

Preparing for Graduate School

- **Researching and Selecting Programs**
- **Funding Your Education**
- **Writing a CV and Personal Statement**
- **Project Managing the Application**



Graduate School 101

In many fields, earning a graduate degree or certificate is a benefit and competitive advantage. In some, it's necessary for advancement.

Getting accepted into your preferred program requires research, differentiation, and extreme project management skills.

Here are some tips!



Researching Programs

With the amount of time and effort required to apply to attend graduate school—not to mention the cost—it's crucial to carefully study the many variables to ensure that you choose the right program.

You'll want to apply to multiple graduate programs to maximize your options, but avoid the scattershot approach. It's better to concentrate your efforts on a few carefully selected programs. Consider these 10 factors:

- **Specialization**
- **Reputation**
- **Requirements**
- **Program Size**
- **Community**
- **Faculty**
- **Resources**
- **Cost/Funding**
- **Career Outcomes**
- **Fit**



Researching Programs

SPECIALIZATION

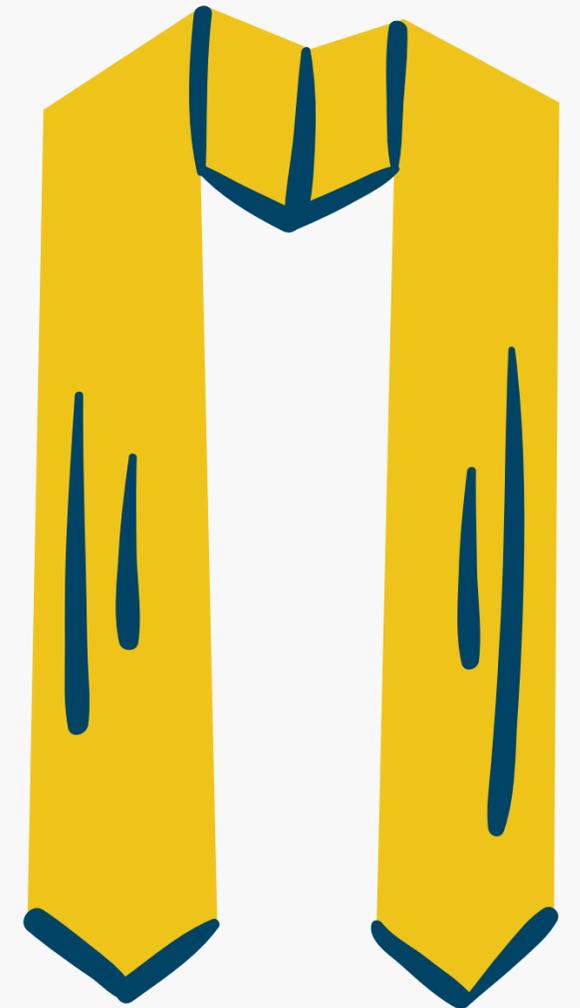
1

Each school and program is strong in specific areas of focus. Do your homework to identify the programs that align best with your interests. Many graduate study concentrations can be completed in a variety of fields and subfields. How much flexibility does each program offer?

REPUTATION

2

You'll want any program and institution to have an excellent reputation, maximizing the career value of a degree you earn. One way to evaluate reputation is to check with professional associations and other sites such as US News and World Report. It's also instructive to look at what the program itself emphasizes as differentiators in its marketing and course materials.



Researching Programs

REQUIREMENTS

3

Carefully review each program structure and number of required courses and seminars, along with their focus. How long does it typically take students to complete the program's requirements?



PROGRAM SIZE

4

Are you most comfortable attending a program offered at a large or smaller campus? Would you prefer a program with a smaller number of students or a larger group? Are you willing to relocate?

Researching Programs

COMMUNITY/SETTING

5

Take a look at the on-campus and off-campus communities. Is the on-campus culture—faculty access, social life, etc.—what you’re looking for? Off-campus, does the area have the amenities you want and need? Is it in a city or a small college town?

FACULTY

6

Your relationship with faculty will be a huge factor in your educational experience. Learn the names, departmental positions and academic credentials of the professors you’d be working with.



