Graduate School Application Timeline

The timetable provided below lists the tasks that are typical for most application processes. Please note that the timetable represents the ideal timing for completing application tasks. It is not meant to discourage those who are unable to follow this outline.

Focus for the beginning of your college career

✓ Grades, activities, and participation within your academic field
✓ Explore areas of interest and potential research topics
✓ Make contacts in your field: faculty, graduate students, professionals, and classmates

Two years prior to entering graduate school (junior year)

September to March

✓ Determine with schools fit your educational goals. A few places to start are www.usnews.com, http://graduate-school.phds.org/, www.gradschools.com/, and www.petersons.com
✓ Gather specific information from schools themselves – contact programs and faculty
✓ Develop and prioritize a list of programs to apply to.
✓ Ask faculty you trust in your field for further program suggestions.
✓ Collect information about required admissions test(s). If you need to take a GRE subject test, it is offered only three times a year. The GRE general test is offered much more often. Consult the GRE website, www.gre.org for details.
✓ Determine if you can prepare for the admission test(s) on your own or if a test preparation course is needed.
✓ Start planning to attend conferences in your field, and present at a conference if possible. This is a great way to meet other students and faculty studying similar topics.
✓ Consider what professors or others you could ask for letters of recommendation.

What is the GRE?

Three sections: Quantitative, Verbal, and Analytical Writing

- Quantitative addresses math through pre-calculus, focusing on logic
- Verbal has challenging vocabulary, necessitating early preparation
- Analytical Writing consists of two timed essays

The Quantitative and Verbal sections are computer-adaptive: the difficulty adjusts from question to question based on your performance.

To start preparing, take a sample test at www.princetonreview.com, www.kaptest.com, or www.gre.org
Several companies offer GRE courses. To compare your options, see www.test-preparation.net. Ask the companies about possible financial aid.

March to August

- Take admissions test(s) if ready. Otherwise, begin preparation for the test(s).
- Request letters of recommendation (faculty have more time during the summer term to accommodate such requests). Provide any additional details or materials, as needed.
- If possible, visit schools. Arrange meetings with faculty, students, and administrative staff.
- Open a credential file by contacting Interfolio.com if you think it is appropriate.
- Write to request program applications or check to see if they are available online.
- Begin writing your application essay/personal statement and personalize it for each school.

Final year

September to March

- Have application essays/personal statements critiqued, preferably by a faculty advisor.
- Attend the Graduate and Professional School Expo to meet with graduate school representatives.
- Take admissions test(s).
- Mail in completed applications or submit online. Keep a copy of each application for your files.
- Complete the FAFSA and any other financial aid forms and apply for relevant scholarships. (Note: Financial aid deadlines are usually earlier than regular admissions deadlines. Generally, if you want to be considered for aid, your entire application package needs to be submitted by the financial aid deadline.)
- Have all transcripts and letters of recommendation forwarded to programs.
- Check with programs at least two weeks prior to deadlines to be sure your application file is complete. This will give you time to rectify any problems.

March to June

- Contact programs who turn down your application to find out how you could increase your chances if you were to apply again.
- Cross your fingers and hope for the best!
- Keep track of acceptances, rejections, and wait lists.
- With the offers you receive, weigh all considerations – academic, personal, and financial.
- Accept or decline offers before they expire, regardless of waitlisted status elsewhere.
- Arrange details for moving, housing, financial aid, employment, assistantships, etc.
The following sources were consulted in the production of this handout:

- www.gradschool.duke.edu/Admissions
- www.gre.org
- www.graduate-school.phds.org
- www.princetonreview.com/grad/apply/articles/process/schedule.asp
- Joanna Spanos, Colleges of the Arts and Sciences, Honors program