If you are a future-focused and goal-minded individual, we hope you will consider attending this year's Graduate School Expo.
Questions to ask about applications

Completing applications can be an exciting process!

You are on your way to your graduate education!

But remember, you do not need to rush, and if you do hurry through the application process, you may make mistakes that hinder your acceptance to the program. Be sure to review information on the program and school’s website. Students are interested in how soon they will hear about an admissions decision, but sometimes you may need to wait weeks or months.

Be patient. If you have access to a university career services office, they can assist you in gearing your resume - and statement of purpose - to the specific program.

Your own application

- Have you proofread all application materials?
- Does your résumé or C.V. reflect your experiences? Is it up to date?
- Have you double checked all spelling?
- Have you double checked the addresses before mailing or e-mailing your application?

Program’s application process

- When are applications due?
- Are applications submitted as a complete packet, or can you submit different pieces at different times?
- Are applications online or by mail?
- Have you fulfilled all the application requirements?
The Graduate School Decision

Personal Assessment

According to Associate Dean of College of Communication, Information and Media, Lori Byers, “Graduate education should fill a void in your life and not a void in time.”

You have some homework to do before taking any graduate classes. Graduate education requires focus, enthusiasm, and attention to detail. You should consider how a graduate education would take you to where you would like to go. Talk to people who have jobs that you find match well with your own goals and aspirations. Make an honest evaluation of your strengths, both professionally and personally. Remember, much like your undergraduate study, it is up to you to make the decision which will be best for yourself long term.

The Introspective Questions

- Why do I want to attend graduate school?
- Do I have the motivation for another one to six years of school?
- Am I the type of person who enjoys being in school?
- Why do I enjoy doing what I do?

The Practical Questions

- Am I willing to pay attention to details and put in extra hours to study and prepare?
- To which specific programs should I apply?
- Can I afford tuition, living expenses, housing, and books?
- Will I be able to attend class every day? Will I be able to put in all of the necessary work outside of the classroom?

The End Goal Questions

- Can I achieve my goals with a master’s or do I need a doctorate?
- Where do I want this degree to take me?
- How will the graduate degree shape and advance my interests?

Graduate School = More Options in Life and More Money in the Long Run

Does this program help take you where you want to be? Will you be a good fit for this program? Don’t get distracted by finding the absolutely perfect fit; rather, find the program that works for you and fits your needs and interests.

Pursuing a graduate degree is a major commitment. Earning a degree can take from one to six years, depending on the type of program. As you consider whether or not to apply to graduate school, you should research programs to which you would like to apply and consider your own goals, too.

The more you learn, the more you earn.

More experiences and opportunities, more skill sets, more networking possibilities, and more options. People with advanced degrees have lower rates of unemployment and higher salaries.

Reasons for attending graduate school

Attaining a graduate degree can be beneficial for many reasons. Most individuals who pursue advanced degrees do so in pursuit of one or more of the following:

- Making a difference in the world around you
- Intellectual curiosity and desire to learn more about a particular field of study
- Career or salary advancement
- Change of career
- Licensing to meet national or state requirements
- Additional employment opportunities

The Council of Graduate Schools has a lot of information about the advantages of earning a graduate degree, including information about increased earnings and employment as a result of earning a graduate degree. For more information, please visit http://www.cgsnet.org.
When should I go to graduate school?

Timing is important for graduate school for two reasons.

1. First, you need to allow yourself plenty of time to review programs and complete applications in a timely manner. Application deadlines and funding deadlines can arrive more quickly than you expect. Six weeks prior to an application deadline should allow adequate time to collect materials and prepare your application.

2. Second, timing addresses when you should think about attending graduate school. Some students go directly from undergraduate to graduate school, others take a few years between degrees, and some return to graduate school years later to change a career or open more opportunities later in life. If you have been out of school for several years, you can still be a strong candidate for admission to graduate school.

Anyone with an undergraduate degree should feel welcome to consider graduate school at any time.

Application Timing
- Do I have time to write, revise, and edit a personal statement, resume, and other application materials?
- Are applications accepted at all times for my program of interest?
- Do I need to take additional exams? When are these exams offered?
- How long does it take to get transcripts from my former school(s)?
- Will I be able to get letters of recommendation in time?