Researching Programs

RESOURCES

7

Research can require significant out-of-pocket costs. Find out about resources available at the institution that can reduce these costs. What kinds of research facilities do they offer? Because research often involves travel, is there a travel stipend?

COSTS/FUNDING

8

Tuition and fees will be an obvious consideration, but you should also take into account living expenses, which can vary widely by region. What sort of stipends and funding programs are available? What are the work requirements?



Researching Programs

CAREER OUTCOMES

9

What are the career outcomes for program alumni and how does the program support students and alumni in professional development?

BEST FIT

10

As you go through the process of evaluating graduate programs against the above factors and criteria, also take into account your instinct. Which “feel” best? If at all possible, you’ll want to visit each institution, speak to faculty and current students, and contact program alumni—this will provide the best opportunity to ensure that you apply to the programs that fit you and your goals best.



Funding Your Education

Whether it's business, law school, medical school, or another profession, all post-graduate education programs share one challenge: Cost.

The good news is there are many options for funding. You'll want to research funding options specific to your needs, qualifications, area of interest, and other factors, but here are four ways to help pay for your post-graduate education.

- **Federal Loans**
- **Scholarships and Grants**
- **Graduate and Teaching Assistantships**
- **Research Positions and Grants**



Funding Your Education

FEDERAL LOANS



Government-sponsored loans can be an attractive way to help fund graduate or professional schools, with fixed rates and flexible payment terms.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND GRANTS



There is a wide array of scholarships and grants available through the government, corporations, and private organizations. Qualifications vary from academic merit or income level to special groups such as military veterans, single parents, cultural identities, and many others.

For example, at DePaul, we offer a significant discount on post-graduate coursework for all DePaul degree holders through our “Double Demon” scholarship program.

Funding Your Education

GRADUATE AND TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS



Supported by government programs, many institutions waive tuition and offer stipends to help cover living expenses for students taking graduate assistant positions.

RESEARCH POSITIONS AND GRANTS



Some institutions offer grants and other support in return for participation in research programs as an assistant.



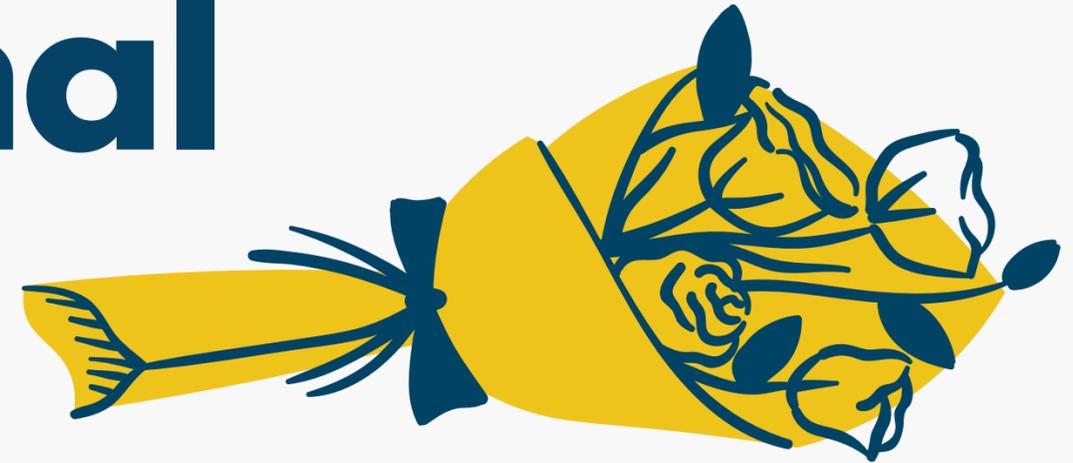
Writing a CV and Personal Statement

Your CV and personal statement are important parts of your graduate school application. In the CV you catalog your skills, experiences, and accomplishments.

The personal statement is where you capture in clear, concise and compelling terms why you should be chosen for the program to which you're applying.

Here are some tips for both!

Writing a Personal Statement



WHAT IS A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

Graduate schools often require a written statement—often called a “statement of purpose,” “personal statement” or “letter of intent”—as a part of the application.

