

APPLICATION GUIDE FOR GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL





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INTRODUCTION

Deciding to seek a graduate degree is a major commitment of time and money – an undertaking that deserves serious consideration. First and foremost, take the time to clarify *why* it is that you are considering a graduate degree and analyze your options (e.g., master’s or doctorate, full or part-time programs, funding the cost, etc). This guide was designed to provide you with the information that will assist you in all aspects of the graduate or professional school application process.



STONEHILL RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

There are many decisions that have to be made when considering and then applying to graduate or professional school, and, of course, you do not have to make them alone. There are excellent resources available who are willing to provide you with advice and information that will allow you to make the most well-informed decisions.

OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES

Career Services advisors can provide you with general information, advice on issues to consider, ways to research programs, and details on the application process.

FACULTY, ACADEMIC ADVISORS, AND RESEARCH MENTORS

These are individuals who have knowledge of the particular field/program you are interested in pursuing. Contact your department to determine the appropriate faculty member with whom to speak.

SHEILA BARRY

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY

Pre-Allied Health Professions Advisor

Advises students and alumni with an interest in attending physician assistant, nurse practitioner, physical therapy, occupational therapy, pharmacy schools and nuclear medicine technology.

CRAIG ALMEIDA

DEAN OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY

Pre-Health Professions Advisor and Nationally Competitive Scholarships and Fellowships Advisor

Advises students and alumni who are considering applying to medical, dental, optometry, podiatric, chiropractic, and veterinary schools. Dean Almeida mentors students who have exceptionally strong academic records and particularly impressive extracurricular accomplishments so that they will be strong applicants when applying for nationally competitive, merit-based scholarships and/or fellowships. These prestigious awards provide funding to support, complement, or enhance domestic or international graduate or professional study, post-graduate research, teaching assistantships, etc.

PETER UBERTACCIO

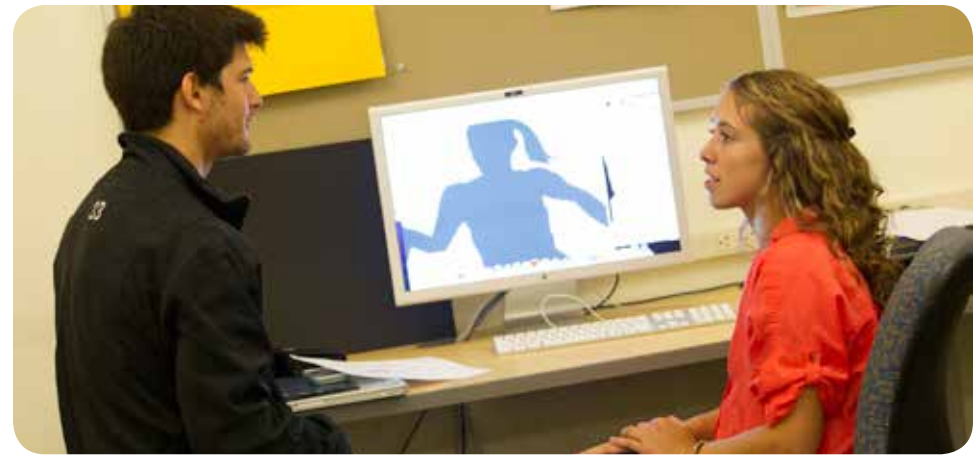
DIRECTOR OF THE MARTIN INSTITUTE AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Pre-Law Advisor

Advises students and alumni who intend to apply to law school.

GRADUATE STUDENTS AND INDIVIDUALS WORKING IN YOUR FIELD OF INTEREST

Another excellent source of information is people who are currently in your field as students or employees.



FUNDING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

Most funding is administered directly from graduate departments or universities. It is important to complete the schools' financial aid applications and requirements early. Special fellowships, grants, and scholarships can be researched through various financial aid directories and databases. Certain types of support, such as teaching, research, and administrative assistantships, require recipients to provide service to the university in exchange for a salary or stipend. Sometimes tuition is also provided or waived. Some programs offer academic and financial need-based scholarships. Check with the institution for directions and deadlines to apply for scholarships. Most graduate students, except those pursuing graduate degrees in certain fields, borrow to finance their graduate programs. Typically, full-time graduate students pursuing MS and PhD degrees in the life and physical sciences receive tuition waivers and teaching and/or research stipends. There are basically two sources of student loans—the federal government and private loan programs. Some employers may pay for your continued education. Visit the following websites to obtain more information:

FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID (FAFSA)

<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>

OFFICE OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/programs.html>

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

<http://staff.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/3subject.htm>

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION FINANCIAL AID

<http://www.iefa.org>

PETERSON'S GUIDE TO COLLEGE INFORMATION

<http://www.petersons.com>



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER: IS GRADUATE SCHOOL RIGHT FOR ME?

