

# Graduate School Guide

SUNY Cobleskill

## Student Success Center

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**Schedule an appointment with Lisa Lopez  
so she can assist you as you consider graduate school.**

# QUICK FACTS

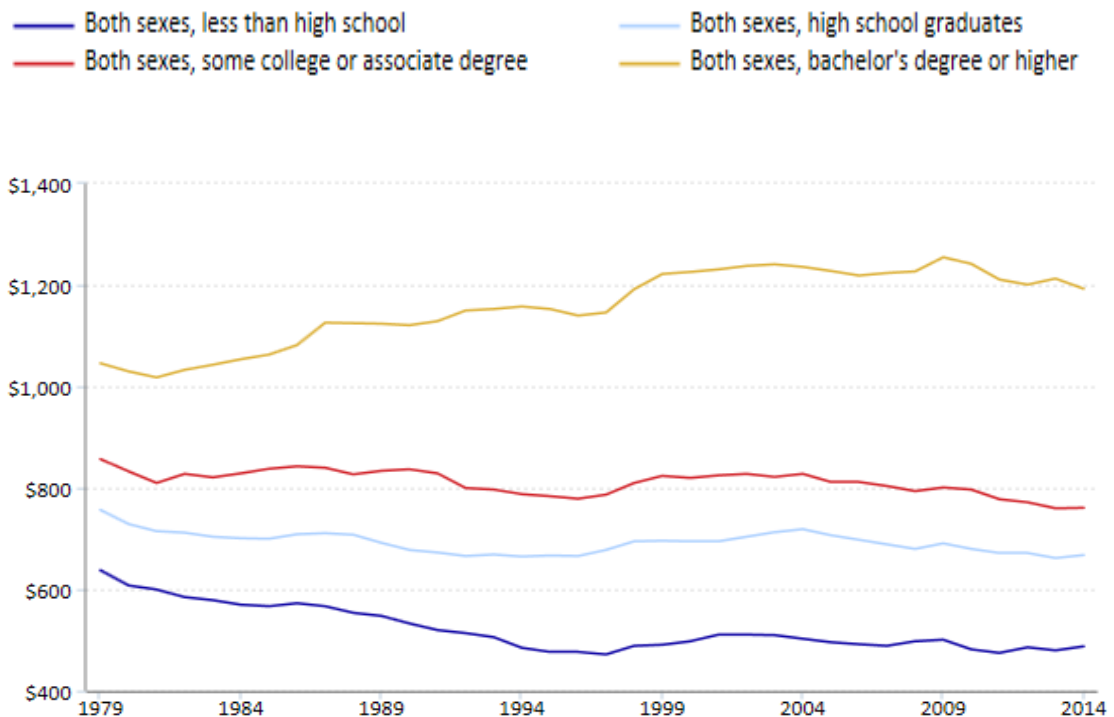
## About Graduate School

### Why Graduate School?

*A graduate degree can influence how fast and how far you can advance your career. It can increase your personal worth both financially and intellectually.*

- Graduate education gives you a chance to learn more about the things that interest you most and to develop your interests and skills into a satisfying career.
- If you enjoy problem-solving, discovering new facts, and exploring new ideas, consider graduate school.

**Median weekly earnings in 2014 dollars of people 25 years and older, by educational attainment and gender, 1979–2014**



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.  
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



## ***What is Graduate Education?***

- A graduate program is generally more focused on a specific area of interest and on acquiring specialized skills to practice a profession or do advanced research.
- The curriculum is generally a combination of coursework and internships (to practice professional skills).
- A master's degree usually takes 1 or 2 years of study, and a doctorate generally 5 years.
- A research master's degree may involve writing a thesis or taking a comprehensive examination.
- The research doctoral degree (the Ph.D.) involves training in research, which provides the skills to discover new knowledge. This degree can provide you with a variety of career choices.
- The first years of a Ph.D. involve coursework, while the final component usually involves original research through a dissertation

## ***Choosing a Graduate School***

Research carefully to choose the program that will best suit your needs and talents. There are more than 1,800 institutions in the United States that offer graduate degrees and the variety of programs is enormous.