Some require fairly specific information. Others are unstructured, leaving the applicant free to address a wide range of topics. Usually, the purpose is to persuade the admissions committee that you are a distinctive applicant who should be selected.

Make sure everything you include supports the overall purpose of the statement, and remember the audience as you draft it. *Your readers are professionals in their field, and they are assessing you for fit, distinctions, self-awareness, and quality in order to make their decision.*

Writing a Personal Statement

DO'S AND DON'TS

Some do's

- ✓ Read the instructions carefully. In applications with detailed instructions for the personal statement, not following them can hurt your chances of acceptance.
- ✓ Spend some time reflecting. Think. Jot down some notes. What are your strengths? What makes you special?
- ✓ Be real. Readers can pick up if you're not being authentic. Stay focused on who you are and what you bring to the table.

And don'ts

- ✗ Don't use the "life story" approach. Stay focused on the program and why you're an excellent candidate for it.
- ✗ Don't use a catalog of achievements. Approaching your personal statement as an exhaustive list of what you have done tells little about you as a person.
- ✗ Don't lecture the reader. The committee knows a lot about the discipline so don't make unnecessary claims about the field.

Writing a Personal Statement

WHAT TO WRITE IN YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT



Some programs provide questions or guidance to help you structure your statement. Analyze them. *Answer the prompts fully and thoughtfully.* Usually, graduate and professional schools are interested in the following topics, although the form of the question(s) and answers may vary.

- **Your professional and academic purpose in graduate study**
- **Your area of specialization**
- **How you're uniquely prepared and qualified**
- **Why this program? Why now?**
- **Tell them who you are as a person!**

Writing a Personal Statement

- ***Your professional and academic purpose in graduate study***

This topic should include the big issues and questions you are especially interested in tackling. It also should include how you intend to apply your graduate study in terms of your future career or other professional goals. The purpose portion of your statement is an opportunity to demonstrate knowledge about the program by referring to faculty, curriculum or other program details.

- ***Your area of specialization***

Why are you drawn to this area and how does this program align with your interests and goals? This is an opportunity to demonstrate deep contemporary knowledge of the area of study. Learn about your area of interest in detail so that you are able to state your preferences using area-specific language, and be sure it aligns with the program's faculty and curriculum.

Writing a Personal Statement

- **How you're uniquely prepared and qualified**

Correlate your academic credentials and your extracurricular experience with program criteria to show how they combine to make you a special candidate. Present yourself as a distinct candidate based on your background, interests, goals, or passions. Many programs value diversity, so this is also a great place to highlight your background or diverse perspectives.

- **Why this program? Why now?**

Research the school and describe its special appeal to you. Refer to the school's curriculum, philosophy/ approach or faculty. Demonstrate that you know what is involved academically, and that your goals align with the details of the program. Also, make it clear why now is the right time for you to begin this study. Your statement should convince the committee that this is your top choice of any program.

Writing a Personal Statement

- **Tell them who you are as a person!**

Remember, your readers know nothing about you. Give them a strong sense of who you are as a person beyond credentials. In many programs, faculty are selecting candidates with whom they will be working closely for three to six years, making this element of your personal statement especially important. Relate your application to personal experience or passion.

One detail: This is an opportunity to demonstrate that you will be an active and generous member of the learning community



Writing a CV

Resume comes from the French word for “summary.” Curriculum Vitae, often called a CV, means “course of life” in Latin.

A resume presents a concise summary of your background, including job-relevant information such as education and experience, formatted to fit on one page, two at maximum. A CV is more detailed, designed to provide a full history of your academic credentials, so it's typically appropriate to be longer.

- Is a catalog of academic, professional, and personal accomplishments
- Is used when applying for graduate school, fellowships, grants, and positions in academia
- Includes these sections, when appropriate: publications, conferences, papers, exhibitions, presentations, honors and awards, extracurricular and volunteer experience, teaching, research, certifications and licensure, professional associations, languages
- Always begins with education



Project Managing the Application

Timeline!

Because every application should be tailored to each individual program, you'll want to start researching programs as early as you can—a year in advance.

