

**Graduate school**, more so than undergraduate, is about preparing for a career in a particular field. Before you leap, investigate where a graduate degree can really take you. Choosing to attend graduate/professional school is an important and highly personal decision. If you are considering graduate school because you do not know what else to do, or because you want to postpone making further life decisions, you are likely to regret it. Be honest and careful when you examine your reasons for attending, and when making decisions about timing.

- What are common career paths for people who pursue graduate work in that field?
- Would you enjoy those career paths/work options?
- Is the advanced degree actually necessary for what you want to do?
- Does it make sense to go now, or to work a while first?
- How motivated and committed are you?

Graduate school costs time, money and energy. Many people decide to take their time working or doing other projects before attending graduate school. Taking time off before applying has helped many students gain a clearer focus, as well as a better understanding of their own goals.

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## WORK FIRST?

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- Working in your field of interest can help you identify possible areas of specialization.
- You can confirm that your view of the field/job is realistic and that the work environment is a good fit.
- Lastly, working before your advanced degree could make you a more competitive candidate for some graduate programs.

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## SEEK ADVICE

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- Some of the best sources of advice about graduate school programs are your **faculty**. They know you and they are familiar with your work and interests at Hampshire. They can be a source for informed discussion about your decision.

- Other sources of advice are **people working in your field of interest**. They often know if a graduate degree, or work experience, or a combination of the two, makes a person more competitive in their field.
- For additional support, check out SPARC's networking guide for help with the process of seeking information and advice from people working in your field of interest.

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## APPLICATION COMPONENTS AND TIMING

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This is a big project to complete, so make sure you have the time and energy to focus on gathering materials and doing your best job with each of these components. Keep the entire process and all the parts in mind:

- Selecting a school (school/program research)
- Admissions tests (or auditions and portfolios, etc.)
- Letters of recommendation from faculty, supervisors, and others
- Transcripts
- Information about Hampshire's narrative evaluations
- Personal Statement
- Application forms
- Resume
- Interviews and school visits (if required)
- Writing sample (if requested)
- Financial Aid applications (including scholarships, fellowships, and grants.)

**Application deadlines run from November through the Spring, the majority are from December through early February.**

**If you choose to apply during your Div III**, it will require tremendous organization and discipline to get all the materials in on time and in good quality, while also keeping up with your Div work. Do as much as possible before you return for your final year:

- Complete your research, narrow down your options and decide where you are applying to.
- Take the GRE, or equivalent tests, the previous spring or summer
- Start writing your personal essay and compiling relevant work into a cohesive portfolio.
- Request letters of recommendation early, so that the faculty or supervisors have enough time to plan, write and get the letter submitted on time.

**If you decide to work for a while between undergrad and grad school**, advantages are:

- You will have more time to produce a strong application
- You will have finished Div III and can now fully be included in your transcript, letters of recommendation, and your personal essay.
- Schools tend to look at time off after undergrad very favorably.

- Returning students are often refreshed, excited and more prepared to take on the intense work ahead.
- Some programs actively seek out students with more related work experience.

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## SELECTING A SCHOOL

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It is important to select the right **program** and the right **institution** for your graduate studies. This requires a lot of careful research and comparison between programs and often, a visit to the school(s).

### **Don't make assumptions about graduate school programs.**

- Academic disciplines at the graduate level can be very specialized, and institutions with superb facilities in one discipline, may sadly be lacking in other areas.
- Some of the finest departments of a discipline may also be found in institutions that you may not already be familiar with.
- Thus, you should not select a school purely based on its overall reputation. This could lead you astray.
- Approach your search like a good researcher, with an open mind and the determination to sift through all of the evidence before you arrive at your conclusion.