When to Attend
- Do I have the motivation and drive to attend graduate school right after my undergraduate degree?
- Am I tired of being in school? Do I have the interest to attend every class and complete every assignment?
- Are there any jobs that I really want to apply for instead of applying to school?
- Can I secure funding to assist with the expense of graduate school?

How should you start the grad school application process?

Before you get overwhelmed, here is a checklist to help you identify some related tasks:

- Research programs and request information and applications.
- Register for appropriate qualifying exams, both general and subject tests, as required by individual programs.
- Take exams and submit results to your chosen schools.
- Decide on first-choice programs to which you will apply.
- Study for qualifying exams.
Timing is everything.

The checklist below might help you know what to expect and may make the process a little less stressful. Even if you don’t complete these tasks in the exact time frame listed here, you will most likely have to do them sometime in the process.

### Junior Year
- **September-June**: Create and maintain contacts with potential reference writers through classroom work, volunteer work, internships, research, and employment. You’ll need recommendations to go with your grad school application.
- **September-November**: Attend the Ball State Graduate School Expo to learn tips to help you get admitted and to research graduate programs from multiple institutions.
- **January-June**: Research schools and request information and applications. The Career Center in Lucina Hall 220 can be helpful in this process, especially in identifying schools that offer the specific program in which you are interested.
- **January-March**: Research nature of appropriate graduate entrance exam; begin review and test prep.
- **April-June**: Continue review for exam(s); consider a review course. Schedule test during the summer when you’ll have less distraction from other academic work. This will also allow you enough time to retake the exam if you are unhappy with your score.

### Senior Year
- **July-August**: Continue researching schools and programs.
- **July-August**: Finish general test if possible.
- **July-August**: Request financial aid information from programs and other sources (loans, grants, fellowships, assistantships).
- **July-December**: Comply with requests from graduate programs for recommendations. Prepare your reference writers for individual requests since programs may request different things (letter, completion of a form, telephone screening).
- **September-December**: Discuss decision with advisors and faculty to narrow down your top choices for programs.
- **September-December**: Last chance for tests. Take subject tests if required.
- **September-December**: Complete applications for first-choice schools.
- **September-December**: Complete all financial aid applications. Collect tax information. Meet all deadlines. File FAFSA.
- **January-March**: Confirm that reference letters have been received by deadline.
- **January-March**: Acceptances begin shortly after deadlines.
- **January-March**: Meet deadlines. Aid offer may accompany admission offer.
- **April-June**: April 15 is a common notification date. Try to be patient!
- **April-June**: Inform letter writers of outcomes of applications.

**Grad school application process continued...**

Calendar adapted from *Applying to Graduate School: A Student’s Guide* (1985) by Marliss G. Strange and Jack W. Bennett.

- Ask professors and employers to write letters of recommendation. Comply with instructions given by each graduate program.
- Complete applications, personal essays, and other information requested by graduate programs. Meet all deadlines!
- Relax and wait to hear from the school(s).

- Request official copies of your undergraduate transcripts from the registrar’s office to be sent to graduate programs.
- Confirm that application materials, recommendations, and test scores have been received by the deadlines.
Assessing Graduate Programs

While you are working on your personal assessment, you need to assess the schools that will help you reach these goals. Graduate school can open so many opportunities that you may not have even imagined when you first applied. While you may have many questions to ask program advisors, you should always do your homework first. Review relevant websites for the program and the graduate school of the place to which you would like to apply. Check all your facts so that you can ask informed and insightful questions. You will be better prepared, and faculty and staff within the program will be better able to answer your questions, too.

If you decide that graduate school is right for you, you will need to find out which universities and colleges offer the graduate program you are interested in. Based upon this research, you will need to narrow your choices so you can begin the application process.

Use the resource guide to help you obtain the information you need.

Selecting a Delivery Mode for Graduate School

When considering graduate programs, a great question to think about is how you, as a student, will interact with the content of the graduate program. While certain modes of delivery may sound more appealing to you than others, a very important question you must ask yourself is: How do I learn best?

What modes are there, you ask?

Well, there are many modes of delivery for graduate programs, but generally there are three options:

1. **In-person (on campus)**
   Attend class every session and listen to the instructor in a classroom.

2. **Synchronous (online and distance education)**
   Watch a live feed of the class presentation at scheduled class times. You could watch this feed from a separate location than the actual class, perhaps your personal computer or a computer at a local library.

