate degree is in? When applying for a graduate program, you should consider whether you need or are even interested in what you will be learning.

## **Am I ready to go back to school or continue school for several more years?**

Graduate degrees are typically more rigorous and demanding than a Bachelor's, so one thing to consider is whether or not you're ready to go back to school and complete the schoolwork required, especially if you have been out of school for several years. While rigorous, graduate programs can be rewarding. Be sure you are able and willing to invest the time and effort to complete one.

Once you have considered all of the above questions and graduate school still seems to be the next proper step in your career and education, you should consider researching and applying to programs. If you answered no or are unsure of any of the answers to the above questions, considering talking to a career counselor at the CCPD for further guidance. You may reconsider attending graduate school later in your life. Regardless, this decision should be made with care and should fit your needs and best interests.

# Is Graduate School Right for Me? Worksheet

Use the following worksheet to help you collect your thoughts on your motivations and interests in pursuing a graduate/ professional degree.

1. What are your motivations for considering graduate school?
2. What are your career goals?
3. How is graduate school beneficial to you?
4. What types of graduate degrees or programs are you thinking about pursuing?
5. How much time are you willing to commit to additional schooling? (e.g. are you willing to attend graduate school full-time? part-time? Do you need to graduate within a certain time frame?)
6. Do you want to go straight to graduate school from your undergraduate program or go to work first? Another option is to go to graduate school part-time and work while you study.

7. What is most important to you when choosing a program? (e.g. location, finances, modality, admission requirements, etc.)

8. What are some barriers/ challenges you may encounter?

9. Who will support you in this process? What resources will you use to overcome these barriers/ challenges?

Potential Benefits	Potential Costs

# Finding graduate school programs

Once you have explored your motivations for continuing your education, the next step is to begin searching for appropriate programs which are aligned with your goals. Below are resources and ideas to help you navigate this process.

1

## **Peterson's: [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)**

Similar to Princeton Review, Peterson's is a comprehensive education service company with ample resources. Although you can pay monthly for their app if you wish, their blog is free for you to search and is full of helpful advice and resources for scholarships, examination prep, etc. It's also a helpful tool to search for graduate programs. The main difference in Peterson's is that it also includes information on application deadlines and fees, and has a useful Scholarship search function.

### **Instructions:**

1. Visit [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com) and scroll to the very bottom of the main page.
2. Under School Search, click Grad Search.
3. Type in the name of a program that interests you and hit Enter.
4. Then further filter your results by using their filter toolbar, located on the left sidebar.
5. Click on the name of the school/ program to review the school's profile page, including application deadlines and application fees.

Be sure to also use their Scholarship tool, also located at the very bottom of the main page under Search School. Here, you can search for scholarships for graduate students by program name or by school.

2

## **Princeton Review: [www.princetonreview.com](http://www.princetonreview.com)**

The Princeton Review is a resource you can use to help you prepare for graduate/ professional school admissions. Although their resources have a cost associated, you can use their Explore Schools function for free. The benefit of searching with Princeton Review is that you can view each school's profile page with pertinent information including type of institution (public or private), average cost of tuition, number of part-time vs. full-time students enrolled, modality (in person or online), etc. You can also check out Princeton Review's Top Schools for your program of interest.

### **Instructions:**

1. Visit [www.princetonreview.com](http://www.princetonreview.com) and click on the **Explore Schools** tab, located at the top tool bar
2. Click **Search Schools** and choose from the list of types of schools which makes sense for you (e.g. Med schools, Business schools, Grad schools, etc).
3. On the "Find your Dream School" page, click on the link that says "**or browse by location or program.**"
4. Use their filter tools, located on the left sidebar. Choose your state, type in the name of the program that interests you, etc.
5. You can either view the school's profile page for preliminary information or save the school's information to come back to later.

# 3

## O\*Net Online: [www.onetonline.org](http://www.onetonline.org)

O\*Net is a free online database of career paths, job titles, education requirements, etc. It is an extremely useful online tool and one you can use to find graduate programs as well!

### Instructions:

1. Visit [www.onetonline.org](http://www.onetonline.org) and begin by entering a position title or career path into the search bar in the upper right corner.
2. A series of links will appear on the next screen. Choose a link which best describes your interests.
3. After reviewing some of the information listed (especially the Education and Salary sections), scroll to the **Training & Credentials** section, directly underneath the Job Zone section.
4. Select a state in which you would like to attend school and click the Go button.

O\*Net will list every school with programs (undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral) within your chosen career, both public and private institutions. O\*Net also reports on the most recent data on the number of graduates from each program. This information helps you gauge how large the cohorts are for each school.

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# Graduate school **FAQS**

**1. How many programs should I apply to?:** The number of programs you apply to is completely up to you. Some students only apply to 1 or 2 programs, while others apply to many more. The national average of the number of graduate schools students apply to in a non-medical school fields is **5 graduate schools**. The national average of **medical schools students apply to is 15**. Keep in mind that application fees quickly add up. **NOTE:** Most schools have scholarships available to help students with application fees for those who are eligible. Make sure you check out those opportunities as well.

