CHOOSING GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS/PROGRAM

Making Decisions About Going to Graduate/Profession School

Once a student has decided to apply to a graduate/professional school, an important decision becomes the selection of schools to which to apply. Prospective graduate/professional students need to develop objective and subjective criteria for good decision-making. This section suggests criteria and some resources to help gather information.

Objective and Subjective Criteria

In order to compare graduate schools and evaluate them, a list of criteria can be very useful. The following factors are suggested as elements students may want to consider. The list is adapted from PATH: A Career Workbook for Liberal Arts Students by Howard Figler. Additional academic, geographical, and personal factors can be added. Each school can be considered in light of the criteria.

**Faculty**

- Members of the Faculty
  - How many faculty members does the school have in the department?
  - What is the faculty to student ratio?
  - Does the reputation of the department rest on the shoulders of one or two people?

- Diversity in the Faculty
  - Is there a variety of viewpoints in the department?
  - Will that be important to you?

- Publications by Faculty
  - What have faculty members published recently?
  - Do these subjects match any of your interests?

- Availability of Faculty
  - Are the faculty readily available to students, in the classroom, for research, for consultation?
  - Ask these questions especially if you hope to work with a noted individual.

**Program and the Students**

- Program Relevance
  - Does the program fit your interests within the field?
  - Will you develop the knowledge and skills you need?

- Quality of the Program
  - What are the state goals and purposes of the program?
  - What is the reputation of the program?
How is the program rated?
Are the facilities and equipment acceptable?
What are the course offerings like?

Admissions Preferences
Where do the graduate students in the program come from?
What are their qualifications?
Does the department recruit recent undergraduates, or is experience in the field preferred?
What qualifications and qualities does the department seek?

Opportunities for Women/Men and Minority Groups
Especially in a field dominated by one gender, what are the opportunities for the other gender?
Does the institution meet the guidelines of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity?
Are teaching and research assistant positions available to students regardless of gender, ethnic classification and age?

Attrition
Do many students who are admitted fail to complete the program? (Information would be obtained from campus visits and questions to students and faculty)

Graduates Produced and Time to Complete the Degree
How many Master's and Ph.D.'s does the department produce each year?
What is the average length of time needed to complete the degree?

Assistance and Experiences
Fellowships and Funds
How much fellowship money is available? How many students receive fellowships?
Would you be likely to receive a fellowship?

Internships and Assistantships
Does the program include planned practical experiences?
If so, where could you work, and what could you do?

The Future
Your Career Plans
What kind of job do you hope to get after graduation? Years beyond graduation?
What kinds of positions are obtained by graduates of the departments?
What do current students hope to be doing?
What is the reputation of the program among potential employers?

Assistance with Finding a Job
What percentage of graduates find employment in their chosen occupation?
What placement or job search assistance is available from the department?

Versatility of the Degree

What is the variety of work obtained by graduates?

Are there options for applying this degree to other fields?

Life at School

What is the size of the school?

What is the surrounding location—consider climate, urban or rural, cost of living, opportunities to pursue other interests?

Final Selection

In considering the factors listed above, students will be asking if a particular graduate school and program will meet their needs, be appropriate for their skills and abilities, and fit in with their plans for the future. There will be the other side of the question as well: will the students be accepted for admission by the schools of their choice.

To develop optimal chances for themselves, students are encouraged to apply to some institutions to which they aspire and believe they might have some chance, even if the school is very competitive. Of course, it is important to be realistic about expectations of admission when competition is strong. In addition, students will want to choose schools that meet their requirements and to which they have a stronger chance of being accepted. Finally, if it is very important that the student go to graduate school at a particular time, he or she may want to include some schools for which chances of admission are excellent. Another option would be to use time between college and graduate school to gain experiences considered important for a field of study or to take courses to show evidence of high grades in a discipline.

In determining the number of institutions to which to apply the student is advised to consider chances of admission, the importance of going to graduate school at a particular time as well as remembering the time and expense required to submit a large number of applications.