This will allow you enough time to take any required standardized tests (i.e. the GRE), seek informational interviews with faculty and program directors, tour campuses, interview recent alumni or currently enrolled graduate students, and line up effective letters of recommendation.

Many competitive programs have due dates between mid-December and early February (for fall admission).

Preparing Your Application

While some graduate programs require very specific standardized tests or portfolios, almost all programs require these basic parts of the application:

- ***Application form (and fee)***

While this part of the application generally involves inputting basic information about your educational background, take your time to make sure your answers are complete.

- ***Transcript***

The transcript provides evidence of your academic record. If there is something anomalous (like withdrawing from a course in one quarter) or if there is a performance issue that you would like the option to explain for the admissions committee, you can sometimes include a brief explanation in your personal statement.

Preparing Your Application

- ***Resume or CV***

Most graduate programs require a curriculum vitae (CV), which is a more robust, almost catalog-like version of a resume. While the CV can be more than one page long, be sure to frontload the most relevant information earlier in the document, knowing the committee might not read beyond two or three pages.

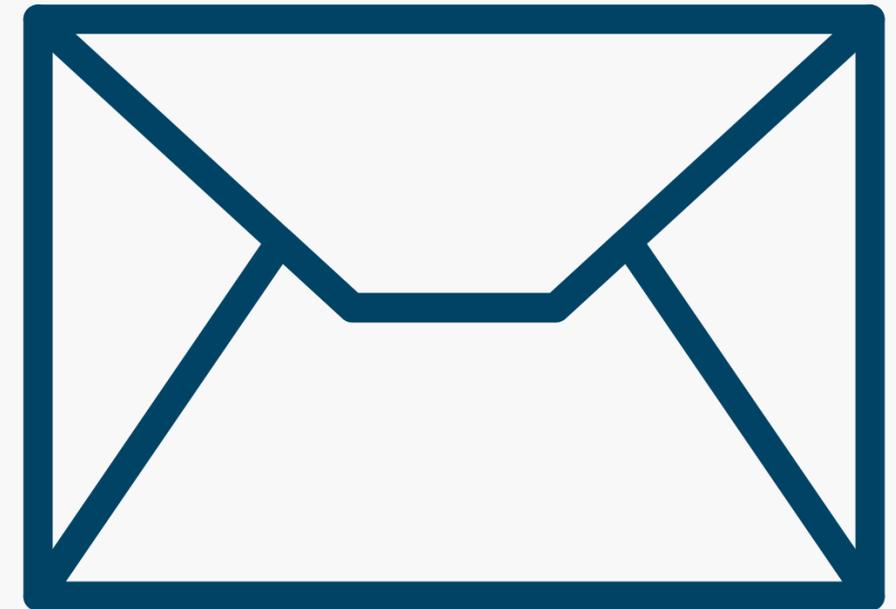
- ***Personal Statement (or Statement of Intent)***

Some programs have a strict list of questions that need to be addressed in the personal statement, and some are more unstructured. Regardless, write the statement to demonstrate your fit for the program (in terms of your academic interests), your ability to succeed in the program and beyond (providing some context for your short-term and long-term professional goals), and your distinctiveness as a candidate.