### **Things to consider when choosing a program:**

- *Reputation*
- *Geography*
- *Cost/Funding*
- *Faculty Research Areas*
- *Interest, Abilities, Values*
- *Size of Institution/Program*
- *Library Holdings*
- *Research Facilities*
- *Placement Rates*

**Identify the Graduate Schools that interest you by using:**

- [www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com)
- The Peterson's Guide or [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)
- The College Blue Book
- U.S. News and World Report

Meet with our counselor in the Student Success Center at SUNY Cobleskill (Van Wagenen Library, Room 109) to explore the resources we have in our office, and to begin to develop your personal plan towards entering graduate school today. Please contact us at (518) 255-5624 for an appointment.

***Recommended Qualifications***

- A Bachelor's degree with a solid GPA (in any field), usually serves as a prerequisite. (Suggested GPA 3.0 or above).
- Positive letters of recommendation from faculty and employers.
- Work experience in a field that pertains to the graduate program. Involvement in activities, especially those showing leadership.
- Good written communication skills as demonstrated by a well written application.
- Your score on the appropriate standardized test to gain entrance to graduate school, including:

**GRE (Graduate Record Exam)** is a standardized test that helps graduate programs evaluate skills that have been developed over a long period of time and are not necessarily related to any particular field of study. Most general graduate schools require the GRE which includes sections on analytic writing, verbal skills and quantitative skills.

**LSAT (Law School Admission Test)** The LSAT is a standardized test designed to measure abilities needed for the study of law and to assist law schools in evaluating applicants. The exam includes multiple choice sections assessing the ability to read, understand and reason and a writing sample.

**GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test)** is a standardized test that helps business schools evaluate the qualifications of applicants for advanced study in business and management. The GMAT is required for most students seeking an MBA (Master of Business Administration) degree. This exam measures general verbal and mathematical skills, and does not test specific knowledge gained in a particular subject area.

**MCAT (Medical College Admissions Test)** The MCAT measures the applicant's abilities in chemistry, physics, biology, reading, quantitative and analytical skills. The test is typically administered twice a year, and applicants are encouraged to take the MCAT 18 months before entering medical school.

**OAT (Optometry Admissions Test)** The OAT is a standardized test for applicants seeking admission to schools and colleges of optometry. The exam is designed to measure general academic ability and comprehension of scientific information.

## ***Making the Decision to Attend***

Although there is no ideal profile for a graduate student, intelligence, initiative, and self-discipline are crucial qualities for success. You must be motivated and persistent. Also, you should have the ability to establish good working relationships with other people, since a large number of graduate programs depend upon working with faculty mentors and other students in your program.

In making the decision to select a graduate program, it's important to examine your interests, values, and abilities and how they match the career fields to which the graduate program might lead. To research the fields, talk with alumni and graduate program faculty. Also, visit our Student Success Center in Van Wagenen Library, Room 109 for more information.

## ***Financing Graduate School***

How to pay for graduate school is a major question for most people. There are three basic ways to finance your graduate education depending upon the type of program in which you are interested:

- 1) Fellowships/Scholarships**
- 2) Research Assistantships/Teaching Assistantships/Graduate Assistantships**
- 3) Grants and Loans**

Fellowships and scholarships are grants that are generally awarded on the basis of academic merit. They are intended to attract the most highly qualified students. They can be offered by a university, department, organization, or agency.

Assistantships are usually supported by stipends to perform tasks such as teaching, conducting research or working for an office or department on campus. Many institutions also waive or reduce tuition for students with assistantships.

Loans and grants are an important source of support for graduate students. This aid may come from the institution, a state, the federal government, or sometimes your employer.

## ***Graduate School Timetable***

### **SUMMER**

- Write a draft statement of purpose/personal statement.
- Start browsing through guides or catalogs to graduate programs and websites.
- Make time to conduct initial visits with a few graduate schools that have programs that you are interested in.
- Complete practice tests on line to begin to prepare for standardized tests.
- **CONSTRUCT A CHART/TIMELINE INDICATING DEADLINE DATES FOR THE SUBMISSION OF ALLPICATIONS AT THE SCHOOLS YOU ARE INTERESTED IN** (Remember, you want to apply **EARLY** to increase your chances for acceptance).

