

GRADUATE SCHOOL? WHAT? FOR ME?

There are simple steps that can help you determine which path to pursue after college graduation. While these steps will help you in finding a job, they should also be an essential part of your deciding whether or not to go to graduate school:

1. Think in terms of a career, not a job.

Even if you can get a job with your college degree, what are your prospects for career advancement without further study? Think long-term, look at your interests v. the career scene. Try to imagine yourself twenty years from now. Where will you want to be? What will you want to be doing? In some professions, an advanced degree is a must. If you stop at the M.A. level, you may eventually limit your options for promotion and career diversification.

2. "Am I going to graduate school for the right reasons?"

You need to be clear on your goals before committing the time and expense of graduate school. Sometimes it is the wrong reason that pushes you to apply for graduate school. Some students may feel burnout after college or may not be ready to choose a career they want to pursue. It is alright to take a year or a couple of years to sort things out. In some graduate programs, work experience and maturity enhance your admission chances. Also, you do not want to continue your education because school is a safe place away from the demands of "real life." It is important to understand what motivates you. A career in history, political science, or international studies should fit your individual interests, abilities, values, and priorities.

Whatever you decide, you must know that in order to succeed in graduate school, you need intelligence, initiative, and self-discipline. Most graduate programs assume that students will maintain at least a 3.0 GPA. Time management skills, being focused and persistence are also important qualities.

3. Self-Assessment: Your skills v. career demands.

Answering the questions below will help you decide if you will like the demands of a profession in history, political science, or international studies:

1. Do you have strong oral and written communication skills?
2. Do you like to read? To analyze and think critically?
3. What personal values are most important to you?
4. How important is creativity to you?
5. What past experiences and achievements have been rewarding?
6. How good are your people skills?
7. Can you manage and prioritize your time well?
8. What are your strongest skills? What skills need improvement?
9. Are your parents, friends, or other people pressuring you to go to graduate school?
10. What drives you to go to graduate school and form career plans?

4. "I do not have a 4.0 GPA and my GRE score is average."

Although your GPA and GRE score are the two most important factors in the selection process, there is room for other factors as well, such as a background in statistics, fluency in a foreign language, job experience in applied settings, and strong letters of recommendation.

Also, associations such as the American Political Science Association are committed to finding a greater role for racial minorities and women who are under represented in the academic professions. APSA members actively support programs dealing with Graduate Fellowships for minorities. Regional diversity counts as well: graduate schools in the Northeast may want to diversify their programs with a West Tennessee scholar. Being open to relocate will increase your chances of success.

THE RIGHT GRADUATE PROGRAM**1. Choose the right degree: M.A. v. Ph.D.**

You can earn an M.A. within two years, whereas the average Ph.D. student remains in graduate school for 6-8 years, counting the years towards the M.A. (some programs push their grads through more quickly than others, something you need to remember and check out). In some programs, you can bypass the M.A. altogether on your way to earning a Ph.D. If you want to teach full-time at the university level, a Ph.D. is indispensable.

There are economic advantages to the Ph.D. Some figures estimate that Ph.D. holders earn on average almost 50% more than M.A. degree holders. The 1996 U.S. Census Bureau estimates the average family income of M.A. holders is 21% higher than that of B.A. holders; that of Ph.D. holders 53% higher than that of B. A. holders; and that of Ph.D. holders 27% higher than that of M.A. holders.

2. Choose the right program: begin thinking about a specialty in your discipline.

This is often overlooked in the application process. Different schools and departments are strong in different areas, so it is important that you begin to narrow your focus before graduating from college. You don't want to apply to the wrong school or be caught off-guard in an interview. Graduate study in Political Science, History, or International Relations, boasts of several encompassing areas and numerous subfields. The American Political Science Association recognizes six general areas of political science: American Politics, International Relations, Comparative Politics, Political Theory, Public Administration, and Political Methodology. Under these broad areas are 90 specialized subfields. We have the APSA Newsletter, the AHA Newsletter that are good indicators of job opportunities.

