



FAQs for Graduate School:

1. Why go to graduate or professional school?

It can often be a requirement for entry into a specific field (e.g., law, medicine, speech therapy, teaching, and counseling). You are looking for an opportunity for professional growth and a career change. You are seeking personal growth, and fulfillment. Obtaining an advanced degree can increase your earning potential. You should base the decision on your personal situation and long-term goals. Careful reflection on your reasons for pursuing an advanced degree will help to ensure you select appropriate programs aligned with your career and educational goals.

2. What are the different types of degrees I can get in a graduate school program?

There are generally two types of graduate school degrees awarded; Master's and Doctoral degree. Professional schools commonly award advanced degrees in law, health and the medical field. The timelines in completing degree programs vary by:

- Degree sought
- Number of classes taken in a semester or quarter
- Required fieldwork experience
- If a comprehensive exam, thesis or dissertation is a requirement
- Residency requirements

A Professional Master's gives you a specific set of skills needed to practice in a particular field, such as education, business, engineering or other profession requiring specialized training. It is generally a final or "terminal" degree, and often involves an internship, practicum or fieldwork. A Research Master's provides experience in research and scholarship, and it may be a final degree or a step toward a Ph.D. Depending on the requirements of the program, a master's degree usually takes one to two years of study. A Professional Doctorate: The M.D. for medical practice and the J.D. for law are the most common types of professional degrees. There are also practical based doctorate degrees in the Social Sciences fields such as a Doctorate in Education, Psychology or Sociology. A Research Doctorate: The Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) is the primary credential for college-level teaching. The Ph.D. typically involves both course work and a major research project. The Ph.D. usually takes a minimum of four to six years of full-time study.

3. Should I work for a couple years, before applying to graduate school?

Entering a graduate school program is a commitment in your time and financial resources. It is important to assess your ability and willingness to make that commitment. We recommend you take the time to do some self-reflection and ask yourself the following: What is your commitment level to pursuing graduate school? How does attending graduate school align with your career goals? Where do you see yourself in the next five years academically and professionally? Some graduate school programs prefer candidates with work experience prior to applying to their program. It is important to find out if that is a requirement for admission to a particular program.

4. What is a gap year? What should I be doing during that time?

A gap year is an opportunity to work or volunteer to gain experience in the industry you are interested in getting an advanced degree. It can also give you a chance to assess if graduate school is still a good idea. We recommend you use the time to conduct more research about graduate school programs, and develop a greater understanding of your values, interests, personality, strengths/talents, and what motivates you. A personal assessment will help in clarifying your career goals and directing you to a graduate program that will be a good match. In addition, your self-assessment can be valuable during the application process, in particular, when writing your personal statement, and in the event a personal interview is part of the application process.

5. Did I miss the deadline to apply to graduate school? Is it too late to apply?

Many graduate school programs have application deadlines set for December and January; however, each graduate school program sets their own timeline and guidelines for applying to their program. It is important to find out

deadlines to allow yourself enough time to apply. Many graduate school programs offer information sessions to learn about their application process and expectations. We recommend you take advantage of the opportunity to learn more about a program you are interested in prior to applying by attending an information session or reaching out to an admissions representative. Prepare questions ahead of time, and use the [Graduate School Questions](#) as a guide.

The recommended timeline to apply:

Six months prior to applying:

- Research areas of interest, institutions and programs
- Register and prepare for appropriate admission tests
- If appropriate, obtain letters of recommendation

Three months prior to applying:

- Take required admissions tests
- Obtain application materials
- Visit institutions of interest, if possible
- Write a draft of your application essay
- Get feedback from 3 academic professionals regarding your application essay
- If needed for medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry, or law school, register for the national application or data assembly service

6. How do I prepare for graduate school?

Making an informed decision about pursuing a graduate or professional degree requires an in-depth self-analysis, research of schools, and development of a plan. We recommend that the planning and preparation begin approximately 12 to 18 months before expected entrance. This would include a self-analysis, graduate school research, and a plan of action. We recommend meeting with a Career Counselor to explore career pathways, and types of advanced degrees needed for your particular area of study. Once you have made the decision to apply to graduate school, we recommend scheduling an appointment with Academic Advising's Graduate School Specialist. [Click here to schedule an appointment.](#)

7. Will I need to take any exams to apply?

Many graduate school programs require a Graduate Record Examination, also known as the GRE. CSUCI offers GRE Test Prep Sessions. Students can register for a reduced flat fee of \$75 for 6 sessions. To learn more about the test prep sessions and to register, go to [GRE Test Prep Sessions](#).