The following are questions grouped by topic that will assist you in working through the number of issues that should be clarified prior to starting the application process for graduate or professional school.

- What are my career interests and goals?
- What are my long- and short-term professional goals?
- Is a graduate degree necessary to attain those goals?
(A graduate degree is required for certain careers in law, medicine, dentistry, and college-level teaching.)
- If a graduate degree is required, then which type (e.g., MA, MS, MEd, MFA, JD, PhD, EdD, PA, NP, MD, DMD, DDS, etc.)?
- Will an advanced degree make me more marketable to an employer?
- Am I simply attempting to delay my post-graduation job search?
- Am I willing to invest time and energy to take on another degree program?
- Can I financially afford going to graduate/professional school now?
- Would an employer pay for part or all of my graduate or professional school education in exchange for a commitment of service for a period of time?
- Have I earned a grade-point average required of a competitive applicant to graduate or professional school?
- Do I know which entrance exam(s) I would have to take to apply to particular graduate or professional school programs?
- When should I take the required standardized entrance exam(s)?
- Am I prepared or do I have enough time to prepare to take the required entrance exam(s)?
- What is a competitive score on the required entrance exam?



RESOURCES TO RESEARCH GRADUATE PROGRAMS AND SCHOOLS

PETERSON'S GRADUATE & PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS

www.petersons.com/graduate-schools.aspx
Provides a wide range of information on graduate and professional programs in North America. The six volume set is in the Office of Career Services.

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL GUIDE

www.graduateguide.com
A directory of graduate school programs that allows you to use search criteria to find programs of interest. The printed guide is available in the Office of Career Services.

GRAD PROFILES

www.gradprofiles.com
Website profiles graduate and professional schools with information about programs of study, degree requirements, expenses, and faculty.

US NEWS & WORLD REPORT

<http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools>
An annual report that provides a ranking of "America's Best Graduate Schools."

GETTING IN: A STEP-BY-STEP PLAN FOR GAINING ADMISSION TO GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PSYCHOLOGY

A book that outlines the application process, particularly in psychology.

GRADSCHOOLS.COM

www.gradschools.com
A comprehensive online directory of graduate school programs, including online programs.

STUDYABROAD.COM

www.studyabroad.com
Provides information on overseas educational opportunities for students.

HOW DO I FIND THE RIGHT GRADUATE PROGRAMS?

The following list contains things to take into consideration when evaluating graduate and professional schools.

- Program of study, accreditation and reputation for both the school and the specific program
- Location and size of the school and the program
- Cost and availability of financial aid, tuition and fee waivers, teaching and/or research stipends
- Program requirements (e.g., types and numbers of qualifying exams, literature or research-based thesis, practicum, etc.)
- Admission requirements: course prerequisites and/or undergraduate degree, minimum vs. competitive cumulative and/or disciplinary GPAs and entrance exam score(s)
- Background, qualifications, and research interests of the faculty
- School culture including multicultural opportunities
- Facilities (e.g., libraries, computers, and laboratories)
- Philosophy of education
- Professional development opportunities
- Career assistance, networking contacts and success of graduates
- State regulations and residency requirements



GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL ENTRANCE EXAMS

Some graduate schools require that you take one or more standardized examinations for admission. Requirements and scores vary between programs and schools. Your intention should be to take the required test(s) once and only once. This requires that you prepare adequately in advance of taking the test(s). Various study materials are available, such as review books, software, access to websites, and classes (e.g., Kaplan or Princeton Review). These resources include study tips, sample test questions, and shortened and full-length practice exams. You can check out the following websites to obtain more information and to register online to take the admissions exams.