Your specialty decision is also important when considering job prospects. Talk to people in your field to get information about their job. Complete an internship program to get "hands-on" experience. Job prospects are better in some subfields than in others. Currently, for example, jobs in Political Theory are scarce, while jobs in Political Methodology and Statistics are much more readily available. But the key question should be: do I love this field/career enough to sacrifice years of my life in order to pursue it? Being enthused in a career area is very important. Remember also that some subfields are more conducive to employment outside the university as well. A Ph.D. in a specialized public policy area such as Health Care will be more likely to find work in the private

sector than a Ph.D. in political theory. Students of history, in particular, have access to a wide range of jobs in the nonprofit, private, and public sectors beyond teaching.

Also, some schools offer interdisciplinary programs. They offer the opportunity to combine fields of study that you might have majored and minored in as an undergraduate student. For example, Law and Divinity programs, Philosophy and Communications, Philosophy and English, Political Economy, and all International Studies fields. In the Appendix section below you will find a few of the most popular subfields in Political Science, History, International Studies that you might be interested in.

3. Gather information about the graduate program you are most interested in.

Obviously you want to attend a university that has a strong reputation in your particular specialty. For example, University "X" may have several leading professors in American politics, but fewer professors who study International Relations. Other programs may be on the cutting edge of methodological research and pay less attention to American politics. Consider this point in making a decision. It is extremely important that you gather the information necessary to make the perfect match between your interests and skills and a graduate program's offerings. Some students decide to choose a department based on the reputation of a certain professor. If that is what you choose to do, be sure that the professor will be around during your tenure as a graduate student. To help you get started, we have on file in the Department, the "Directory of History Departments and Organizations in the U.S. and Canada" and the "Directory of Graduate Faculty and Departments in Political Science."

4. Consider the placement success of prospective programs.

Unless you are independently wealthy, you are no doubt hoping that your graduate experience will lead to a fulfilling job. It is of vital importance that you examine the placement success of the programs where you are applying. How have other students fared coming out of these programs? Are they gainfully employed, or dog-catching?

You need to look at the general figures on graduate student placement rate, but also remember to examine the success rate of students in your specific program of choice. This may not be indicated in departmental statistics. Also, no graduate program will probably tell you the full story about their job-placement success rate. You should talk directly with current graduate students to get the whole story.

YOUR FINANCIAL OPTIONS: THE FINANCIAL AID CARD

1. Find and Choose Financial Aid

Financial support for graduate study is more readily available than it is for "professional" schools like law or medicine. Most of the financial aid for graduate study, however, goes to students who apply to the Ph.D. program. This aid usually takes two forms: research assistantships and teaching assistantships. With a research assistantship, students work closely with a chosen professor on an academic project. With a teaching assistantship, students are assigned their own teaching load and earn valuable experience in the classroom. Also, there are several opportunities for minority scholarships. However, be prepared to pay full fare for pursuing a M.A. program. Moreover, when you apply to a doctoral program, you are simultaneously applying for financial aid. If you do not like debt, you may decide against graduate school unless you get a lucrative offer from a university. If you are granted a fellowship or some other financial offer from a university, perhaps it would be wise not to "swing at the first pitch." In other words, you may benefit from the fact that universities are competing with each other for good students.

When you look up information about a graduate school, you also find information about financial aid. Look in the Appendix section of this brochure to learn how to find information about graduate schools.

2. Estimate your costs v. your earning potential

As with any career move, compare your graduate school investment with the earning potential of your chosen field (e.g.: Is it worth going into debt \$150,000 if you start out, after eight years of graduate school, making \$25,000 a year?). Perhaps you need to take a couple of years off to work to save money for graduate school. Before doing that, investigate grants, fellowships, assistantships, and loans. Another option is to go to school part-time. Some programs require that you go full-time, and it may be difficult to impossible to get financial aid without being a full-time student. On the other hand, attending school part-time allows you to work in the field and earn money. Some organizations or companies are willing to send you to graduate school as a part of your training. There are several publications that will help you finance graduate education. You will find them in the Appendix to this brochure.

THE "MUST DO" THINGS DURING YOUR UNDERGRADUATE CAREER

1. Carefully choose your minor/second major.

The choice of a second focus of study in undergraduate school can be a significant help in choosing a future career. A major in political science with a communications minor, for example, can be a great asset for graduate study in Public Administration or Public Policy. A history major with a second major in business can lead you to a career in Business History. Virtually any two fields combine nicely. It is up to you to choose which two best suit your skills and interests.