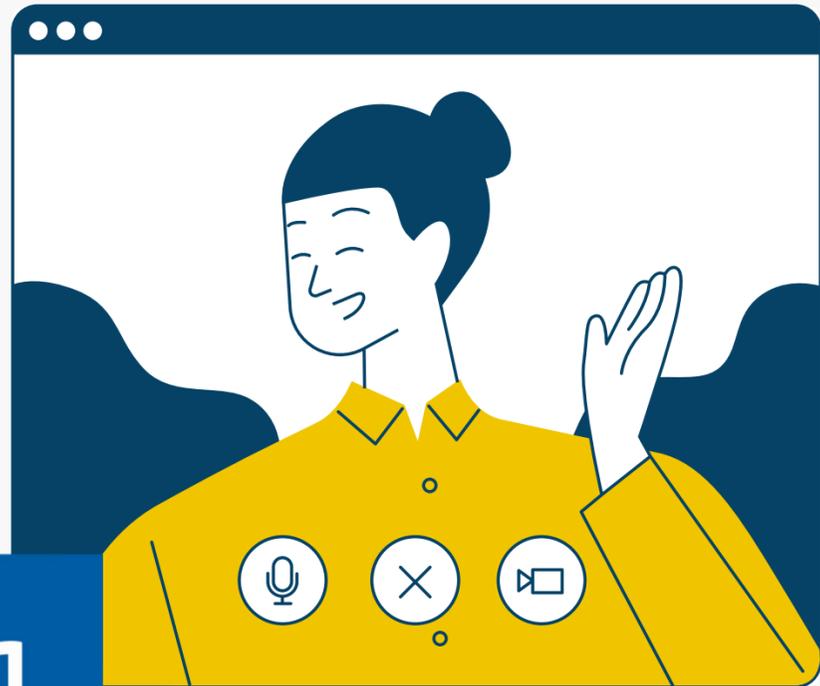
Preparing Your Application

- ***Letters of Recommendation (or list of recommenders)***

When selecting a recommender for graduate school, it's important to think about who knows you well enough to write a compelling letter that provides evidence of your skills and knowledge. Be sure to line up your recommenders well in advance and provide them with your completed resume/CV and personal statement as a way to help them write a supporting letter. Finally, write thank you notes to all your recommenders!



WHAT CAN THE CAREER CENTER DO FOR YOU?



- [Drop-In Career Coaching](#) (no appointment necessary!)
- [Virtual Appointments](#) with Career Community Advisors
- [Email Resume Review](#)
- Access a [Career Library](#) of 50+ Handouts and Videos
- Search for opportunities on [Handshake](#), our careers platform
- Network with Alumni on (ASK) or [Alumni Sharing Knowledge](#)

careercenter.depaul.edu

CAREER LIBRARY



The DePaul Career Center recently created a library of 50+ handouts and 14 two-minute videos focused on every career readiness topic, ranging from resume basics to exploration to building your brand!

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational interviews are a low-pressure, highly productive way to learn about a field, get career advice, build your network and hone your interviewing skills. Reach out! It's easy and fun.

Informational interviews are an opportunity for you to talk with professionals about their career path, profession, organization and industry. These conversations can take place via phone or email, but it's much more fruitful when conducted in person.

Follow these simple steps to get started:



Step 1

LOCATE THE PEOPLE YOU WANT TO MEET

Search for emerging, mid-career and established professionals in roles or organizations that interest you. Recent graduates that are emerging in their careers have first hand knowledge about existing pathways. Mid-level and advanced professionals have large networks and can share their views about how industries are changing.

- Definitely consider targeting DePaul alumni. They are often the most open to speaking with students and recent graduates of their alma mater.
- If you're still in school, DePaul faculty are an excellent place to start—ask your professors if they know of any contacts in your field of interest.
- DePaul's ASK (Alumni Sharing Knowledge) network and LinkedIn are excellent places to find professionals whose pathways align with your passions.
- Don't be afraid to be bold—is there a well-known person in your field of interest whose perspective would be helpful, interesting or inspiring? Reach out to them! You have nothing to lose and much to gain—the worst that could happen is you get a "no."

GRADUATE SCHOOL 101

In many fields, earning a graduate degree or certificate is a benefit and competitive advantage. In some, it's necessary for advancement.

Getting accepted into your preferred program requires research, differentiation and extreme project management skills. Here are some tips:



Selecting the right institution and program

Chances are, you'll want to apply to multiple programs to maximize your options. Which are the right ones? There are a number of factors to consider.

- 1 Faculty** Your relationship with faculty will be a huge factor in the educational experience. Learn the names, departmental positions and academic credentials of the professor or professors you'd be working with.
- 2 Resources** Research can require significant out-of-pocket costs. Find out if there are resources available at the institution that can reduce these costs.
- 3 Community/Location** Take a look at the on-campus and off-campus communities. Is the on-campus culture—faculty access, social life, etc.—what you're looking for? Does the local area have the amenities you want and need? Is it in a city or a small college town? Does the program offer online courses? How would these factors contribute to your quality of life?
- 4 Cost/Funding** The tuition and fees will be an obvious consideration, but you should also take into account living expenses, which can vary widely by region. What sort of stipends and funding programs are available? What are the work requirements?
- 5 Career Outcomes** What are the career outcomes for program alumni and how does the program support students and alumni in professional development?