### **Learning about Schools**

- **Research:** You are already doing research and reading publications related to your concentration. Start to track articles written by people you would be excited to work with. If you notice that one of these authors work at an academic institution, you might want to consider making that school an option.
- **Faculty:** Frequently, people working in your chosen field know which graduate schools are considered the best in that field. Ask them about the reputation of a particular school in their field.
- **Alumni:** Hampshire alums are a great resource. Go to Hampshire's Alumni network at <https://hampshirenetwork.com/>. You can also find alumni using LinkedIn.
- **Professional Associations:** Sometimes professional associations will summarize and graph information about accredited graduate programs in the field.
- **Subject-Based Blogs/Online Communities:** When you find a group of people online who are doing what you want to be doing, ask them for information and advice about strong graduate programs in the field.
- **School Fairs, Informational Sessions, Open Houses, Visits:** Every fall, there is a Five College Graduate School Fair at UMass. You may also be able to find other fairs that are often held in major metropolitan areas, especially during the fall. Many programs and schools will offer information sessions online and on site, as well as open houses. Often,

you also have the ability to arrange a visit to a school in which you are able to sit in on classes and talk with admissions, financial aid, faculty, and students.

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## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN COMPARING DEGREE PROGRAMS

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### The Program

- What are the requirements for completing the degree? Oral or written comprehensive exam? Thesis or dissertation and defense? Research project? Foreign language competency? Teacher assistantship?
- To what extent do students plan their own program? How many electives are required? What is the ratio of independent work to course work?
- Are there opportunities to acquire practical experience? Teaching/research assistantships? Any part-time or summer opportunities?
- If you are considering traditional arts or sciences, are the research interests of the faculty in line with your own research interests?
- If students work with primary advisors, how are they chosen and how often do they switch?

### The Admissions Process

- How much focus is on specific undergraduate courses? Or test scores? Experience? Independent research? Etc.
- When are submitted applications reviewed? Do they accept applications on a rolling basis?
- Do they allow you to defer admission? (Many schools will only allow deferment for a compelling reason. Your funding may not be deferred, and keep in mind that your new financial package may not be as generous as the original.)

### Financial Aid

- What percentage of students have fellowships or teaching/research assistantships? What is the likelihood that you may become a recipient? What is that process like and when does it take place?
- If you decide to defer, what will happen to the funding offered originally?
- What percentage of students are offered aid, and how much is typically offered?

### Students

- What size is the student body? What is the class size? What is the composition of the class in terms of race, age, gender, sexual orientation, and anything else important to you?
- How competitive is the academic culture? Are students competitive with one another? What is the attrition rate?
- What student organizations and communities exist?

**Facilities**

- Check out the labs and training facilities. How extensive, available, and accessible are they? Are there specialized research facilities available? Are their facilities related to your focus?
- Are there programs or events that include other institutions, whether they be educational, research, or cultural?

**Employment Potential**

- What career support is provided for graduate students?
- What positions do graduates typically hold? Where in the world, or the country/state, do graduates often find positions in your field?
- How is this school ranked in national rankings and is that important to your future plans?

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**CONTACTING PROFESSORS AT SCHOOLS OF INTEREST**

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**Should you reach out to grad school professors as a part of your search process?**

It can be appropriate, but this could also be a detriment. Some faculty members get hundreds of emails each year from prospective graduate students. Consider it carefully before making your choice to reach out:

**No, don't do it...**

- If your intent is to get your name out there and get an edge during application season, don't do it.
- If you are considering sending an email to a long list of professors, don't do it.
- If you are seeking information about the program, don't. Instead, contact the graduate admissions office or program director rather than a faculty member.

**Yes, it could be appropriate...**

- If you have genuine interest in working with this professor based on your knowledge of them and what they do specifically. Have a real reason, don't make something up.

**If you do decide to reach out to a graduate school professor, here are your next steps:**

- Thoroughly read their web pages, get a grasp of their research, and think deeply about your reason for contacting them
- Write a concise email, be brief so they will read it, but not so vague that your interest seems ungrounded.
- Explain that you intend to apply to their program based on the strengths in \_\_\_\_\_.
- Mention which research or courses caught your attention.
- If you have studied this topic previously, mention that. Be aware that sometimes professors may be done working on the topic that they are known for and may have moved on to new interests.

- Briefly discuss your future plans and introduce your questions about how your interests might fit in with the professor's current research agenda.
- Some suggest not including a resume or CV as it is too much information for the first time reaching out. Others suggest that you can include it, in case the contact is interested and would like more specific information.
- Try to find balance between being interested and enthusiastic, while also being professional and grounded.