## **AUGUST/SEPTEMBER**

- Meet with faculty members you know to discuss your personal statement and learn about possible programs and edit based on feedback. The SSC can provide the initial review of your Grad School essay.
- Ask for letters of recommendation.
- Begin to develop your personal timeline for the application process.
- Sign up for the required standardized tests.

## **OCTOBER**

- Take standardized tests.
- Determine the schools to which you plan to apply and request application materials.
- Finish your timeline based on each institution's application and financial aid deadlines.
- Complete your personal statement, adjusting it to meet each application's specific needs. Have it reviewed by a Counselor at your Student Success Office, located at Van Wagenen Library, Room 109 on the SUNY Cobleskill campus. (Call (518) 255-5624 for an appointment).
- Order transcripts from all post-secondary institutions. If fall term grades are expected, check with staff in the registrar's office to see if a transcript including all fall term grades can be sent in time to meet your deadlines.

## **NOVEMBER**

- Complete application forms. Work using a rough draft until your application form is complete.
- Provide the individuals who are writing your recommendations all the information they will need.

## **DECEMBER/JANUARY**

- Submit applications. Even if deadlines are later, it is good to submit your application early as it increases your chances for acceptance.

## **FEBRUARY**

- Contact departments about the possibility of an on-site visit. It is very helpful to visit the campus in person.



## **APRIL**

- If you are applying for need-based financial aid programs, you may have to file a copy of your federal income tax return.

IF YOU ARE NOT ACCEPTED into the graduate programs you have applied to, it is helpful to contact each institution and find out the reasons why. This valuable feedback will be helpful as you persist and reapply. Do not become discouraged. Remember that graduate school is often difficult to gain entrance to, but worthwhile in terms of your enhancing your career opportunities.

*The Student Success Center is prepared to assist you every step of the way as you apply for graduate school. Please call for an appointment to discuss your plans.*

Pages 1-7 Adapted from UB Career Services, Doors of Opportunity, UB Career Guide.

## **Best Sources to Learn about Graduate Programs**

### **Professors**

This is your best source. Professors know you, they know which programs favor students from your school, they know the relative quality of graduate programs in their fields, and they even have personal friends at graduate programs where you might like to apply.

### **Other Students and Alumni**

Students and alumni have similar information. Alumni at graduate programs will give you the most honest information about the quality of the program and the faculty.

### **Peterson's Guides**

Peterson's guides have every accredited program in the United States. They are a little dense and boring, but if you want to learn about programs, there is no other complete resource. All major university libraries have a full set of Peterson's guides.

### **Specialty Guides**

Find specialty guides for your field, for example, *Graduate Programs in Neurosciences*, by asking professors for reference to them, by using the subject search engine at amazon.com, or by using the subject search engine on CD from *Books in Print*, available from your university bookstore. Some associations also print guides to graduate programs. Find out about them by looking up the association's HQ phone number in the *Encyclopedia of Associations*; then just call them and ask them.

### **Academic Journals in Your Field**

Top students should get grad school ideas directly from the academic journals. The best programs generate the best and the most articles, so look in the journals for writing and/or research that interest you; then find out where the article writer teaches.

### **Research-Doctorate Programs in the United States**

This is the best source for unbiased, multivariable analysis of graduate programs. It is the result of a National Research Council-funded study, limited to the top programs in 41 major subject areas. This is a much more sophisticated resource than the “beauty pageant” unilinear rankings of business magazines (see below).

### **Educational Rankings Annual**

A compendium of data from other sources. Expensive, but can be very useful. Check your library.

### **The Gourman Report**

Another “ranking” book, with methodologies that are never fully explicated. Can be useful.

### **The Business Magazine Rankings**

Business magazines are in the business of selling business magazines. Their editors usually know less about higher education than they know about automobiles, which is not a lot. These “rankings” are not useful *per se*, but you can get ideas to investigate further.

### **World Wide Web (www)**

Online data are voluminous but shallow, and can be downright misleading (for example, some sites list schools in order of having paid a subscription fee). Use the Web to investigate schools you’re already interested in, in this order: University-department-faculty-specific faculty member’s research interests-his or her advisees (i.e., currently enrolled graduate students). Also, watch carefully for information on related labs and institutes, which might interest you more than the main department.