GRADUATE RECORD EXAMINATION (GRE)

www.ets.org/gre

GRADUATE MANAGEMENT ADMISSION TEST (GMAT)

www.mba.com/the-gmat.aspx

LAW SCHOOL ADMISSION TEST (LSAT)

www.lsac.org

MEDICAL COLLEGE ADMISSION TEST (MCAT)

www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/

DENTAL ADMISSION TEST (DAT)

www.ada.org/dat.aspx

OPTOMETRY ADMISSION TEST (OAT)

www.ada.org/oat/index.html

PHARMACY COLLEGE ADMISSION TEST (PCAT)

www.pcatweb.info

MILLERS ANALOGIES TEST (MAT)

www.millieranalogies.com

A TIMELINE FOR APPLYING

FRESHMAN AND SOPHOMORE YEARS:

- Research and clarify career options and discover areas and programs of interest.
- Investigate educational and experience requirements for potential career paths.
- Start getting to know one or more professors well within your principal areas of interest.
- Keep your grades up! Most graduate programs require at least a 2.75 or 3.0 GPA. (It is important to keep in mind that the minimum GPA requirement is just that—the lowest acceptable GPA to apply. The average GPAs of those who are accepted and who matriculate in the graduate program are typically much higher.)
- Pursue summer internship, research and work that will provide you with practical experience in your field.



A TIMELINE FOR APPLYING, CONT.

JUNIOR YEAR:

- Join a club or association related to your field if you have not already done so.
- Look for an opportunity to get an internship or research experience for academic credit during the academic year.
- Identify and research the schools that offer programs in your areas of interest and visit them if possible.
- Meet with Career Services, Faculty and Academic Advisors to review your resume and discuss your graduate-study goals to ensure you are on the right path.
- Keep your grades up! Take courses that are relevant to your field of study and are prerequisites for graduate programs to which you may apply.
- Think about who you will ask to write strong letters of recommendation in support of your applications.
- Research entrance exams and test dates.
- Look for related workshops and attend open houses at graduate schools.

SUMMER BEFORE SENIOR YEAR:

- Research graduate programs in depth and become familiar with admission requirements and deadlines.
- Study for and possibly take required standardized entrance exams. For example, the LSAT, MCAT, DAT, and OAT should be taken 15 months to a year before law, medical, dental, and optometry school begins. The GRE is typically taken no later than October of the senior year.
- Start completing your applications, update your resume, and begin working on personal statements.
- Investigate options for financing your education.
- Visit campuses and graduate programs that interest you.
- Think about a back-up plan in the event you are not accepted to graduate school.

FALL OF SENIOR YEAR:

- Continue to obtain application materials from schools you have selected and make final decisions concerning where to apply.
- Continue to study for the entrance exam and take the exam required by the graduate schools and your area of academic focus.
- Create any specialized materials to distribute to your references and request letters of recommendation.
- Request your transcripts to be sent to the graduate schools to which you are applying.
- Continue to visit schools; meet with counselors or graduate students in your prospective programs.
- Complete applications and finalize personal statements.
- Submit application materials before the deadline. Check with the schools to make sure all of your information was received on time.
- Meet with a Career Services Advisor to revise and update your resume and to undergo a mock interview in anticipation of a graduate/professional school or employment interview.
- Determine how to implement your back-up plan.

SPRING OF SENIOR YEAR:

- Review acceptance letters and notify each school of your decision to attend or decline.
- Inform the people who wrote references for you of your progress and decisions. Send them thank you letters as well.
- Respond to financial aid opportunities that have been offered to you.
- Prepare for the upcoming year! Visit your college of choice, attend orientation seminars, and get ready for your next educational experience.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Application requirements differ among institutions and programs. Begin the application process early by determining the admissions criteria, deadlines, fees, and application processes for each of your prospective schools. Knowing each school's requirements will enable you to obtain all that is necessary to file a complete and timely application.

FREQUENTLY REQUIRED APPLICATION MATERIALS:

- Graduate admission exam(s)
- Application form
- Application fee
- Resume
- Statement of interest/personal essay
- Letters of recommendation
- Official undergraduate transcripts

OBTAINING STRONG RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

Most institutions require two to five letters of recommendation on your behalf. These are letters from other individuals supporting your decision and ability to succeed in graduate school. Even though others actually write the letters, you can influence their quality by selecting the most appropriate recommenders and providing them with helpful information.

1. THINK AHEAD

Cultivate relationships with those who you may ask in the future for recommendations (e.g., professors in whose classes you excel and who get to know you beyond simply as an academically strong student; volunteer, work, and internship supervisors, etc.).

2. SELECT RECOMMENDERS WISELY

Identify individuals who can provide quality recommendations—individuals who have credibility (*i.e.*, are not relatives or friends; are familiar with what is required of a graduate or professional school student in the field to which you are applying; etc.) and have gotten to know you well enough to testify strongly in support of your character, academic ability, initiative, accomplishments, oral and written communication skills, interests, and preparedness, capability, and motivation for graduate work.