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## ADMISSIONS TESTS

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The most commonly used test for graduate school admission is the **Graduate Record Exam (GRE)**. The GRE General Test measures verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and analytic writing skills, acquired over a long period of time and not related to any specific field of study. Some schools will require one of the eight GRE Subject Tests, which examine knowledge in a specific field of study. Try to learn well in advance which tests you may need to take, so that you will have time to prepare. To find out more about the GRE, or to register, check out [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org)

Other tests include the **GMAT** which is for anyone applying for a Master's in Business Administration ([mba.com](http://mba.com)), the **MCAT** for those applying to medical school ([aamc.org/students/mcat](http://aamc.org/students/mcat)), and the **LSAT** for law school ([lsat.org](http://lsat.org)). Other tests are sometimes required for a particular program, such as the **MAT** Miller Analogies Test ([milleranalogies.com](http://milleranalogies.com)), but this is a small number of schools.

### Test Preparation

There is no *correct* way to study for these tests, but it is imperative that you have worked with the test in the way it will be administered, and that you are familiar with the format and strategies. Knowing the test and the content will be important in gauging how prepared you are; how much you should study, what content to study, and any strategies that will aid your test-taking experience.

Preparation may include:

- Taking a prep course, either in person or online
- Gather a study group of peers
- Hire a tutor for one (or more) subject areas
- Use practice tests that are found on many test prep publications and websites

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Guidelines for obtaining references

- You will typically need three academic references. There are people who can write about your skills as a student. One of these references may include an employer or supervisor if you have had work experience in a related field.
- Speak with your recommenders beforehand about writing a letter for you. Do not assume that a faculty member or former supervisor will write on your behalf. Letters of recommendation are written strictly on a voluntary basis, no one is obliged to write them. Have a list of other options, just in case!
- It is helpful to ask at least one month, thirty days, before you need the letter. Preferably, longer, as it takes some time to write a good letter and your faculty or supervisor will have other commitments and deadlines to attend to outside of this.
- When recommenders have agreed to write, we strongly advise that you help them make their letter as specific and useful as possible by providing the following:
  - The deadline(s)
  - A copy of your transcript (it can be unofficial)
  - Your resume
  - A statement about what specifically you are applying for, and why (if you feel inclined to do so, you may include a copy of your application essay)
  - Instruction about how to upload or where to send the letters of recommendation (for example, should they send it to you, the institution, or to a specific online service?)
  - Ask them for confirmation that their letters have been sent
  - Additionally, for faculty recommenders, ask if they'd like you to give them:
    - Any evaluations you received in their course(s)
    - Copies of papers you wrote or other samples of your work in those courses
    - It is important that *you*, not the letter writers, stay on top of deadlines and manage your time and application accordingly.

***When all is done, remember to thank your recommenders for their assistance, and be sure to let them know the outcomes of your applications!***

### Online storage service

If you would like to collect and store your letters of recommendation, the online service called Interfolio (<https://www.interfolio.com/>) has a very strong reputation. They have been around since 1999 and are used by many schools. Learn more about the site's features and pricing on the Interfolio website:

<https://support.interfolio.com/m/62586/l/646855-about-cost-or-price-of-using-interfolio-s-dossier-interfolio.com/>

(As of Fall 2022, there is no charge to store your letters, but the cost is \$48/year to send to as many places as you'd like.)

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## HAMPSHIRE TRANSCRIPTS

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Hampshire transcripts are sent from central records. Before graduation, you can and should talk to the staff there about what will be included in your official transcript and in which order. If you are not sure what or how much to include, we suggest including full evaluations for any class that may be relevant to your future graduate/professional school applications. When asking for the transcript to be sent, allow for two weeks of buffer room. Usually, the transcripts are sent quicker. The Hampshire transcript gives a lot of good information to graduate programs. Your evaluations usually speak volumes about the type of work that you are capable of, including the probability that you will do well in graduate school. Your Division III evaluation can be very impressive as it will usually refer to a complex and advanced level of work you have completed, or are currently completing.