PERSONAL IDENTITY AND YOUR BRAND

Your identity, whether based on your gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture, faith, or another element of your background, is fundamental to who you are. Deciding when and/or how to integrate your identity into your brand and job search can be a meaningful part of navigating your professional life.



In the Career Center, we often work with students and alumni who ask about the risks and benefits of sharing personal details about their identities. Whether it's a recent alum who is non-binary, or a single mother who returned to school to complete her degree after spending years caring for her children, every individual has the power to shape a specific and compelling authentic professional identity that includes (or does not include) personal information.

While we understand that identities are intersecting and not binary, below are some general tips that we hope are helpful in navigating discussions around career development.

Connect who you are to what you do.

If your identity or background links to why you have selected a career path or professional interest, you can differentiate yourself from other applicants with a "why statement," which illustrates your personal commitment to that role or career. For example, in a cover letter, you might include a statement like this:

"As a first generation college student navigating the opaque space of higher education without the insights of parents or a network of college-educated adults, I am passionate about providing support to under-resourced students, helping them succeed academically and thrive socially."

"I am particularly interested in this role because I recently returned to college to complete my degree in Health Sciences after providing care for my disabled sister for five years. This experience taught me the value of a holistic approach to caregiving, and I am eager to use these skills to enhance the patient experience at Good Samaritan."

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. That's why it's important to put careful thought into how you dress for job interviews and meetings with business contacts.



It's all part of your personal brand. It's the package you present—your qualifications, your preparation and, yes, your style—when you meet someone who can help advance your career. You know you're a person with great potential. Follow these simple guidelines to make sure you look the part!

General Guidelines

- Dress codes in the workplace have relaxed considerably in recent years, which can make it tougher, not easier, to decide what to wear. While it's definitely better to over-dress than under-dress, looking too formal for an interview can suggest that you're not a good fit for the culture. That said, here are some general guidelines:
- Clothes should be in good condition, fit correctly, and be clean and lint free
- Wear dress shoes that are comfortable and clean
- Hair should be well groomed
- Fragrance—a light touch is better
- Bring essentials only—a professional bag, briefcase or portfolio
- Cellphone off

HOW TO RESEARCH EMPLOYER DRESS CODES

If you have an interview or it's your first day and you're unsure what to wear, here are a couple of ways to get an idea of what staff wears on an everyday basis.

✓ **Check out their social media accounts** Many employers post images of employees at work or at business functions. Look for everyday-type images (not dressy corporate events) to get a sense of the culture. Be sure to look for staff in functions similar to yours, as some teams' dress codes vary.

✓ **Call the hiring manager or HR department** You can ask explicit questions about an employer's dress code. Questions like: "How formal is the dress code?" or "Do most interviewees wear a suit?"

WORKING REMOTELY: THE BASICS

Working from home is common now, and with the pandemic, it's even more so. The number of remote roles has increased by 173 percent since 2005, and most experts expect this trend to accelerate. This is the future of work.



Set up your workspace for success.

Whether it's a home office, a commercial co-working space, or a table in a coffee house, your workspace has a lot to do with your effectiveness. Make sure your space:

- Is comfortable and ergonomically sound
- Is quiet and able to accommodate phone conversations or video conferencing without distractions
- Gives you room to move around—cramped quarters can increase fatigue!

Get the right equipment.

Make sure you have the right tools and technology to do your job well:

- A computer with a camera.
- A reliable internet connection—nothing is more disruptive to a video meeting than a connection that drops.
- Remote-work software
- LinkedIn Learning is an excellent source for technology tutorials and tips, including entire courses, to support remote-work success.

SOFTWARE SUGGESTIONS

Video conferencing/screen sharing: Zoom, Skype, GoToMeeting, JoinMe or others

Communication: Slack or others

Project Management: Asana, Trello, Mondays

Cloud Computing/team sharing: Basecamp, Google Drive, Microsoft Teams, Box

Check it out here: go.depaul.edu/careerlibrary



Thank You!