2. Get involved with the profession as an undergraduate.

While an undergraduate, you have several opportunities to engage in extra-curricular activities that will give you "hands-on" experience with the profession, contacts with professionals in careers you may want to pursue, and leadership and research experience. These activities not only look good on your resume, but are extremely helpful in deciding what to do after graduation from college. Here are a few examples of what you can do to enhance your undergraduate experience:

- participate in an state, national, or international internship program or a summer pre-professional program; Peterson's publishes a yearly *Internship Guide* that is well worth looking at; this department has a broad array of local, state, and national internships that are available to you.
- attend professional conferences; many offer undergraduate the opportunity to read papers; this is an excellent opportunity for you to observe what graduate students and professors are doing. Although some of the conferences are national in scope, there are also many important regional and state seminars. Attendance at these conferences will give you a better feel for what life in academia is like. In political science, the journal *P.S. Political Science and Politics* frequently lists the times and dates for these professional meetings--Ask a member of UTM's department for information on state conferences that may be close enough for you to attend. Very advanced undergraduates may even want to consider delivering a paper at a professional conference.

Indeed, if you are truly serious about graduate school, you should work to make your undergraduate research as academically sound as possible, in the hopes of using it in a future professional arena.

- become a member of one of the professional honors societies your university sponsors; many of these honor societies give you an opportunity to publish, and advice on the pursuit of a career, and on financing grad school; you may also present papers at their annual meetings.
- get involved in a research project with a faculty member; the International Student-Scholar Program provides you with a great opportunity.
- read and write as much as you can.
- **subscribe to an Internet discussion list; check that list's book review section; participate in a discussion; check out their "jobs" list.**

3. Utilize your junior year to your advantage: Research Graduate Schools.

Your junior year can be a vital time to begin researching graduate schools. Contact the different departments for information on specific programs or better yet, surf the Internet for information. There is an astonishing array of options out there. Our department also has information on file about several graduate schools. So does the office of the Associate Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Dean of Graduate Studies, Dr. K. Paul Jones. You will find all this information in the Appendix section of this brochure. By beginning the process in your junior year, you should be well-equipped to make a decision on where you want to apply by the Fall semester of your senior year. Ask each school for a complete application packet. Almost all departments will be glad to send out materials on their program, but expect some lag time through the mail. Again, the Internet provides today's students many options not available to undergraduates just a few short years ago. If you need help in beginning your search, consider the following excellent websites:

- (1) [WORLD WIDE GRADUATE SCHOOL DIRECTORY](#)
- (2) [GRADUATE SCHOOL GUIDE ONLINE](#)
- (3) [PETERSONS GUIDE TO GRADUATE SCHOOLS](#)
- (4) [BURRELL'S GUIDE TO GRADUATE SCHOOL ADMISSIONS](#)
- (5) [MOVIN' ON: TIPS ABOUT GRADUATE SCHOOL](#)
- (6) [US NEWS AND WORLD REPORT'S GUIDE TO GRAD SCHOOLS](#)

Our department keeps on file a current list of the best graduate programs in history and political science, as rated by *US News and World Report* and by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. We also have the APSA's *Guide to Graduate Faculty and Programs in Political Science*, which lists information about 350 departments in the United States and Canada. In addition, we keep a graduate school file that has program descriptions, application forms, entrance requirements, financial aid and other information. Just ask the departmental secretary or check with a faculty member to consult our file.

4. Make the Most of your Senior Year: Visit campus(es).

Just as important as it was when you applied to college, a campus visit may make the difference between admission to and rejection from a graduate program. A campus visit gives you the chance to meet with faculty, grad students, perhaps even alumni/ae, and to check out the library and research facilities.

Ask each school for a complete application packet. Almost all departments will be glad to send out materials on their program. You should be well-equipped to make a decision on where you want to apply at the beginning the Fall semester of your senior year.

5. Apply to more than one graduate school.

Although there is no set number, most graduate publications suggest that you should apply to at least 3-7 programs in order to increase your likelihood of being accepted. The rule of thumb is to apply to 2-3 "fall back" schools (where you are pretty sure of getting accepted but would be your second choice), to 2-3 "comfortable" schools (where you are reasonably sure of getting accepted), and 2-3 "high profile" schools (where your being accepted is unlikely). Of course, you want to apply to high-quality schools. At the same time, you want to be realistic. The only drawback to applying to several schools is the application fee. Most schools charge between \$25-\$75 just to apply. If only "the best" will do for your graduate education, you may want to consider a university's national rank. If so, look for either The Gourman Report, or the annual March issue of U.S. News and World Report.

