

GRADUATE SCHOOL GUIDE

TYPES OF DEGREES

Master's degrees: Some lead to a doctoral degree while others are the "terminal" degree for a profession. For full-time students, completing a master's degree usually takes 2 years.

Specialist degrees: Usually earned in addition to a master's degree, and will require additional coursework, training, or internship experience.

Doctoral degrees: Provides extensive knowledge of the field, trains you to do original and meaningful research, and prepares you to function as a faculty member. This degree may take anywhere from 4-6 years to complete.

IS GRADUATE SCHOOL RIGHT FOR ME?

Good Reasons to Go

- Your desired profession either requires an advanced degree or heavily favors people with advanced degrees
- Advanced education greatly increases your chances of advancement
- You need an advanced degree to increase your earning potential
- You are confident that your increased earnings will outweigh the time, money, and energy you will invest in a graduate degree
- You have a passion for your field

Bad Reasons to Go

- You do not know what to do with your life and hope you will find direction in graduate school
- You assume that a graduate degree makes the job search easier
- You are not really sure if you want to continue studying this field
- You are not ready to join the world of work just yet
- All your friends are going on to graduate school, so it must be the right thing to do

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ **Accreditation:** While accreditation is not necessarily the key indicator of quality, you could face negative consequences if the program that confers your degree is not accredited.
- ▶ **Admission Standards:** Look for the number of applicants compared with the number of acceptances.
- ▶ **Reputation:** While rankings are an important measure of quality, you also need to investigate the source of the rankings as each use a different set of criteria.
- ▶ **Faculty:** Are the program's faculty members well published? Do they publish in well-regarded peer reviewed journals? What are they currently researching? Does this research match your interests?
- ▶ **Multicultural/Diversity Opportunities:** Examine the composition of both the faculty and the students in the program. You need to determine where you'll feel comfortable and appropriately challenged.
- ▶ **Current Students:** Request contact information or arrange a talk with current students to learn the pros and cons of the program from an insider's view.
- ▶ **Location:** Where is the school located? What recreational activities are available? What is the social atmosphere? Can you be happy in this environment?
- ▶ **Cost:** What is the tuition for the program? What kind of financial assistance is available?
- ▶ **Career Assistance:** Does the program assist with the job search after you receive your degree? Where do the graduates end up working? What opportunities for internships, research, and jobs are available?
- ▶ **Graduation Requirements:** Does the program require an exit project, such as a thesis, dissertation, or comprehensive exam?

FUNDING GRADUATE SCHOOL

Graduate school can be expensive; however, financial aid is available in several forms.

- ▶ **Fellowships:** Fellowships vary and may include tuition and a stipend. They usually require full-time enrollment.
- ▶ **Assistantships:** Are teaching, research, and other staff positions that usually include tuition, a stipend, and some benefits.
- ▶ **Scholarships:** Are awarded to incoming graduate students with proven academic records of achievement and typically focus on a specific area of study.
- ▶ **Loans:** Are available through the government or private lenders. Private loans generally cost more than federal loans.

For more information on your financial aid options, visit...

- <http://www.uco.edu/graduate/financial/>
- <https://fafsa.ed.gov/>
- <http://www.finaid.org>
- <http://www.fastweb.com>

TIMELINE FOR APPLYING

Spring of Junior Year — Summer before Senior Year

- ❑ Begin researching graduate programs
- ❑ Meet with advisors, faculty members, and career development specialists to discuss programs
- ❑ Make a note of deadlines for tests, registrations, applications, interviews, essays, etc.
 - *Most are between December and March, later deadlines fall between March and August*
- ❑ Sign up for required standardized tests
- ❑ Identify potential reference letter writers
- ❑ Identify an initial list of 10 to 15 prospective graduate schools
- ❑ Begin looking into financial aid
- ❑ For medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry, or law school, you may need to register for the national application or data assembly service

Fall of Senior Year

- ❑ Take standardized tests.
- ❑ Generate a final list of universities to which you want to apply
 - We recommend the "Rule of 6" — two "reach," two "middle-of-the-pack," and two "safe bets"
- ❑ Write draft of application essays/statement of purpose
- ❑ Apply for financial aid available through program; assistantships, fellowships, scholarships, etc.
- ❑ Request letters of recommendation from faculty members and former employers
- ❑ Order official transcripts
- ❑ Finalize your essay/statement of purpose and have it reviewed at the Career Development Center
- ❑ Submit application for programs that have a late fall deadline

Spring of Senior Year

- ❑ Fill out the FAFSA form and submit as soon after January 1 as possible
- ❑ Submit all applications even if they are not yet due - many schools pay special attention to early applications
- ❑ Compare offers based on your top values
- ❑ Visit prospective campuses, if possible, and talk to faculty/students to help you make your final decision
- ❑ Research deadlines to apply for graduate assistantships offered
- ❑ Make a decision — contact other programs to decline or withdraw
- ❑ Send thank-you notes to people who wrote your recommendation letters or helped you during the application process

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Application Form

You will likely have to apply to the graduate school as well as the specific department

Application Fee

Application fees can be as much as \$80 per school

Official Transcripts

You can order UCO official transcripts for free through UCONNECT, fax, mail, or in person
<https://www.uco.edu/em/registrar/transrequest.asp>.

Admission Essay

Also called a personal statement, letter of intent, or letter of purpose

▶ **General Essay Tips:**

- Essay should be typed, not handwritten, and error free.
- Make sure you respond to the questions asked. Follow instructions regarding length. If there is no limit, two double-spaced pages is a good rule of thumb.
- Use a strong opening sentence or paragraph. Try to grab the reader's attention.
- Be clear and concise. Organize your essay effectively.

▶ **Content Tips:**

- Include a combination of personal and academic information.
- Discuss the history of your interest and your goals for obtaining the graduate degree.
- Go beyond the obvious and indicate how things such as extracurricular activities have impacted you or your choice of career.
- Be as specific about your career goals as possible. Emphasize your passion for the field.
- Indicate some knowledge of the program to which you are applying — be specific.
- Be yourself. Don't write what you think the admissions committee wants to hear.
- Avoid controversial topics like politics and religion. Don't criticize the profession
- Avoid clichés, for example, "I want to be a doctor because I like to help people."
- The statement can include some explanation of less-than-stellar grades or test scores.

▶ **Before You Send It:**

- Ask yourself and others if your essay is relevant, interesting, and memorable.
- Have someone proofread your essay like a professor or someone familiar with essays.
- Don't send exactly the same essay to several schools if the questions asked are different.

▶ **Resources**

- <https://www.gradschools.com/get-informed/applying-graduate-school/essay-writing>
- www.statementofpurpose.com

Test Scores

Most schools require scores on at least one standardized test for admission. Typically, a minimum score is required but that score does not guarantee admission. We encourage you find out about the "average" test scores of people admitted to a program.

Letters of Recommendation

You will typically be asked for 2 or 3 recommendations, but each university will specify the number they require. A program may provide a recommendation form for your recommenders or simply request a letter.

▶ **When deciding who to request letters from, you should consider the following:**

- A professor in your field who knows you well and can speak to your academic abilities.
- Someone in your field who has supervised you through an internship, field work, job, etc.
- Start thinking about potential recommenders early. Visit professors during office hours, get involved in research or community service projects, and/or have conversations with supervisors about your career goals.