Many people consider attending graduate school but are unsure whether they should or how to begin the application process. Attending graduate school is a major decision and should not be made lightly. You need to consider your professional and personal goals, research different programs, and submit your materials in a timely fashion. This handout will address many of the common questions individuals encounter when considering graduate study.

SHOULD I ATTEND GRADUATE SCHOOL?
Perform a self-assessment before applying. Some areas you might want to consider:

Professional goals
- Do your professional goals require a graduate degree?
- How will you use the degree once you’ve acquired it?

Motivation for attending
- Are you considering graduate school because it feels “safe” as you are wary about entering the job market?
- Are you considering graduate school due to the wishes of a friend or family member?
- Do you have a strong interest in a particular topic that you wish to study in-depth?

WHAT TYPE OF PROGRAM SHOULD I SELECT?
Academic
- Focuses on original research or creative activity, teaching at a college/university, working in a research facility.
- Master’s degrees take 1-3 years.
- Ph.D. programs take approximately 3-7 years after obtaining the Master’s degree.

Professional
- Law, medicine, architecture, business, theology, and social work are a few examples that stress practical application of knowledge.
- Professional degrees take approximately 2-5 years depending on the area of study.
- Medical programs vary based on specializations.
- Medical school usually take 4 years after undergraduate, then 1-3 years of residency/intern, and could involve 2-6 more years based on the area of specialization.

WHEN SHOULD I ATTEND?
Pros/Cons of Working First

- **Pros**— gain experience, help determine area for graduate study, clarify career goals, assess likes/dislikes/abilities, company may offer tuition reimbursement, gives time to mature/learn/gain a perspective on the world outside academe, can enhance application credentials
- **Cons**—may not return to graduate school, lose study skills, financial considerations, trying to balance work/family/school
Pros/Cons of Going to Graduate School Immediately after Undergraduate Degree

• **Pros**—may be required in some professions to obtain career goal, familiar with study skills and habits, desire to study more in your chosen area, no gap in your educational experiences, fewer personal obligations, may be able to defer loan payments

• **Cons**—burnout, existing school loans may continue to build interest, no significant work experience, being labeled an “academic” when you try to enter job market, some programs may prefer/require you to work first

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL?

Researching Programs
Careful research will help you make an informed decision about existing graduate programs at a variety of excellent institutions. Research sources include the Internet, talking to professors, Alden Library, campus visits, meeting with faculty and current graduate students at programs you are considering, and looking through professional research journals in your chosen academic discipline to see what universities are represented. It is vital that you find programs suited to your professional goals. Careful research should allow you to identify programs that are a good fit.

Evaluating Programs
There are many issues to consider when evaluating graduate programs. Some of the issues include:

- Quality of Faculty, faculty specialization
- Reputation of program
- Prestige
- Accreditation
- Size of college/university
- Classes offered in your area of interest
- Facilities
- Student Services
- Educational cost
- Housing - cost, quality, location
- Financial aid (Scholarship/Loans)
- Teaching/graduate assistant positions
- Geographic Location
- Surrounding community
- Other issues of importance to you – diversity, health care, rural/city, transportation, recreational opportunities, religious organization, cultural opportunities
- Employment statistics of program graduates

Obtaining Application Materials
Each institution you are considering will have their own process for applying to graduate school. The application process can vary greatly from one institution to the next, so it is important to follow application procedures carefully. You will want to obtain the following types of materials during the application process:

- Graduate catalog—information on all programs and application requirements (many are online).
- Departmental information about a specific graduate program.
- Admissions applications (many are online).
- Some colleges/universities will require you to apply to The Graduate School and your chosen program of study.
- Financial aid forms—Federal, college/university, scholarship applications.

Registering, Studying, and Taking Admissions Exams
Almost all graduate programs will require you to take some type of standardized exam. There are different exams based on different areas of study.
Know what exam you need to take:

- GRE—Graduate Record Exam
- LSAT—Law School Admission Test
- GMAT—Graduate Management Admission Test
- MCAT—Medical College Admission Test
- MAT—Miller Analogies Test
- OAT—Optometry Assessment Test
- DAT—Dental Admission Test
- PCAT—Pharmacy College Admission Test

Many programs will list guidelines for the minimum acceptable score on the required entrance exam in your area. You need to plan ahead so you can take the exam(s) again if you are not satisfied with your score the first time. LSAT scores are averaged and you have a limited number of times you can take the LSAT exam, so read your registration materials carefully.

Registration for most exams will be online. Make sure you check on dates and locations for these exams because you may need to register up to eight weeks prior to taking the exam. It may also take 3-10 weeks for your results, depending on the exam you take, so plan accordingly.

Studying for the exam(s) you are required to take is crucial. Consider taking an exam review class, purchasing a CD-ROM which has sample tests, or study guides. If you have financial need, it is possible to take graduate entrance exams once at no cost. Check with the Office of Financial Aid for more information.

- Ohio University’s Community and Professional Programs office has preparation courses for various graduate exams; check their web site http://www.ohiou.edu/noncredit/explore.htm for more information.
- Ohio University’s Educational Testing Center (www.ohiou.edu/etc/), located in the Computer Services Center (CSC Building), offers the following tests on computer: GRE General, GRE Writing Assessment, and NBTPS.
- Ohio University’s Learning Express Library offers practice tests, exercises, and information on the GRE, GMAT, LSAT, and MCAT. For more information check out their website at:
  http://www.learnatest.com/LEL/index.cfm/

Official Transcripts

Most institutions require an “official transcript” from Ohio University, which includes a list of classes taken, grades, GPA, class rank, graduation date, and an embossed University seal. Transcripts can be requested from the Registrar’s Office in Chubb Hall; you can request transcripts online, by fax, or in person. If you attended several colleges or universities prior to completing your degree at Ohio University, you may need to submit a transcript from each college/university attended. Remember to allow processing time for your transcript requests!

