

# Guide to Grad School

If you are considering Grad school and wondering how to navigate the process or what you need to do, the following guide will help you explore and plan with more clarity.

## 1. Reflect

- What is your motivation for more education?
- When is the best time for you to pursue graduate or professional school?
- What is your career vision? Will graduate school help you get there?

Be honest with yourself and be clear with your motivations

## 2. Explore your options

- Gather info from internet resources and people!
- Career Cruising
- [www.universitystudy.ca](http://www.universitystudy.ca)
- [CanLearn.ca](http://CanLearn.ca)
- Professional association websites
- Professionals working in the career field: use LinkedIn or Alumni & Partner Advisor Network
- Professors or students in the programs of interest
- Admission Coordinators or Program Coordinators of the programs

Not sure what you are looking for? Then take a step back and do some career exploration.

## 3. Research and know your options

There are many types of Graduate programs such as; Research intensive Masters or Ph.D, professional focused with internships or projects, and course based graduate level. Some require subject knowledge in same field and some will accept a wide range of undergrad programs. You can also consider post-graduate certificates at College or University Continuing Education.

When researching the programs, some things to look for are:



On the Graduate Studies school website:

- Look for general graduate admissions application requirements, application fees and processes, financial supports, student supports

On the program specific website ask yourself:

- Does the program and courses fit with your academic and professional goals?
- What is the structure of the program and what is the faculty focus or specialties?
- If it is a professional program, is it accredited with the professional regulatory body?
- If it is a research based program, are there supervisors that match your research interests?
- What is the cost of the program and is there scholarships or funding options?

After thoroughly reviewing the web info, direct your program questions to the program admission coordinators.

#### 4. Gather application details

Gather the facts for each program and look for the details:

- What is the minimum and competitive GPA? How is the GPA calculated?
- Are there required courses and do they need a minimum grade?
- Do they require academic and/or professional references?
- Does it require a Resume/CV ? What kinds of experiences are they looking for?
- Do they ask for supplemental materials like a letter of intent, personal statement, or supplemental questions?
- If there are entrance exams, when are results needed and what is competitive results?
- Will there be interviews and when?
- What is the selection process?
- What are the deadlines for fees, application materials, and references? They may vary.
- What are the admissions costs? When are the program fees due?

Create a spreadsheet to help you keep track of the details. We have a handy Further Education Research Organizer to help you get started. [Click for the Excel spreadsheet.](#)

#### 5. Take a pause

The whole process of exploring, researching and wondering if the program is a right fit or if you will get accepted can be a lot to handle. It's quite common to have questions and experience uncertainty. This is a



good time to pause and clarify and reflect. Reflecting on your goals for grad school and then evaluating the programs you are considering can help you gain more confidence in your decisions and next steps

## Clarify your goals for Grad School

### Academically

What do you want to learn?

What will help you be successful?

What skills or knowledge do you want to develop?

### Professionally

What do you hope the program will provide career wise?

What opportunities do you hope the program will provide to support your career goals?

What supports do I hope the program/school has to help me transition after the program?

### Personally

What do you want to achieve personally?

Financial considerations?

Location considerations?

Relationships to consider?

Time commitment and best timing for you?

## Evaluate your options

List your Academic, Professional and Personal Goals and then evaluate your programs based on your own criteria to help you with your decision

Priorities/ Goals	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3	Program 4	Program 5
Academic					
Professional					
Personal					

## 6. Get Organized!

- Create a chart/spreadsheet with all the details, requirements, deadlines
- As new questions emerge, make a note of them and source out an answer
- Make a list of requirements for your applications and develop a plan to meet them
- Create a timeline with deadlines in mind to help you stay on track



## 7. Apply!

- Focus your application to each program and follow the instructions for each program and apply!
- Keep all account info, documents submitted and records secure
- Seek out supports as needed. Student Success Centre and Alumni Career Services offers career counselling and application support to help you on your career journey
- Follow up with your references to thank them for their support

## Frequently Asked Questions

How can I increase my GPA?

- Increase your GPA is by taking more courses or a second degree. Contact the admissions office of the program to which you are applying to confirm the best strategy
- The way admission GPA is calculated varies with each program. It is highly recommended to calculate your GPA (Then, calculate # of courses + hypothetical grades that you would need to obtain competitive GPA)

How do I make up missing pre-requisites?

- Best way to confirm is to contact the program admissions office. For some programs you may take classes after graduating. Some programs will give a conditional offer dependent on their completion before you start. For others, pre-requisites have to be done during your undergraduate degree

How do I know if courses I take after graduation will count towards the pre-requisites?

- Contact the program admissions office to inquire if the course will count. Some programs will include a list of pre-requisites from different schools on their website. If the course you want to take is not included, contact the admissions office with the course description
- Request information by email to create a record of communication

How do I use my work experience to my advantage?

- To make your application standout, incorporate insights from your work experience and discuss transferrable skills in your application as appropriate
- View your work experience as a resume builder even if it's unrelated to the program you're applying to

Is standardized testing is needed? E.g. GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT



- Standardized tests are part of many application processes for professional and graduate programs. Be sure to research if your program(s) require standardized testing. The majority of US graduate schools require some form of standardized testing (mostly GRE) and there are some select Canadian programs that will require testing

### Can I study abroad?

- Studying abroad can be an enriching and life changing experience, but do your research
- If you are studying abroad for a regulated profession (rehabilitation, law, medicine, etc.) and plan on returning to Canada upon completion, research to ensure that the program is/can be recognized by the regulatory association in the Canadian province you wish to work in. Become familiar with the process you will need to go through once you return to Canada
- Talk to other students who have studied abroad and successfully returned to Canada
- Remember to look up the application for international students (usually different than regular application process)  
Consult with international education consultants who can help with your application and their knowledge of programs at their partner schools. This should be free of charge. E.g. OZtrekk, Austra Learn

### How do I get academic references?

- It's natural to be nervous but remember professors want to support further education goals
- Reconnect well before the deadlines. Choose those who knew you best and excellent grades
- Expect to reintroduce yourself, let them know what you have been doing since graduation and why you want to return to education. Ask them if they could write you a positive recommendation.
- Once they agree, offer additional materials, like your resume and statement of intent to help with personalization
- Provide them with all the information they require: program name, brief synopsis, deadline and method of reference (electronic or mail). If mail, you can provide an addressed, paid postage that can be tracked
- If you have been out of school for more than 5 years, contact the program you're applying to and let them know your situation

### How do I get professional references?

- When selecting a professional reference, identify who can speak to your suitability for the field
- Give them an overview of the program and what to include in the reference letter as well
- Don't be surprised if your professional reference asks you to write the first draft

### Who can help me with making a decision and the application process?

- Please feel free to connect with us through additional resources on our website **Student Success** or through an appointment with our career professionals (self-booking on **OscarPlus** - appointments)

### I'm worried about paying for my education



- Check with the school's financial office to inquire about scholarships. Some Masters and PHD programs offer funding through Teaching or Research assistant jobs. Consider lost income during your time at school and reflect on your budget
- Talk with a finance professional at Mac's Money Centre. Book a meeting using **Oscarplus**