3. **Asynchronous (online and distance education)**
   Access course content at any time. These may be pre-recorded videos of lectures that you can watch when it fits best in your schedule at any location.

Keep in mind that some graduate programs may actually only offer one of the delivery formats, so you will not necessarily have a choice.
How do I fund graduate study?

This is a very important question when considering graduate school. Graduate education can be affordable, as there are numerous opportunities to receive funding from a specific program or school or outside funding too. Just as with selecting a program, searching for sources of funding can be a bit overwhelming. Where do you start? As with all steps of the graduate admissions process, do your homework about funding sources. Do not expect someone to approach you with some kind of funding source just because you have shown an interest or even sent in an application for a specific program. Funding for graduate school, just like all other aspects of graduate school, requires a lot of homework and thinking on your part.

Funding sources
Funding can come from federal agencies, non-profits, and several other organizations. Funding can be used for specific research projects or initiatives too. For example, Ball State maintains a fantastic resource of funding opportunities and has additional resources for funding specific projects. The Council of Graduate Schools has a page with some funding information. Your own institution may have similar pages with resources more specific to your interests.

Assistance with finding funding sources
Finding funding sources for graduate education can be as overwhelming as identifying a program to which you would apply. There are people at the program or school you would like to attend who may be able to assist you. If you are currently enrolled as a student at a university, there is likely someone on campus in charge of external grants, scholarships, and fellowships who could help you. If you are an alum, people from your school may be able to assist you too. For example, at Ball State University, Dr. Barbara Stedman is in charge of assisting students with applying for national and international scholarships.

Barbara Stedman, Ph. D.
Director of National and International Scholarships
765-285-5086
bstedman@bsu.edu

Types of funding
Consider these terms to be keywords when you are looking for ways to fund graduate education. The other sources of funding do not require repayment, but you may be required to perform certain duties, including teaching, research, or administrative tasks.

Grants
Can be grants, fellowships, or scholarships. These provide funding for a specific purpose or task, such as supporting a research project. These may cover additional costs, such as tuition and fees. Great for professional development.

Graduate assistantships
Can be in the form of teaching assistantships, research assistantships, or graduate assistantships. These provide funding for a specific job, such as teaching a course. These may cover additional costs, such as tuition and fees. Great for professional development.

Loans
Require repayment, may accrue interest, should be considered a last resort for graduate school.

Funding
- How does this source of funding affect my graduate school experience?
- Do I work a certain number of hours?
- Do I have an obligation to teach?
- Is there a responsibility to conduct specific research?
- Do I need to maintain a certain grade point average?
- Do I need to participate in certain activities?
Grad students need a big “because”

Because you are piqued to pursue your passion beyond the undergraduate level.
Because you want to advance your career early and often.
Because you’ve heard of its impact on a paycheck.
Because your field demands it.
Because you’re an upperclassman and you’re finally on a roll?

Because grad school is a major life decision, beware of enrolling “just because.” There are many valid reasons to consider pursuing a master’s degree, depending on your goals and objectives, not to mention your fondest hopes and wildest dreams.

You might consider the fact that graduate education will help you define your goals as you delve more deeply into your field in the company of students and professors who are motivated and have committed their lives to the same single pursuit. Because of this environment, you’ll find that grad school is more collaborative than the undergraduate experience. Get ready for fewer tests but more writing and research. Anticipate fewer lectures but more discussion.

Don’t be surprised if professors demonstrate a different level of respect for you now that you have joined them on this journey through a shared profession.

You may have heard that the graduate degree promises a return on investment. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that those holding master’s degrees may earn an average of $2.5 million over their careers, while those with only a bachelor’s degree should expect to earn $2.1 million.

A job market for master’s degrees

Other reports suggest that employers are now looking for additional education in their new hires. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of occupations that require a master’s degree will increase by 20 percent over the next several years.

In DIY U: Edupunks, Edupreneurs, and the Coming Transformation of Higher Education, Anya Kamenetz compares this modern trend toward graduate degrees to the early 20th century when high school graduates were no longer guaranteed office jobs due to the proliferation of high school diplomas.

“As the nation gets more educated, the credentials necessary to get the really good jobs might just keep on inflating,” she writes. “Already, people with graduate degrees earn more than plain old BAs. When I visit wealthier private colleges and public universities today, the students tend to take it for granted that the goalposts are already moving down the field. They expect to go on for a law degree or an MBA or at least a specialized master’s in order to get the kind of job they want.”