Grade Point Average (GPA)

The requirements for grade point averages vary from program to program. Most graduate programs prefer at least a 3.0-3.2 cumulative GPA. If you continue on in graduate school and apply to Ph.D. programs, they usually require approximately a 3.5 GPA in a Master’s program. The GPAs listed here are only guidelines; extremely competitive programs will expect outstanding GPAs.
Letters of Recommendation
Letters of recommendation are generally written by faculty or other professionals within the University who can speak for your ability to do well in graduate school (academic advisors who know you well, advisors for student organizations, etc.). Most programs require three to four letters. You must consider carefully who will write letters for you; always ask the person if they are willing to write a positive letter of recommendation and do not assume she/he will write. If you ask the person directly, then they can tell you if they feel comfortable writing a recommendation. You should provide your references with a copy of your current résumé and personal statement as to why you want to attend graduate school. Be sure to follow the directions listed on the application for the correct procedure to follow when submitting letters of recommendation.

Portfolio, Audition Pieces, or Interview
Some disciplines require a portfolio of your work (i.e. architecture, art, graphic design, photography, visual communication, journalism, teaching, etc.) to determine if your work shows potential and you have the necessary basic skills and knowledge that can be nurtured and developed during graduate study. Other disciplines require a performance or audition piece(s) performed live or submitted on tape, CD, or DVD (i.e. dance, music, film, theatre, broadcast journalism, telecommunications, etc.). You are encouraged to speak with professors in your area to learn more about preparing these items correctly and professionally. A graduate program may require you to travel for an interview, portfolio review, or a live audition. Since you will want to prepare for an interview, you are encouraged to participate in a Mock Interview through the Center & Leadership Development Center. See Interviewing Handouts for more information.

Personal Statement
Graduate and professional schools typically require applicants to submit some type of written statement as a part of the application process. This document is referred to as your “personal statement,” “letter of intent,” “personal narrative,” etc. The requirements for this document will vary according to the field and institution.

• Purpose: Typically, the purpose of the letter is to support your candidacy and thereby, convince the admissions committee you are a good candidate for their program. Focus on why you would be a good fit for the programs, your credentials, and your career/professional goals.
• Content: A graduate program may provide a list of questions to address or explain the type of information you need to include in a personal statement. Statements are generally two to three pages typed, but each program may specify a word or page limit. You will want to be sure to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the area in which you wish to specialize. Express why you are interested in graduate study. Include your career goals and plans for the future, your academic qualifications and record of success to support your candidacy. Prove your knowledge and understanding of the institution and the particular program you are applying to. Also, be sure to make it personal, and provide information about yourself.
• Style: There is no perfect style. You should carefully read what the school has requested and adjust your style if necessary.

General Guidelines:
• Be specific – give examples that demonstrate your skills, abilities, and commitment.
• Do not ramble – make your points early, and attract the readers’ attention.
• Be objective – write in a straightforward manner that speaks to your experience and goals.

It is helpful to have other people read over your personal statement paying close attention to writing style, grammar, argumentation, and thought development.
Applying for Financial Aid
Unfortunately, many gifted students do not apply for graduate study as an undergraduate because they have financial concerns. However, there are many financial aid packages available for graduate students. Financial aid opportunities include:

- Loans and Grants
- Tuition Waivers
- Scholarships
- Teaching Assistantships
- Graduate Assistant/Associate
- Fellowships

You will need to fill out the FAFSA form as well as submit an application for financial aid to the graduate program. If you need to obtain a loan, many loan agencies do not require that you start repaying your debt until six months after graduation. The Office of Financial Aid should be able to answer questions on financing graduate school whether you continue at Ohio University or attend another institution.

WHAT IS THE TIME LINE FOR THE APPLICATION PROCESS?
Timing is crucial when applying for graduate study! The following time line may help you plan the application process.

Junior Year
Research programs, determine type(s) of exam(s) you need to take, visit programs and speak with current graduate students and faculty, begin studying for exams, send for catalogs, gather application materials, assess programs you are considering, research financial aid at each institution and federal aid programs.

Summer between Junior/Senior Year
Study for exams, possibly take exams, work on personal statement, determine who will write letters of recommendation, work on portfolio/audition pieces.

Senior Year
- Fall: Take entrance exam(s), complete personal statement, have others read over personal statement, complete applications, develop flow chart of what each school requires for the application process and check off each item as it is completed, request official transcripts, give forms and supplemental information to your references for their ease in writing letters of recommendation, finish portfolio/audition pieces, submit any necessary financial aid forms/applications.
  - Make sure your file is complete! After a reasonable length of time, check in with each graduate school to make sure they received all required materials!
- Winter: Have ALL materials submitted and ALL exams completed prior to Jan. 1. Be patient. Wait to hear from the schools.
- Spring: Make decision as to where you will attend, finalize financial aid, find a place to live!

For more information, visit the Career & Leadership Development Center web site. Click on the Graduate School Planning section. You may also schedule an appointment with a counselor in the Career & Leadership Development Center.