

# Applying to Graduate School

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- ◆ Making the decision to go to graduate school
- ◆ Deciding when is the 'right' time to attend?
- ◆ Using the timeline to prepare and apply
- ◆ Knowing the Application Process
- ◆ Paying for graduate school



**Smith College Lazarus Center for Career Development**

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## THE DECISION TO ATTEND GRADUATE SCHOOL

**Who?** The decision is yours. Make the decision because it is something you wish to pursue. Approximately 75% of Smith graduates will decide to attend a graduate or professional school at some point after their Smith graduation.

**Why?** Your decision to attend graduate school is a personal consideration which reflects your deep interest in a particular area of study, or, a qualification to enter a particular career field.

**When?** You may attend a graduate program immediately after receiving your undergraduate degree, or, it may be 1 or more years after graduation.

**What?** The program you enter may be a continuation of your undergraduate degree, or, it may stretch across disciplines building upon your skills, knowledge and experiences.

**Where?** Use resources to help narrow your list of graduate schools. Speak with faculty, alumnae, scholars/authors. Read resources such as [Peterson's](#). Explore associations affiliated with the career field you wish to enter.

**How?** Regardless when or where you decide to attend graduate school, the application process is one to enter into thoughtfully, purposefully, and with the support of others

## WHEN TO GO

### Reasons to go now

1. The sooner you start, the sooner you finish!
2. You may have fewer personal commitments now than you'll have later.
3. You may be interested in a field that's changing quickly, so you need to keep up.
4. You want to maintain your academic momentum.

### Reasons to go later

1. You need a rest from academia.
2. You need time to develop the purpose and focus to be a persuasive applicant.
3. Work experience will give you perspective on what training you need.
4. Experience may make you a stronger candidate for certain degree programs.
5. You want to establish legal/financial independence so you can apply for financial aid individually.
6. You've been working for a while, want to change careers, and need further training.

### Reasons to go part-time

1. You may only need specific courses, rather than an entire degree program.
2. You may find it more convenient to use distance or on-line learning programs.
3. Your employer may help you pay for courses related to your work.
4. Working while studying will keep your debt level down.

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## TIMELINE

The following timeline is appropriate for most graduate programs; carefully read application guidelines and follow accordingly.

**Start Early:** Application deadlines may be as early as November. Evaluation and acceptance into programs may be decided as applications arrive. Plan to submit a complete, thoughtful, error-free application by Thanksgiving.

### Spring of the application year

[Research graduate programs](#) based your criteria (i.e. area of interest, faculty and mentors, facilities and resources, research or experiential opportunities, financial aid and funding, geographic location, size of program, etc.)

Review graduate schools' brochure and application materials (*from the previous year*)

Speak with professors, alums, mentors and other professionals about your interests

Study and plan when you will take the appropriate [admission test](#)

Review the letter of [recommendation process](#) and carefully select recommendation writers

### Summer of the application year

Study and take the appropriate [admission test](#)

Research, contact, and visit graduate schools

Contact letter writers for updates

Draft [personal statements/statements of purpose](#) and have them reviewed and critiqued by a Lazarus Center Advisor

Request current brochures, application and financial aid materials

### Fall of Application Year

Study and take the appropriate [admission test](#)

Contact letter writers to insure completion and submission

Create list of schools to which you will apply

Complete and submit application and financial aid materials at least 1-month before deadline

### Winter

Confirm completed application files

### Spring

If wait-listed, send additional supporting materials

Evaluate acceptances and pay

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## APPLICATION PROCESS

Craft your application specifically for each program to which you apply. Admissions officers want to understand who you are, what you bring to the program, what is your academic preparation and interest, and how their graduate program meets your needs.

### Personal Statement

Read the Personal Statement prompt and take the time to write your statement accordingly. Attend the [Writing a Personal Statement Workshop](#), or schedule an appointment with an advisor. [Writing your personal statement.](#)

### Transcripts

Most graduate programs require transcripts from any college where you had taken a college level class (even while in high school). If a college you attended is no longer in existence, request is made through the state department of education. [Requesting your Smith Transcript.](#)

### Tests

Graduate schools may require you to take an entrance examination as part of the application process. The exam is meant to evaluate your ability to succeed in their program, or, the likelihood you will pass certification or board examinations.

#### [Graduate Record Exam \(GRE\)](#)

[General Test](#) – is a general test of verbal, mathematical and analytical writing skills

[Subject Test](#) – specifically designed to evaluate your knowledge of a particular discipline

[Miller Analogies Test \(MAT\)](#) – most often used for education or counseling programs

[Test of English as a Foreign Language \(TOEFL\)](#) – may be required of students whose native language is not English

Take the test when you are most prepared to do well on the test. Review the examination by taking multiple practice tests. Practice books are available in most bookstores or online.

While most everyone hopes to take the GRE one time and achieve their target scores, sometimes it may be in the applicant's best interest to take the GRE a second time. In the an applicant takes the GRE multiple time, the applicant may choose to send to the graduate schools the higher of their test scores.

**Test Prep Organizations** – May be useful if you need assistance organizing time to study, preparing for and feeling confident in achieving a higher test score. Criteria to use in selecting a *prep course*: cost,

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## Letters of Recommendation

Select professors who will best support your application to a graduate program. Read the graduate program's application guidelines as to how many letters are required and how they are to be submitted. Read the [Guide to recommendations](#) and if appropriate, use [Interfolio](#).

## Interviews

Some programs (PhD level), will ask for an interview (which may include several sessions) with faculty members in your field and current students. This is an opportunity for the department to get to know you and offers you a chance to ask questions and determine whether the department is a good fit for you. Prepare for the interviews with a mock interview with the Lazarus Center staff.

## Paying For Graduate School

As with paying for your undergraduate career at Smith, most graduate schools will advise you to consult with their financial aid office. Graduate schools and programs may have several ways to assist in helping you pay for the cost of the graduate program.

- **Scholarships / Grants** — Almost consider this to be free money. Most often awarded for merit or need, an applicant may need to complete an application process or demonstrate their suitability for receiving this money.
- **Assistants** — May be associated with work study. You may be a teaching or research assistant with a professor or a department. You may work administratively with one of the institution's other offices, such as residential life, counseling, or student services.
- **Loans** — Just as with a bank or private funding institution, you are borrowing money from the institution, with determined interest percentage, which will be paid back to the institution after completing the degree or leaving the institution.

In addition to contacting the graduate program's financial office, paying for graduate school will most likely involve additional investigation into:

- Obtaining grants / scholarships from sources outside the institution. Consult websites of associations within your area of study, use resources such as "[Grant Forward](#)" to locate opportunities and monies available that apply to your study or to you as an individual (based on race, gender, etc.)
- Locating a part-time job in the community in which you are studying.
- Applying for loans through banks (be wise about interest rates and the amount of debt you may be incurring both from your Smith and graduate school loans.

Websites which may be useful to you include:

[AccessGroup](#), [FastWeb](#), [FinAid](#), or [US Department of Education](#).