6. Prepare your resume carefully.

There are several formats for writing your resume. Regardless of which one you choose, remember that grad schools' admissions committees look carefully at your resume. Start documenting all your activities and achievements. Keep a copy of your best papers. Prepare a portfolio of your undergraduate career. Every piece of information counts. This step can become the basis for your application statement. Having done your self-assessment and written your resume will help you set clear goals for graduate study and communicate them in a coherent and impressive fashion to the admissions committee.

TAKING THE GRADUATE RECORD EXAMINATION (GRE)

1. The General Test--A Description

The General Test is composed of 7 sections, lasting 30 minutes each, bearing on verbal, quantitative, and analytical questions. Each section has a possible score of 800. According to the *GRE 1997-98 Guide to the Use of Scores*, the average verbal score is 480, the average quantitative score is 560, and the average analytical score is 560. A student applying at a competitive graduate school usually has a score of 1200 to 1300 for two out of the three sections. A 1400 score for two out of the three sections is an excellent score. The paper test costs \$96. Fee waivers are available, check the GRE Web site. The paper test is offered twice during the academic year. Many students still take it. The computer-adaptive test is the version that more and more students are opting to take. It is offered on demand, although you may not take it during the last week of the month. The advantage of this test is that it tailors the questions to your ability level. Consequently, there are fewer questions that are either too easy or too difficult for you. But you cannot go back and change your answers once you have entered them. Also, you know your scores immediately after taking the test. In the future, this is probably going to become the most commonly used method of taking the GRE.

GRE Subject Tests: You need not worry about these tests. Fewer and fewer graduate school admissions committees require that you take the GRE History subject test, although it is still administered twice a year. The Political Science subject test has been discontinued.

2. General Strategy

Records indicate that our students do extremely well on the analytical part, and that they obtain above average on the verbal part of the exam. All the reading that you've done in your life will now pay off. A careful preparation can boost your score by several points on the verbal. Vocabulary words, analogies, reading comprehension, are particularly important. Regarding the quantitative score, (which among our students tends to be lower), we recommend that you take or audit a refresher math course during the fall of your senior year to enhance your score. You should not take the test with the expectation that you'll retake it. For one thing, you have to wait 60 days before retaking the computer-adaptive test. Also, taking the test is expensive. And now, with CD-ROM technology and review courses available, you can take practice tests and come to the real test fully prepared.

Graduate School admissions committees do not look at all parts of the GRE equally. Until recently, political science admissions committees combined verbal and quantitative scores in making decisions. Some schools, such as Middle Tennessee State University, now add up two scores: either verbal and quantitative, or verbal and analytical. Other schools look at all three scores. Ohio State University, for example, looks at all three scores but does not add them up. Therefore, you should prepare for all three sections unless you know specifically which ones the graduate schools of your choice use for admissions. It is a good idea to call the graduate school before taking the test and find out if a minimum score is required on particular parts of the GRE.

3. Preparing for the GRE

There are many GRE preparation materials available to you in paper form, and they constitute an excellent introduction to the test. However, a computer-based preparation is a must. The paper versions usually include a CD-ROM practice test. You may take a professional course to prepare for the GRE. Kaplan Educational Services offers GRE prep courses in Memphis. The cost to you is \$899. Included in this cost is a 9-week course and the supporting papers and CD-ROM materials. You may call 1-800-KAPTEST to enroll.

