

# Your Guide to Graduate School Success

**Essential Steps, Questions, and Timelines for Navigating the Application Process**



**VANDERBILT**  
Career Center

# Funding Your Graduate Education



Graduate school can be a significant investment, but there are many ways to help fund your studies. Start early, research your options, and ask about available resources.

# Funding Your Graduate Education

## Getting Started



- Ask about application fee waivers if you have financial need.
- Apply early. Funding pools shrink as deadlines approach.
- PhD programs often have more funding than Master's programs.
- Always ask about internal scholarships, assistantships, and fellowships.

**Many schools automatically consider you for internal funding when you apply—another reason to submit your application early!**

# Funding Your Graduate Education

## Ways to Pay



**Merit-based scholarships** are awarded for academic achievements, while **need-based scholarships** require completing the FAFSA and demonstrating financial need. **Assistantships**, like teaching, research, or administrative roles, often include tuition waivers. **External funding opportunities**, including scholarships and fellowships, may be available through professional organizations, state programs, or grant agencies. **Grants** are typically tied to specific projects or fields. Students can also explore **federal and private loan options**, and those who are employed should check if their workplace offers tuition benefits to help cover costs.

# Graduate School Application

APPLICATION FORM

Country:

Organization:

Name:

Contact numbers:

Sex: ☐ male ☐ female

E-mail:

Date and Place

Age:

Yes ☐ No ☐

Number:

Date of Birth:

Time:

Graduate applications require careful planning and organization. Review the next page for a description of the most common components of an application.

# Graduate School Application

## What To Include

### Recommendations

Typically 2–3; choose people who know your work well.

### Essays

Tailor your personal statement to the program's requirements.

### Test Scores

Determine if an entrance exam is needed; some waive based on GPA.

### Transcripts

Request from all institutions attended.

### Academic Courses

Meet all prerequisite requirements.

### Experience

Highlight research, leadership, and relevant work.



# Key Topics to Discuss with Graduate School Admissions



When connecting with graduate programs, come prepared with thoughtful, targeted questions. Focus on gathering information across key areas, like academics and funding or student life and career outcomes. This approach will help you make informed decisions and find the program that best fits your goals.

# Key Topics to Discuss with Graduate School Admissions

## Guide Your Conversations

**Program Details:** Research, teaching, assistantships, facilities, student support.

**Admissions:** Acceptance rates, deferral policies.

**Academics/Faculty:** Availability, graduation timelines, advising, flexibility.

**Funding/Costs:** Funding history, living costs, fee waivers

**Financial Aid:** Average packages, scholarships, loans.

**Student Life:** Housing, community, health services.

**Career Outcomes:** Employment rates, alumni engagement, employer connections.

# Graduate School Application Process



Think of the graduate school application as a process journey that unfolds in four phases. By approaching it with intention, building relationships, and staying organized, you can create a strong application and position yourself for success in your chosen program.

# Graduate School Application Process

## Phase 1: Self-Reflection & Discovery

- Clarify your reasons for pursuing grad school.
- Talk with mentors, professionals, and current students.
- Explore how grad school supports your career goals.



## Phase 2: Develop a Plan & Connections

- Identify programs that fit your goals.
- Research student life, location, and financial aid.
- Speak with faculty, admissions staff, and current students.

# Graduate School Application Process

## Phase 3: Design Application

- Complete all required components.
- Request recommendation letters early.
- Review personal statements with peers or career coaches.



## Phase 4: Deliver Your Talents

- Follow up on outstanding items.
- Send thank-you notes to recommenders.
- Explore campus engagement opportunities.

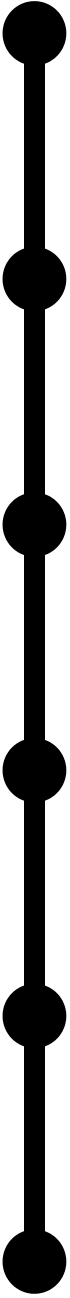
# Suggested Application Timeline



Planning ahead is key to a successful graduate school application process. This month-by-month timeline breaks down essential steps so you can stay organized, meet deadlines, and present your strongest application.

# Suggested Application Timeline

## Month-by-Month



**May:** Research programs, identify entrance exam requirements, take practice tests.

**June:** Develop a study plan, register for exams.

**July:** Request information from schools.

**August:** Take entrance exams, draft essays.

**September:** Finalize school list, identify recommenders.

**October:** Request transcripts, send requests to recommenders.

**November:** Review personal statements, retake exams if needed.

**December:** Submit applications, verify documents.

**Spring:** Prepare for interviews.





# About the **Vanderbilt** Career Center

Scan the QR code below to visit our Top Resources page, which includes information about how to meet with one of our career coaches.



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