8. How do I get started with my personal statement?

The purpose of the personal statement is to show the admissions committee how you think as well as your writing ability. Your goal in writing a personal statement is to create a portrait that is both persuasive and personal. It should be a concise, well-written essay about your background, knowledge of the field and your reasons for pursuing graduate study in the field or profession you have chosen. This is also an opportunity to show admissions how you align with their program's area of study and their mission. To help you get started review the [Personal Statement Worksheet](#). For help and support with your personal statement, we recommend contacting the [Writing and Multiliteracy Center](#).

9. Where do I begin with choosing a graduate school program?

Thoroughly researching graduate schools will significantly enhance your ability to make a good decision, and help to prioritize which schools match an your educational and career goals. Make a list of criteria that are important to your decision. Although no absolute criteria are available for judging graduate or professional schools, the following may serve as a checklist of criteria to consider:

- School offers degrees in your area of interest
- Strength and reputation of the academic program
- Geographic location

- Meets your goal(s)
- Required entrance exams
- Demographic makeup of campus population
- Cost of tuition, books, relocation, housing
- Financial aid availability (Graduate Assistantship, Fellowship or Grant)
- Number of applicants vs. Number accepted
- Application deadline
- Faculty to student ratio
- Undergraduate preparation
- Size of institution
- Program accreditation
- Length of time to complete program
- Program Mission and Values
- Campus culture
- Where are Alumni hired upon graduation
- Completion rate

Many schools provide virtual tours and information sessions to introduce you to their school and programs, and give you an opportunity to ask questions and meet with a representative of the program.

10. Is it true that I will need to interview before acceptance to a program?

In some programs an interview may be required as part of the admission decision-making process. Students applying to obtain a Medical degree might be expected to participate in Multiple Mini Interviews (**MMIs**). To learn more about MMIs we recommend scheduling an appointment with a Career Counselor. In addition to being an important factor in gaining admission, it provides you the opportunity of assessing the program. Prepare for the interview by participating in a mock interview with a Career Counselor. [Schedule an appointment here.](#)

11. How many schools should I apply to?

There is no rule on how many programs to apply to; however, we recommend applying to more than one graduate school program. Keep in mind the application fees incurred, and the time, energy and resources to apply to more than five programs. It is important to look at the quality of the program and to examine if you are prepared to take on the rigors of a graduate school program. It is always important to be able to visualize yourself in the programs you are applying to over the course of 2+ years. Make sure to review [Criteria for Evaluating Graduate School Programs](#) and [Selecting Graduate School: Look before You Leap!](#)

12. Is Financial Aid available for Graduate School?

[Federal Student Aid](#) (FSA) programs. Available in English and Spanish, this site will guide the user through the process of preparing for college, from a variety of sources, attending college, and repaying loans. Information is available for high school, undergraduate, and graduate students as well as parents, international students, and other targeted student populations. The site links to FAFSA, the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) for easy access and application processing.

13. Do schools offer scholarships?

Grants and scholarships are typically awarded based on financial need and/or academic performance. This type of grant money does not obligate the recipient to repay the award. Check with religious organizations, foundations, labor unions, businesses or town and city groups for scholarships based on achievement, ethnicity, hobbies or talents. Armed forces may also offer financial opportunities. Your employer may also have an educational reimbursement program. **Fellowships and assistantships** are available through your department of study and/or funded by the state. These types of awards may cover part or all of your tuition and provide stipends. There are a number of private fellowship offerings available based on merit, area of interest, and underrepresented populations. Apply with national fellowships including [Fulbright Scholarship](#), [Fulbright Mellon](#), [National Research Foundation](#), and/or [National Science Foundation](#).