But the advantages are more than professional and financial. The Council of Graduate Schools says that those with graduate degrees report better health and quality of life, higher participation in civic activities, better educated children, and more leadership roles in education, nonprofit, and government sectors.

Online has its advantages

With the advent of online programs, these advantages aren’t as unattainable as they once were. Today’s new grads can jump into their first jobs while pursuing master’s degrees simultaneously.

“Graduate education has become uncoupled from time and place,” says Joel Whitesel, associate director of online and distance education programs at Ball State. “So you can now manage school around your family and job instead of managing your life around school.”

Whitesel thinks the dynamics of the online classroom hold some real benefit, too.

“I think the online classroom is good for those who call themselves ‘visual learners,’” he says. “Essentially, online education is presented in black and white. Syllabus, course content, deadlines, directions, are all laid out before you.”

Whitesel thinks that, ultimately, everyone benefits in the virtual classroom. “Online, the professor gets to hear from every student in discussion boards,” says Whitesel, “but in the physical classroom, the more vocal students may override the shyer students. In the traditional classroom, students may be adept at evading the questions, but in an online classroom, everyone is in the front row.”

Whitesel likes the fact that the virtual classroom can be less threatening, especially for those who are not as quick on their feet—or raising their hands. “The nature of the classroom is such that students can revise and edit their responses to discussions before posting them,” he says.

But what do employers think?

“While the social element may be lacking,” says Whitesel, “the strength and rigor of online course content may surpass the content of many on-campus classes.”

Studies by GetEducated.com suggest that many employers agree with this assessment.

In her “Expert Advice” column, Vicky Phillips, GetEducated.com’s founder and chief education analyst, writes that “studies show that most employers are not overly concerned about how a degree was earned. They are, however, very concerned about overall school reputation and educational quality.”

Phillips thinks the stigma about such degrees has faded.

“Expect to encounter no stigma if the college you attended is already known to your employer and respected by your employer for the quality of its graduates,” she writes. “For most people, this means attending an online program offered by a college with a long and respected tradition of educating students via a local residential campus.”

So students at Ball State, which boasts a number of nationally ranked online and on-campus graduate programs, may be in the ideal place to consider graduate school.

To further access the practicality of graduate study, students should visit the Ball State Graduate School’s website and look at the “What Can Graduate School Do For You?” information at www.bsu.edu/gradschool.
How do you learn best?
Ask the right questions to find the program to fit your needs.

About the Program
- Where do students go after completing this program?
- What kind of support services exist for students?
- How much interaction do you have with your instructors?
- Are the classes taught by faculty or teaching assistants?
- Are you able to speak with the instructor during office hours or by e-mail?
- How are assignments turned in and evaluated?
- Does the course allow feedback from students and faculty?
- Is the program accredited and respected within the field?

About Yourself
- How do you learn best?
- Are you able to attend class every session at specific times?
- Does your computer allow you to access course materials?
- Do you have a reliable Internet connection?

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Contact Us
For more information, contact Steve Jones, Director • Center for Information and Communication Sciences (CICS) • Ball State University • Ball Communication Building
- Room 221 • Muncie, IN 47306 • Phone: 765-285-1889 • E-mail: cics@bsu.edu • website: www.bsu.edu/cics
Successful Keys to the Application Process

Graduate School Search
Ask yourself these questions:

- To meet my career goals, do I need to pursue an advanced degree?
- Do I want to specialize to gain more information about a specific field or area of study beyond what I learned as an undergraduate?
- Would an advanced degree help me to change careers?
- Do I want to go back for more education and pursue a master’s or doctoral degree in a graduate or professional school?

Application Checklist
Generally, applications may be due in the winter to start the following fall. For example, if you submitted an application due in January, you are planning to start classes in August or September of the same year.

While applications differ, there are some components that may be required. You may need to submit your application to two or three different offices within the same institution. Some kind of in-person interview or presentation may be required as well. Each program and institution should provide detailed instructions on how to submit an application. Always review relevant websites before submitting questions to program faculty and administrators.

Be sure to check your application requirements!

Commonly required components:

- Official transcripts
- Résumé or C.V.
- Statement of purpose
- Application fee
- Test scores
- Recommendation letters

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• Secondary Education
• Special Education
• Technology Education

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