**2. When should I apply for graduate/ professional school?** Most graduate/ professional school admission deadlines are between December and February. Depending on your own time table for attending graduate school, you might be applying in this time period your last year at WCU. However, be aware some schools, like medical schools, operate on a rolling admissions basis where the application period might open in late May and close by August; we would encourage you to apply as early as possible in the application cycle as admissions administrators will begin deciding on admittance sometimes as early as a few weeks into the cycle.

**3. Do you have to have a 3.0 or higher to get into graduate/ professional school?** Having a high GPA helps, but it isn't always required. If you have an undergraduate GPA lower than a 3.0, we recommend studying for and doing well on the GRE (or other required examination) to help alleviate an admission committee's concerns over your ability to handle graduate-level work. You may also consider re-taking some of the required courses for the graduate-level program that you didn't do as well as you had hoped.

**4. What else can I do to be competitive in the graduate/ professional school process?** High GPAs and GRE scores are only part of most graduate admission committees' consideration. They will also look at your personal statement, your resume/ CV, and consider any unique perspectives you may have to contribute to the classroom dialogue. We highly recommend that you do some type of hands-on opportunity to put you in the professional environment. These might include internships, job shadowing experiences, volunteer work, or part-time jobs. Use these experiences in your personal statement essay so that admission committees know that you are not only capable of successfully completing their program but have the motivation and desire to represent their program well.

# General Application Guidelines

## Resumes vs. CVs:

Most graduate schools will give you the option of uploading a resume or a CV. Depending on your undergraduate experiences, most likely you'll be uploading a resume. If you have done research, have taught classes (or tutored other students), or have been published, you would probably upload a CV instead. Additional distinctions between the two can be found on page 50. If you need help deciding which document to attach, feel free to make an appointment with a career counselor.

## Personal Statements:

Each school will have distinctive instructions, from specific prompts to address to specific maximum word count or character limits and types of font to use. Make sure you pay attention to each school's instructions and follow them closely. If you are applying to schools which use nationwide application systems (for example, Physical Therapy students upload documents to Physical Therapy Centralized Application System, or PTCAS), usually you'll upload one resume or CV but can upload multiple personal statements for each school. Again, pay attention to the instructions given and ask questions if you are unsure of what to do.

If your school does not give a specific prompt or instructions, then they are wanting you to upload a general personal statement. Typically, these statements should be no more than 2 pages in length (either single- or double-spaced) and should include:

- Why you want to go into your career field (include specific experiences that have brought you to this point in your life. Think about part-time jobs, internships, job shadowing, or personal firsthand experiences)
- Your short- and long-term career goals
- Your motivations for continuing your education (this could be tied in with your career goals)
- Why you're interested in their program or school specifically

## Letters of Recommendation

Most schools will ask for letters of recommendation from usually two to four professional references. Think about the influential people in your undergraduate career who know you well enough to speak to your work ethic, personal attributes and characteristics, or academic strengths. These references could be specific professors, academic advisors, counselors, supervisors, upper level administrators, etc. Be sure you pick references who are not related to you and make sure you give your references plenty of time (at least 4 weeks) to write letters for you. **Do not ask them at the last minute!**

After you have chosen your references, contact them ahead of time to ask if they will write a **positive** recommendation for you. If they agree, be sure to email them information on the graduate program(s) to which you are applying (including specific links) and include your professional resume and personal statement so that they have additional information to reference. You will also need to send them instructions on how to send or upload their letters as most schools have specific guidance on how they want to receive these letters. If possible, provide your references with the name(s) of the program director or selection committee so they know to whom they should address the letter. Also include the deadline to write and send in the letters and remind your references if they have not finished this step.

And finally, be sure to thank your references for taking time out of their busy schedules to write positive letters of recommendation for you. We often don't achieve our goals by ourselves and it's important to recognize the people in our lives who help us get to where we want to go.

Paws Catamount – Personal Statement  
Master of Education, Higher Education Student Affairs, Paws University

Attending the NASPA Annual Conference during my sophomore year of college is where my journey in student affairs began. I was a Resident Assistant when I was given the opportunity from the Office of Residence Life to travel to South Florida for the NASPA annual conference. I attended the conference with no idea of what to expect or what I was going to get out of attending. Little did I know it would be the conference that would ultimately reveal the industry of work I wanted to pursue. My experiences as a Resident Assistant, an intern for Greek life, and a member of my fraternity's executive board all strengthened my passion for becoming an advisor and a mentor for students.

All of my experiences are what have driven me to earn a Master of Education in Higher Education Student Affairs at Paws University. I believe that this program will successfully prepare me for a career in student affairs by advancing my knowledge in student advising and the ability to connect with students on personal and professional levels. After researching multiple graduate programs, I believe that this program best connects my experience to the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful in the field. I am especially interested in the hands-on and practical experiences afforded to graduate students in this program through two required internships as well as opportunities for full graduate assistantships. The focus on career development evident in this program is something I am very interested in pursuing.

