It is important to start gathering information about graduate schools early in order to complete applications on time. Most people should start the process a full year and a half before enrollment to allow time for thorough planning and preparation of materials. When beginning the process of applying to graduate school, it is a good idea to think about your motives. There are several things graduate schools look for in strong candidates. By identifying why you are interested in a graduate program, you may make yourself a better candidate.

**WHAT MAKES A STRONG CANDIDATE**

- Strong GPA and standardized test scores
- Strong letters of recommendation
- Well written personal statement and curriculum vitae
- Commitment to the field of study
- Ability to stay with one program for 2-7 years
- Interest in exploring/performing research in narrow fields of study
- Ability to mentor other students or teach classes at the University level
- Comfortable living on minimal income for several years

**TIMETABLE**

You may not be able to adhere to the following timetable if your application deadlines are very early, as is the case with some medical schools, or if you decide to attend graduate school at the last minute. In any case, keep in mind the various application requirements and be sure to meet all deadlines. If you cannot adhere to this schedule, use the outline as a checklist of the things that should be done in preparation for graduate school. If deadlines are impossible to meet, call the institution to see if a late application will be considered.

**BY YOUR JUNIOR YEAR (FALL AND SPRING)**

Research areas of interest, various institutions, specific programs, degrees, etc.

Collect and read information about colleges and universities in magazine and newspaper articles, books, computer publications, college guides, college catalogs, and institutional home pages on the Internet.

Become familiar with the resources offered by Career Services (Oklahoma Memorial Union, 3rd Floor).

Prepare for graduate admissions tests. Study for these tests and take as many practice tests as possible.

Consider the college features you value such as size, location, type of institution, extracurricular activities, costs, potential for financial aid, social opportunities, political climate, and cultural environment in addition to the strength of their academic program.

Investigate financial aid opportunities including scholarships, grants, fellowships, and loans. Contact the financial aid office at the schools you are considering and the state’s higher education agency.

**JUNIOR YEAR (SUMMER)**

Take required graduate admissions tests. Remember to allow lead-in time for registration as well as processing time to obtain your results. Registration deadlines occur approximately five weeks before the test date, and processing may take up to 60 days.

Request application materials from each university that interests you. Most programs have their forms, bulletins, financial aid, and other related information online.

Familiarize yourself with all applications and forms. Make a note of all important deadlines for tests, registrations, applications, interviews, essays, etc. If possible, visit the institutions that interest you. Call the admissions office in advance to give them a chance to set up appointments for you with faculty members and students.

Write application essays. Many applications request that applicants write an essay about past experiences,
future goals, and/or interest in the graduate program. Check on application deadlines and rolling admissions policies. Deadlines range from August (before your senior year) to late spring or summer (after your senior year). Most deadlines for fall enrollment are between January and March, while later deadlines fall between March and August.

For medical, dental, osteopathy, podiatry, or law school, you may need to register for the national application or data assembly service.

Talk to department administrators and advisors about the possibility of waiving graduate level courses. Some graduate level programs give credit for previously completed undergraduate course work.

SENIOR YEAR (FALL)
Obtain letters of recommendation. This should be done well in advance of application deadline dates to allow the people involved time for completing, mailing, and processing the recommendations. Take graduate admissions tests if you haven’t already done so. Most institutions do not allow enrollment without graduate admissions test scores. If necessary, talk to administrators about exceptions to this rule and the possibility of conditional enrollment.

Send in completed applications. If possible, send your applications early. Applying early shows your enthusiasm for the program and gives admissions committees more time to evaluate your application.

SENIOR YEAR (SPRING)
Check with all institutions before the deadline to ensure your file is complete. After the admissions committees have had a chance to review your application, make sure that they have all of the information they need to make their decision.

Visit the institutions that accept you. You can take this opportunity to visit various program offices and student services offices, and to meet faculty members and administrators.

Register for financial aid services, if required. Many programs require applicants to use these services because they simplify the process for the admissions committees and the applicants.

Notify all colleges and universities that accepted you of your decision.

Send thank-you notes to people who wrote your recommendation letters or helped you in your application process, informing them of your success and future plans.