Adapted from *Graduate Admissions Essays* by Donald Asher (Ten Speed Press), 2000)

## ***Why you need to apply early and to several programs: (actual cases)***

- ◆ One student was rejected because her portfolio was “accidentally placed on the wrong pile.” The graduate school discovered its mistake later in the season, but had already sent the student a rejection letter. Rather than admit what had happened, they let the decision stand.
- ◆ A student applying for a Ph.D. in philosophy received a letter from a major university rejecting his application for a Ph.D. in Germanic languages.
- ◆ A student was rejected by an internationally acclaimed architecture program after his portfolio was reviewed by Prof. X. When he called to inquire about the status of his application, Prof. Y picked up his portfolio,

glanced through it while the student was on hold, and reversed the decision of Prof. X; thus he was admitted.

- ◆ One professor forgot to mail a wonderful letter of recommendation he had written for his favorite advisee, and she was rejected.
- ◆ Another professor was not granted tenure, and stopped performing all duties whatsoever that were not contractually required. This included writing letters of recommendation *that he had already agreed to write*. At least one of his advisees was not admitted to a graduate program because of this. The student never knew what happened.
- ◆ A student failed to send original transcripts from a community college she attended while in high school. The transfer grades from the community college appeared on her regular college transcript but, through a bizarre chain of events, an overzealous student employee and a 50 cent library fine from six years prior conspired to keep her out of graduate school.
- ◆ A student had a wonderful exchange of letters with a department chair, some of which included such statements as “We’re so delighted that you will be joining us next year.” Nevertheless, she was rejected by the graduate school office, which had more authority than the department.

Adapted from *Graduate Admissions Essays* by Donald Asher, 1-800-841-BOOK or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

## Recommended Resources

### **Graduate Admissions Essays: How to Write Your Way into the Graduate Program of Your Choice**

By Donald Asher, \$19.95. The best-selling guide to the process of getting admitted to graduate school. Covers far more than essays (selecting schools, time lines, contacting professors, letters of recommendation, wait lists, everything). Amazon.com or tenspeed.com.

### **Sources for the Graduate School Search**

[www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com) The most comprehensive online source of graduate school information

[www.allaboutgradschool.com](http://www.allaboutgradschool.com) This site provides a comprehensive geographic directory of graduate schools in the United States along with test preparation information & recommended books.

[www.collegesource.org](http://www.collegesource.org) This website will give you access to complete graduate catalogs for institutions across the country. Very useful to search for programs by topic.

[www.eurograduate.org](http://www.eurograduate.org) A site for identifying graduate program opportunities across Europe.

[www.Gradprofiles.com](http://www.Gradprofiles.com) Features in-depth graduate and professional school profiles with information about programs of study, degree requirements, facilities, expenses, financial aid, faculty research and much more.

[www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com) Just like their Guide to Four Year Colleges, this site will let you search for graduate programs in nearly every discipline imaginable.

[www.usnews.com/sections/education](http://www.usnews.com/sections/education) Provides career outlook information, admission tips, and graduate school test information; also provides information on graduate programs in Business, Law, Medicine, Engineering, Education, Health, Library Science, PhD's, the Arts and Public Affairs.

[www.businessweek.com/bschools/00/](http://www.businessweek.com/bschools/00/)

### **Sources for Grad School Tests**

[www.ets.org](http://www.ets.org) Educational Testing Service has been leading the field of assessment and measurement for decades. ETS wants to help test takers understand the complex standardized testing process.

[www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org) The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is a commercially-run standardized test that is an admission requirement for many graduate schools in the United States and in other English-speaking countries.

[www.lsat.org](http://www.lsat.org) The Law School Admission Test

[www.mba.com/mba/thegmat](http://www.mba.com/mba/thegmat) The Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) is a computer-adaptive standardized test in mathematics and the English language for measuring aptitude to succeed academically in graduate business studies.

### **Sources for Grad School Test Prep**

[www.kaplan.com](http://www.kaplan.com) A company providing graduate test prep materials