Sources of Information

People Resources

UMM professors and advisors

Career Services career counselors

UMM alumni and others who have attended graduate school

Potential employers in your field

Graduate school representatives. Some attend the annual Graduate/Professional School Information Day each fall at UMM

Current faculty, students, staff at the graduate school. Visit campuses if possible.

Printed Resources

Peterson's Guides to Graduate Programs

The College Blue Book

Graduate school catalogues on microfiche in the Career Resource Center

Gorman Report: A Rating of Graduate and Professional Programs
Current copies of catalogues and other materials requested from the schools

DISCOVER (Module 7 contains listings of approximately 1300 graduate/professional programs)

GENERAL TIMELINE FOR GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL APPLICATION
The following timeline is based on one presented in Peterson's Guides to Graduate Study. This is a general guide and should be adapted as each individual determines the deadlines for their selected schools.

First and Second Years of College

Explore!
Develop an awareness of your abilities, values, goals, interests.
Explore different academic disciplines and see which ones connect with your interests and abilities.
Begin to explore career options and the possibility of education beyond UMM.
Consider seeing a career counselor.
Talk to faculty in your field of interest to ensure selection of appropriate courses for graduate school requirements. If you are planning graduate study in an academic field, declare your undergraduate major in that field, if possible.
Consider getting involved in extracurricular activities or research projects related to your field of graduate/professional school.
Keep your grades up!

Junior Year -- Fall and Spring

Conduct research!
Research yourself--
What are your general interests, goals, values, abilities?
What are your academic and career interests?
Seek input from faculty, people who know you, and career counselors.
Research occupations--
Read printed materials.
Talk to people in the field.
Consider internships.
Look for occupation-graduate school connections.
Research graduate/professional school options--
Research possible graduate school programs--look at the Peterson's Guides, College Blue Books, etc. in the Career Resource Center.
Investigate national scholarships.
Talk to advisors and other professors about schools and application requirements.
If you are planning to apply to professional schools (for example, law, medical, dental, osteopathy or podiatry) you may have to register for the data assemble service or national application service.
Junior Year--Summer

Consider these steps and take some action!

Consider taking the required admissions tests at this time.
Research graduate schools of interest.
Read catalogues on microfiche in the Career Resource Center
Talk to advisors and professors about schools.
Talk to graduates of schools, perhaps UMM alumni.
Discuss schools with potential employers, if relevant.
Write schools for materials, catalogues, application and financial aid materials.
If possible, visit graduate schools of interest.
Begin to write personal statements. (See handouts in the Career Resource Center).

CAREFULLY NOTE APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS, AND DEADLINES-- SOME MAY BE EARLIER THAN THIS GENERAL TIMETABLE SUGGESTS.

Senior Year--Fall

If you have not already taken required admissions tests, do so now. Make sure your test scores are sent to the schools/programs you desire.

(Booklets including application forms are available from the UMM Student Counseling Service).
Select the schools/programs to which you will apply.
Request letters of recommendation from faculty and others well in advance of the deadlines.
Request that transcripts be sent. (UMM Registrar’s Office).
Complete personal statements/professional objectives. (Seek help from UMM Writing Room, if needed).
Gather and edit papers you might need as examples of your writing and research ability.
Formulate your budget for financial aid applications.
Write a resume. (See handouts in Career Resource Center).
Complete and send applications to graduate schools. Deadlines may be as early as January 1.
Determine a Plan B. What will you do if you are not accepted into a program you desire?

Senior Year--Early Spring

WELL BEFORE THE DEADLINES, check with schools to make sure your application is complete.
Register for Graduate and Professional School Financial Aid Service (GAPSFAS) if required, and complete other financial aid requirements.
Visit schools that accept you, if you have not done so already.
Submit a deposit to the school you choose.
Notify other schools accepting you of your decision.
Send thank you notes to those who wrote letters of recommendation for you.
For Graduate Test Information check out Test.com.
CareerPlanit Grad School, Etc Planning