Other options include:

- GRE services' review materials: check the GRE registration packet or call 1-800-537-3160.
- Cliffs notes. GRE Review (IBM or MAC) App. \$20.00
- McMillan. ARCOGRE Supercourse. App. \$35.00
- Princeton Review. Cracking the GRE. App. \$30.00
- Barron's GRE

APPENDIX

MOST COMMON SUBFIELDS IN THE DISCIPLINES

POLITICAL SCIENCE

International Organizations and Law	Politics and History
Comparative Area Specialties	International Security and Arms Control
Legislative Politics	Political Communication
Political Culture	Public Law/Judicial Politics
Presidential Politics	Public Opinion
Voting Behavior	Women in Politics
Southern Politics	African American Politics

POLITICAL SCIENCE RESOURCES ON GRADUATE SCHOOL We have documentation on file about the following schools:

American University	Austin Peay State University	Duke University
Emory University	Howard University	Indiana State University
Indiana University	Murray State University	St John's Col. of Anapoli
Suffolk University	The University of Chicago	The University of Kansas
The Univ. of Memphis	The Univ. of Missouri-Columbia	Notre-Dame
The Univ. of Pittsburgh	UT Chattanooga	Vanderbilt University

Published Resources on Graduate School

- Peterson's Grants for Graduate and Post Doctoral Study
- Financing Graduate School
- Getting What You Came For: The Smart Student's Guide to Earning a Master's or Ph.D. (Noonday Press 1992)
- The Graduate Scholarship Book
- The Foundation Center's Foundation Grants to Individuals
- The Southern Regional Board in Atlanta, GA (Tel. 404-872-1477)
- The National Science Foundation in New York, NY (Tel. 212-391-2030)
- Kaplan's How to Get into Graduate School--Business, Medicine, Law, a yearly publication, through Newsweek
- Harold R. Doughty's Guide to American Graduate Schools. The Most Comprehensive Guide to Graduate and Professional Study in the United States (Penguin Books, annual publication)
- Robert E. Clark and John Patella, The Real Guide to Grad School: What You Better Know Before You Choose Humanities and Social Sciences (Lingua Franca Books, 1997)
- Melanie Gustafson, Becoming a Historian: A Survival Manual for Women and Men (Washington, D.C. : American Historical Association, 1991)
- Lesli Mitchell, The Ultimate Grad School Survival Guide (Peterson's, 1996)
- Barbra Rittner and Patricia Trudeau, The Woman's Guide to Surviving Graduate School (New York: Sage Production, 1997)

Web Sites on Graduate School

- <http://www.gradschools.com/>
- <http://www.gre.org>
- <http://petersons.com/graduate/gsector.html>

- <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~burrell/guide2.html>

You may simplify the process of typing long website addresses by typing GETTING INTO GRADUATE SCHOOL and using the Alta Vista Search Engine (or by clicking on the above links) . you will get all the information that you need about the graduate school process. The internet today provides many options not available to undergraduates just a few short years ago.

TIMETABLE FOR APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

Applying to graduate school does not have to be a scary ordeal. The following schedule may help you organize your efforts.

Remember that this is not an overnight process. It will take work, initiative, and determination on your part. Also keep in mind that specific institutions have different deadlines.

JUNIOR-SUMMER	Examine guides to various graduate programs, preferably over the Internet. Determine test requirements and application deadlines for each school. Talk to your faculty advisor about your findings, ask for guidance. Request application materials from programs. Talk to professionals about career choices, requirements. Study for the GRE.
SEPTEMBER-SENIOR	Research financial aid assistance. Request application packets. Sign up for the required standardized test (normally the GRE). Write a draft of your statement of purpose.
OCTOBER-SENIOR	Take the GRE. Begin to finalize your choice of schools. Request recommendations from faculty members.
NOVEMBER-SENIOR	If you haven't done so already, take the GRE. Order official transcripts from Registrar's office (preferably including your Fall grades). Give recommenders addresses of prospective schools, recommendation forms.
DECEMBER-SENIOR	Work on your statement of purpose. Apply finishing touches to application packets and mail them (although most deadlines are late January -early February, it is always useful to get the packets in early). Contact recommenders to be sure that they have mailed their recommendation .
JANUARY-FEBRUARY-SENIOR	If you have not done so, mail application packets. Contact schools to ensure that all application material arrived by the deadline. Contact graduate schools about possible visits. Prepare and file a copy of your federal income tax return if you are applying for need-based financial aid programs.
FEBRUARY-APRIL-SENIOR	Consider additional campus visits. Discuss acceptances, rejections with your faculty advisor, faculty in your department.
APRIL-SENIOR	Pay graduate school deposit. Have final transcript sent with indication of your graduation. Let your faculty advisor know where you have been accepted.

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