

Undergraduate Preparation For Graduate School: What You Can Do NOW

Take actions to narrow which discipline/field/major and research interests you want to pursue:

- Get help from your advisor
- Take a good look at what you are passionate about
- Google your passions
- Look at where your skills and talents are
- Get a catalog of graduate school courses from a school which offers many programs in your areas of interest. Highlight every course you're interested in taking. See which programs have the most classes highlighted.
- Look at your transcript and highlight the classes you most enjoyed and did well in.
- Get advice from people you respect: instructors/professors, advisors and friends, family, fellow students, community members

Get to know people in the department you are currently in:

- Your advisor
 - Professors
 - Staff
 - Graduate students
 - Fellow students
1. Inform them of your plan to pursue graduate education.
 2. Ask them for guidance through this process and to pass along information about graduate school opportunities/resources.
 3. Let them know about your research and academic interests and related extra curricular activities.

Work hard in your undergraduate classes and try to get the best grades and do your best work. You want your professors to know just how smart you are.

Build strong student-teacher relationships with professors/instructors in your field (See handout on strategies for building bridges with professors):

- They can help you to choose which graduate schools to apply to
- They can help you on your personal statement
- They might be the ones you ask for letters of recommendation
- They can provide more information on what skills you should gain/improve on for graduate school success in your field
- They can tell you what graduate school was like for them, and what led to their success
- They might be able to tell you about internship opportunities in your field
- You might be able to work on a research project with them (see Undergraduate Research Project Mentor Guidelines handout)
- You might be able to be a teaching assistant in one of their classes
- They might be able to give you readings to help you to focus on your research interests
- They might be able to tell you about scholarships you can apply for or they might nominate you for awards in your department
- You might inspire them
- You might have a new idea for a research project which they are also interested in (see Undergraduate Research Project Mentor Guidelines handout)

Build strong student-teacher relationships with professors/instructors in your field (See handout on strategies for building bridges with professors) *continued*:

- You might be able to help lighten their workload if you are a teaching assistant or research assistant
- Your enthusiasm for school might be a positive reinforcement for them
- Your academic relationship with them may help them to better serve and understand the needs of other students like you

Get to know people from other schools who are in your department/field/major:

- Go to graduate school fairs—NAU has one each Fall and Spring semesters
- Go to lectures, book signings, and other more public events related to your department/field of study
- Go to conferences related to your field of interest

Let people know of your background/situation:

Sometimes graduate schools want to increase diversity and may even offer financial incentives to attract you to their program.

- First-generation in college
- Low-income*
- Member of an ethnicity or gender underrepresented in higher ed or underrepresented in your discipline/field of study
- Learning disabilities or other documented disabilities*
- Your discipline or field of interest for graduate study
- Names of graduate schools you're interested in
- Topics you are interested in researching
- Relevant life/work/volunteer experience in your field

**Be sure that it's documented now so that in the future you can investigate any available services on your graduate school campus*

Decide how many schools to apply to. We recommend at least 5:

- 2 schools you are pretty sure you can get into
- 2 schools you have a fair chance of getting into
- 1 prestigious school that you've always dreamed of going to but think your chances are pretty slim

Determine which 5 graduate schools you'll apply to by:

- Researching graduate programs on the internet, through Gateway Student Success Center, at graduate school fairs
- Asking professors in your field
- Asking advisors
- Pay attention to your favorite readings and who wrote them—where do the authors teach?

Once you have narrowed down your selections:

1. Visit as many of your top five graduate school choices as you can. (See Graduate School Visitation handout)
2. Check out graduate schools on the internet and find out their admissions requirements.
Do they ask for a writing sample? When you are taking classes and have papers due, do your best work so that you have choices on which writing sample to choose to include in your graduate school application.
3. Contact the graduate schools and ask if they have application fee waivers and what the criteria and process for obtaining them are.
4. Make a checklist of what you need to turn in for each school's graduate school application
(Do you need to turn in different items to the department than what you need to turn in to the graduate school office?)

Once you have narrowed down your selections *continued*:

5. Start a list of things you think would be good to include in your personal statement. Start working on your personal statement now. (See Graduate School Personal Statements handout)
6. Contact the graduate schools you're interested in (call the department office) and find out when they make funding decisions for graduate students. Use that deadline and not necessarily the advertised application deadline which might be much later.
7. Make a timeline of when your applications need to be in for each graduate school you're interested in.
8. Create/update a resume or curriculum vitae (academic resume) which lists ALL of your paid and unpaid work experience, your activities, special skills, honors and awards since you've started college. Be sure to be accurate on dates and names and titles.
9. Find out about graduate school admissions examinations such as GRE, LSAT, GMAT, etc. Build a strategy for studying for these.

To Supplement Your Application:

Gain research experience (see Undergraduate Research Project Mentor Selection Guidelines)

- Approach a professor you took a class with and ask if you can assist with a research project s/he is working on. Perhaps you can earn academic credits in your department and have it listed on your transcript. (See handout on selecting a mentor)
- Look on the web for paid summer research opportunities
- Ask fellow students about research opportunities
- Ask advisors about research opportunities

Gain teaching experience

- Approach a professor whose class you did well in and ask if you can become a teaching assistant or tutor. You may be able to get internship or special projects credits for this.
- Ask department staff if there are any professors who need or want teaching assistants or tutors
- Ask fellow students if they know of anyone who has been a teaching assistant or tutor and which professor s/he worked for

Gain teaching experience *continued*

- Ask advisors for teaching or tutoring opportunities
- See if there are tutoring jobs advertised in other departments such as academic assistance programs on campus

Gain internship experience

- See if there is an internship coordinator at your department.
- Ask department staff about potential internships
- Ask professors and other students about potential internships
- See if Gateway Student Success Center lists internships in your field.

Tips for achieving a higher G.P.A.

- Don't take too many classes per term. Focus on doing well in fewer classes.
- Find out about getting tutoring in classes where you are not necessarily doing badly but would benefit from support.
- Consider retaking classes in which you earned a D or F if you are prepared to put in all effort required to earn an A or B.
- Look at study techniques and time management skills.

- Ask for help from professors, tutorial centers.
- Choose classes you really like.
- Evaluate non-academic reasons that prevent maintaining a high G.P.A. and determine what steps you can take in your personal life to remedy those (working less hours, improving study environment, assistance with relationship issues, etc).
- Consider the costs/benefits of graduating later than planned to raise your G.P.A. to a high level.

Improve Your Interviewing Skills

Some Graduate Schools will invite you for a personal interview to find out what you're like in person.

- Find out as much as you can about the interview (how long, group or individual interview, what kinds of questions do they ask, what are they looking for)
- Schedule a mock interview with the Gateway Student Success Center
- Prepare formal answers to frequently asked questions:
 - Why are you interested in this program?
 - What are your research interests?
 - Why do you want to be a _____?
 - Tell me something about you personally.
 - What are some of your strengths and weaknesses?