



## MAKING THE DECISION TO APPLY

### WHY *SHOULDN'T* YOU GO TO GRAD SCHOOL?

- To please someone else.
- You don't know what else you want to do.
- To avoid a tight job market.

### WHY *SHOULD* YOU GO?

- You have a compelling interest that can only be satisfied with graduate study.
- For increased satisfaction in your life.
- To (eventually, possibly) make more money.

### STILL UNDECIDED? A FEW MORE THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

- Where you want to be in 3-5 years.
- How long it takes to complete the program.
- The faculty and the content of the program.
- The makeup of the student body and student life.
- How successful the program is in terms of placement: how many graduates have actually gotten positions after completing the program?
- Is the experience going to be worth the cost in tuition payments or student loans?

## YOU DECIDE GRAD SCHOOL IS FOR YOU. SO, NOW WHAT?

### *STEP ONE: Find your "universe" of possible schools.*

- Peterson's guides in the Career Services Resource Library or online sites such as [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com) and [www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com).
- Professors.
- Parents, parents' friends, friends' parents, alumni.
- Practicing professionals in your field of interest.
- Citations in scholarly journals.

### *STEP TWO: Rank them according to your interests and difficulty of admission.*

- Peterson's guides.
- Talk with professionals in the field to get their informal rankings.
- Popular published rankings.
- The number of applicants they accept each year.
- Their stated minimum test score necessary.
- Call and ask: how hard is it to get in?
- Look at the program's web site for course descriptions and faculty information.

### *STEP THREE: Divide into 3 categories: reach, maybe, safety.*

### *STEP FOUR: Pick target schools (at least 2 in each of the above 3 categories).*

Once you have 6-12 targets:

### *STEP FIVE: Call or e-mail for application and catalog.*

- Check their web site for downloadable application materials.

### *STEP SIX: Check application for what you need: make a timeline.*

- It's a good idea to get your application in as early as you can.

### *STEP SEVEN: Check catalog for names of specific professors who interest you.*

- Call school and ask for information on these professors.
- Write to the professors – ask questions about the program, show that you're interested.

## **YOU'VE FIGURED OUT WHERE YOU WANT TO GO. NOW YOU HAVE TO GET THEM TO WANT YOU.**

**WHAT GRAD SCHOOLS ARE LOOKING FOR:** Thoughtful, well-prepared, ambitious, and mature candidates who stand out in the application pool; students with a mission and vision. Candidates who give evidence that they will succeed in the program to which they apply.

**\*\*If you have decided to pursue degrees in Law, Business, or Medicine and Allied Health fields, be sure to consult the appropriate advisor for assistance. Business and Pre-Med (and Allied Health fields) applicants should meet with Cindy Parker in Career Services. For Law, talk with Cate Talbot Ashton in Career Services.**

### **WHAT ADMISSIONS COMMITTEES LOOK AT:**

#### ***ONE: GRADES***

- Never estimate your G.P.A. – make it precise.
- How to make moderate grades look better? Recompute your G.P.A. after omitting a bad year/semester: show, for example, that your g.p.a. has increased every year, or share information about why particular grades were low. But be truthful here and avoid any appearance of sounding defensive or whiny.

#### ***TWO: TEST SCORES***

- Take a look at a test-prep book to determine whether you need to take additional steps to prepare for the tests applicable to your graduate school goal.
- For GRE subject tests, be sure to review introductory texts and class notes. Consult with professors in the subject area for advice.

#### ***THREE: APPLICATION AND ESSAY***

Tips for a good application:

- Leave nothing blank (make nothing up, but leave nothing blank.)
- Send something extra (a paper, lab report, résumé.) Make it good and directly related to the program to which you're applying.
- Show that you've published or have made an attempt to get published (but only if it is true).

Tips for a good essay:

- Strong opening line.
- Tell why you're prepared for grad school.
- Present a vision of your future.
- CHECK SPELLING AND PROOFREAD!!
- Substantiate your interest in the program.
- Tell of some adversity you've overcome.
- Show it to people whose opinion you respect.

#### ***FOUR: RECOMMENDATIONS***

In asking for recommendations:

- Open a reference file in Career Services.
- Level with your professors and ask them to level with you. Be direct in asking if he/she can prepare a strong recommendation for you and can meet your application deadlines.
- Provide your professor with information about yourself: transcript, résumé – anything that reflects upon you favorably.
- Make sure he/she knows your deadline.
- Remind him/her (nicely) every week.
- Thank your reference writers!

**NOTE!** The application/essay and the recommendations are what get you out of the maybe pile and into the admit pile. So get your recommendations in early. It also can be a good idea to send one more recommendation than required to the school.

### **WHAT IF YOU DON'T GET IN ANYWHERE?**

- Apply to more schools, including more safety schools.
- Ask the programs where you didn't get in what would strengthen your application.
- Take an intermediate degree.
- Take additional classes.
- Enroll in summer school at your targeted school.
- Wait until you're older.
- Gain experience.