If given the opportunity, I would want to further my experience in the university's housing, student activities, and Greek life departments. My short-term goal is to learn more about each of these areas and how each of them work together to create a holistic student

experience. My past experiences and the knowledge I would gain would help me in my long-term goals of enhancing these programs for institutions I will serve in the future.

When I began my undergraduate journey, I did not expect that I would have gotten as involved as I did. As a reserved first-year student, I did not think I would hold multiple leadership positions in various departments across campus. However, during my first year, I took a work-study position in the school library working at the circulation desk and doing other small, office tasks. Towards the end of that year, I applied and was offered a Resident Assistant position for male residents. It was this leadership position that made me recognize my passion in assisting students.

During the same time, I became a founding member for my chapter of Kappa Sigma. After one semester, I took the opportunity to serve as the new member where I taught our new members about the history of Kappa Sigma. It was this same semester that I was also elected to my fraternity's executive board as the Grand Master of Ceremonies, where I oversaw multiple committees and assisted all members in becoming ritually proficient. Additionally, I applied and accepted a position for Secretary for the Interfraternity Council (IFC) beginning my junior year. Being an executive board member for my University's IFC, I gained more leadership skills that I brought back to my fraternity and my community.

It is through all of my experiences that I am confident I possess the characteristics and skills that are necessary for a career in higher education. Attending Paws University's higher education program will not only help me further my knowledge about student affairs but will assist me in putting those characteristics and skills into practice by successfully preparing me for my future as a leader in my field. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to the opportunity to meet with you in person.

# Graduate School Application Tracker

Keep yourself organized during the graduate school application process by using this graduate school application tracker:

School/ Program	Deadline to apply	Application fee	Required Pre-Reqs	Min. GPA requirement	Min. GRE Score	Interview dates	Notes (e.g. keep notes regarding admissions processes)

# Graduate School Preparation Checklist

Center for Career and Professional Development | careers.wcu.edu | 828.227.7133

Feeling overwhelmed? The CCPD is here to help you with any of the below suggestions! Drop by the Career Studio between noon and 4 p.m. Monday-Friday or make an appointment with a counselor via your MyWCU!

## RESEARCH

*Typically, you should complete this phase within your first and second years of college.*

- Research career paths and their educational requirements
- Consider if graduate school is for you and when you would ideally like to apply
- Use O\*Net, Petersons.com or Princetonreview.com to begin a list of possible graduate school programs for your career path. Choose 5-10 programs
- Start an Excel spreadsheet to collect admission requirements including minimum GPA, GRE scores, Pre-requisite courses, application deadlines, interview requirements, letters of recommendation, etc.
- Based off your preferences and priorities, narrow your list down to the schools and programs you are excited about (NOTE: Medical students should consider 10-15 programs)

## PREPARE

*Typically, you should complete this phase within your third year of college, or in the summer after your third year.*

- Write a draft of your resume and personal statement essay
- Visit the CCPD or WaLC for review of your resume and personal statement(s)
- Check out [examprep.wcu.edu](http://examprep.wcu.edu) for other examination preparation materials
- Schedule your professional examination at [testing.wcu.edu](http://testing.wcu.edu) (for GRE, Praxis, TEAS, ACT, CLEP, DSSAT, or MAT only; please schedule all other professional examinations through the appropriate third-party resource such as the AAMC for MCAT)
- Touch base with your professional references and ask for a letter of recommendation (NOTE: Give at least 4 weeks' notice. You will need 2-3 references)

## APPLY

*Typically, you should apply the year/semester before you want to start graduate school.*

- If applying to health-related programs, register using the appropriate Centralized Application System (e.g. PTCAS for physical therapy; DICAS for dietetic internships, or AMCAS for medical schools)
- For all other graduate school programs, create an account on each graduate school's application system
- Upload resume, personal statement, and letters of recommendation (NOTE: some systems will require your references to upload directly to their system)
- Pay attention to application fees, deadlines, and timelines.
- Prepare for graduate school interviews using CCPD resources, if applicable

## TRANSITION

- Apply for scholarships, grants, and/or financial aid
- Search for student housing on- or off-campus
- Look for assistantships, fellowships, or part-time work to help you with your finances
- Get to know your cohort members and professors
- Keep on top of your reading and schoolwork. Graduate-level work is very different from your undergraduate experience
- Explore your new community
- Use your on-campus resources such as the career center, counseling center, or graduate school

# how can we help?

Career & Major Exploration  
Resume & Cover Letter Review  
Interview Preparation  
Job & Internship Search Strategies  
Graduate School Preparation  
Student-Employer Interaction  
One-on-one & Drop-In Appointments  
Online Career Software Resources

