

# The Graduate/Professional School Application Process

## **Is Graduate School Right For Me?**

It is important to evaluate your decision to pursue a graduate degree. Will attaining a graduate degree be advantageous to your career goals? Is it required for your field—medicine, law, university teaching, research? Your decision to pursue a graduate degree should not be based on the job market or the uncertainty of your next step. Make sure you have a specific outcome in mind.

## **Do Your Research**

First, define your criteria—location, institution type, type of degree, structure of program, financial support, and so on. The next step is research. The internet is a great tool to help you find a program that meets your needs. You can check out [www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com) and [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com) to get started. Each October the University of Minnesota hosts a Graduate School Information Fair and a Health Careers Fair that is open to all students. Please check the Career Center for Science and Engineering website for specific details. After you have narrowed down your options, visit the individual websites of those institutions to gather specific information. Other helpful resources are faculty and alumni as they can give you inside information on programs. If possible, visit the institutions of interest and talk to faculty and current graduate students. If you cannot visit, make contacts and gather as much information as possible in order to make a confident decision.

## **Note Deadlines for Application Materials**

After you have decided on potential graduate programs, the next step is to visit each institution's home page to request the application materials. The requirements and deadlines will vary, however, the deadlines are typically between December –March for the following fall. It is beneficial to apply as early as possible for institutions with a rolling admission policy.

## **Graduate/Professional School Admissions Exams**

It is recommended that you create a study plan and allow adequate time to prepare for the exams. You can access the exam registration information online, and you may consider purchasing a test prep book. Note deadlines and register early as registration fills up quickly.

## **Personal Statement/Essay**

Most graduate and professional school programs will have specific criteria they would like you to include in the form of an essay. The essay should be clear, concise, and showcase the depth of your thinking. The essay should be a reflection of who you are, why you have chosen the field, and why you are a good candidate. The CCSE resource library has books available to help you get started. We recommend you have a faculty member and/or a career counselor review your essay.

## **Letters of Recommendation**

Most graduate programs will require two or three letters of recommendation for your application. It is essential that you choose professional references including faculty. It is important that you choose individuals who know you well enough to compose a strong letter. Once you have identified those individuals, set up a time to have a conversation with them to discuss your goals and bring a copy of your application materials. Be sure to note if the institution requires the letters to be submitted directly or sent in with your application materials.

## **Financial Aid**

Financial aid for graduate and professional school is primarily in the form of assistantships, fellowships, and student loans. Be sure to investigate your financial aid options at each institution. Note the deadlines for financial aid as they can be earlier than the application deadline.

## **Completed Applications**

It is a good idea to make back up copies of your application materials. After you submit your application materials, follow up to make sure they have been received and your file is complete. It is your responsibility to make sure the admissions committee has your completed application.