### Including an Explanation of the Hampshire Transcript

Most grad and professional school applications give you some opportunity to include a separate addendum to explain further about any part of your application. While the Hampshire transcript already comes with an explanation, with centralized application services and uploading norms, it might be helpful to call attention to our narrative evaluations by writing a short explanation that would address:

- Our narrative evaluations rather than grades for classes
- 5 college classes and those grades, if applicable
- You will not have a GPA, even if you have grades from 5 College courses
- There are no credit hours for Hampshire classes

While you may include your own brief explanation in the application, it is **NOT** appropriate for you to include your own explanation when uploading your actual transcript, as it will not be a part of the official transcript. The official Hampshire transcript already comes with an explanation; be sure that it is included even if/when you are uploading an unofficial transcript.

### Sample Hampshire Transcript Explanation

*This is based on a specific alum transcript; you will need to modify it to fit your situation.*



Hampshire College's distinct academic program reflects the College's educational philosophy, one principle being that students learn more from teachers' thoughtful reactions to their work than from a number or letter grade.

Hampshire College's distinct academic program reflects the College's educational philosophy, one principle being that students learn more from teachers' thoughtful reactions to their work than from a letter or number grade. The belief is that these labor-intensive evaluations provide the student with insight not available through a letter grade and perhaps more importantly, promote a campus atmosphere in which students are driven by a desire to learn rather than by competing for a number or letter grade. Thus, our transcripts include these narrative evaluations, rather than grades.

Hampshire College students are also permitted to take classes at all colleges that are members of the Five College Consortium that includes Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, and Smith colleges, along with the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The other institutions in the consortium offer letter grades. During my years as a student at Hampshire, I have taken 8 courses at the other four institutions and received four A's, three A-, and one B+ in these classes. These grades are NOT calculated into a GPA so that we don't give a skewed representation with a GPA based on a limited number of courses.

Based on my complete transcript, which includes these eight grades as well as more in-depth information from the narrative evaluations, I believe you will see clear evidence that I can succeed in your doctoral program (graduate program, medical school, or you can specifically name the program, internship, school to which you are applying.)

Please be aware that Hampshire does not assign credit hours to courses. It may be helpful to note that for transfer purposes, the College suggests that each of our non-laboratory courses are evaluated at 4 credits.

More complete information regarding the program at Hampshire College is available in the transcript guide included in the official transcript. You are also welcome to contact Hampshire's Registrar/Director of Central Records if you have any further questions about our processes.

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## **PERSONAL STATEMENTS: WRITING YOUR STORY FOR GRADUATE ESSAYS**

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See our separate handout on this topic!

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## FINANCING

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First, you must have a realistic expectation of the costs involved in attending graduate school—it can be very expensive. Financial assistance exists in several forms. Listed below are brief descriptions of the types of aid available for graduate students beyond Federal loans.

### Fellowship and Grants

Awarded by federal and local governments, private organizations, and institutions of higher education, fellowships and grants come in different types and amounts. Many provide tuition and a stipend. Most are awarded on the basis of academic merit; therefore, it is important to apply for those that match your interests and strengths. Not everyone will be eligible to compete for major national awards, but there are other, less well-known fellowships and awards that are worth investigating.

### Work Programs

- **Teaching Assistantships:** These are most typically awarded to second semester or second year graduate students, though some may be available during your first semester. Many include a tuition waiver and stipend in exchange for your work—up to twenty hours per week—leading a discussion section, supervising a lab, or grading papers. In some public universities, if an assistantship doesn't cover the entire tuition bill, out-of-state students may only be responsible for in-state tuition.
- **Research Assistantships:** These are also awarded by the institution, and most often to second semester or second year graduate students, though some may be available in your first semester.
- **Employee Work/School Programs:** Some employers will help you pay for your graduate education, usually for classes related to the work you are currently doing. Universities often offer their employees the opportunity to take a class or two each semester, at the undergraduate or graduate level. Speak to the Human Resources office for information and eligibility requirements.

### Fellowships, assistantships, and other award applications

Some schools require a separate application, while others award on the merit of your program application. Also, be aware that sometimes the deadlines for these awards are before the grad school deadline, so know your deadlines!