3. REQUEST EARLY

Approach your recommenders early in the fall of your senior year to give them time to write. Give recommenders at least 3–4 weeks notice.

4. FOLLOW UP

It is your responsibility to make sure that your recommenders are aware of the deadlines and complete everything on time. A subtle reminder is to send a thank-you note a week before the recommendations are due.

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION CHECKLIST

Professors and others are asked to write many recommendations. So, be sure to provide each recommender with the following information included with a list of the programs to which the person is writing and 1–2 sentences about why you specifically want to go to that program/school.

PROVIDE FOR EACH SCHOOL:

- Information about whether an electronic recommendation will be submitted or a letter will be mailed;
- The deadline by which each recommendation must be provided (it is advisable to give a deadline date that is at least 1–2 weeks prior to the actual deadline date);
- Any forms that must be filled out and accompany a mailed letter (be sure you complete the applicant portion of the form and sign it prior to giving it to the recommender to complete);
- The addresses to which each mailed letter will be sent;
- Ask if the recommender wants stamped, addressed envelopes for the letters that need to be mailed, and if so, provide them;
- A list of classes you have taken with him/her and the semesters in which they were taken;
- A folder that contains graded work from his/her class(es) to assist in a better recall of the quality of your work;
- An unofficial copy of your transcript;
- A copy of your up-to-date resume;
- A copy of your personal statement (it should not be the first draft but it does not have to be the final version either.)



PERSONAL STATEMENT

Consider this, there are going to be many applicants with whom you are going to compete – ones that may have, higher GPAs, more relevant work and life experience, higher standardized exam scores, etc. How are you going to make your application stand out? One answer is through the message you convey in your personal statement. Your personal statement should answer the question, “Why should a graduate or professional program want to interview me and eventually decide to accept me?” There is no doubt about it; this is a hard statement to write. You need to keep your target audience in mind and think long and hard about what it is that you want to convey. First write a draft and then revise, revise, and revise until you are satisfied that you have a document that conveys your desired message well.

CONSIDER YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT TO BE AN OPPORTUNITY TO:

- “Speak” to and engage the attention of the people reviewing your application;
- Convey your professional goals, how you arrived at those goals, why you want to attend the graduate program, and how confident you are in your future direction; and
- Persuade the individuals reviewing your application that you possess particular skills, abilities, perspective, motivation, personality traits, and experiences.

WRITING TIPS

GIVE YOURSELF PLENTY OF TIME:

Start thinking about your essays early. The quality of the essays as well as the impact they have on the readers are very important factors in the admissions decision-making process. Make sure you have put your best effort into writing the application essays.

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT ARE ASKED:

Give thought to each question in the application. Read the directions clearly and answer the questions accurately and address issues directly. Allow your spirit, character, and uniqueness to come through and make sure your writing is formal and grammatically correct.

ORGANIZE YOUR THOUGHTS:

Ensure that you have a clear logical progression from the beginning to the end of the statement. Sometimes working from an outline into which you can incorporate desired points is easier than beginning by writing line by line. The outline should contain the information you want to convey.

HAVE A FLOW TO THE ESSAY:

Convey the main point of each paragraph in the first sentence of the paragraph. Doing this should provide the reader with a sense of the essay by reading only the first sentence of each paragraph. Be sure that the body of each paragraph includes details supporting the main idea in its first sentence, and that there are transitions from one paragraph to the next so that the essay flows.



BE SPECIFIC:

Back up your personal statement with references to your past experiences. Specific knowledge, skills and insights acquired through internships and other work and personal experiences are particularly valuable. Be sure to provide specific and concise examples that back-up statements you make (e.g., I am capable of quickly assessing a situation and confidently making a decision. For example, one day at work I was required to...).

STRIVE FOR A STRONG OPENING STATEMENT:

Look for something beyond the predictable, something that demonstrates the qualities that set you apart from other candidates. Avoid openings such as “My name is ” Or “I want to be a teacher/doctor because...” You want to hook the reader from the beginning and set the framework for the rest of the essay. Avoid the overused, “For as long as I can remember I have wanted to be a...” Be original! For example, “When a convicted felon, handcuffed to the gurney and accompanied by armed guards, was brought into the Emergency Department on my first day as a volunteer...”

DEVELOP A STRONG ENDING:

In addition to having a strong opening statement, you want to have a strong ending as well. This is a good opportunity for you to bring together all the pieces of your essay into a well-organized section that conveys your confidence in being prepared for and capable of handling the rigors of graduate or professional school and highlights what you can also offer the institution.

PROOF YOUR DOCUMENT:

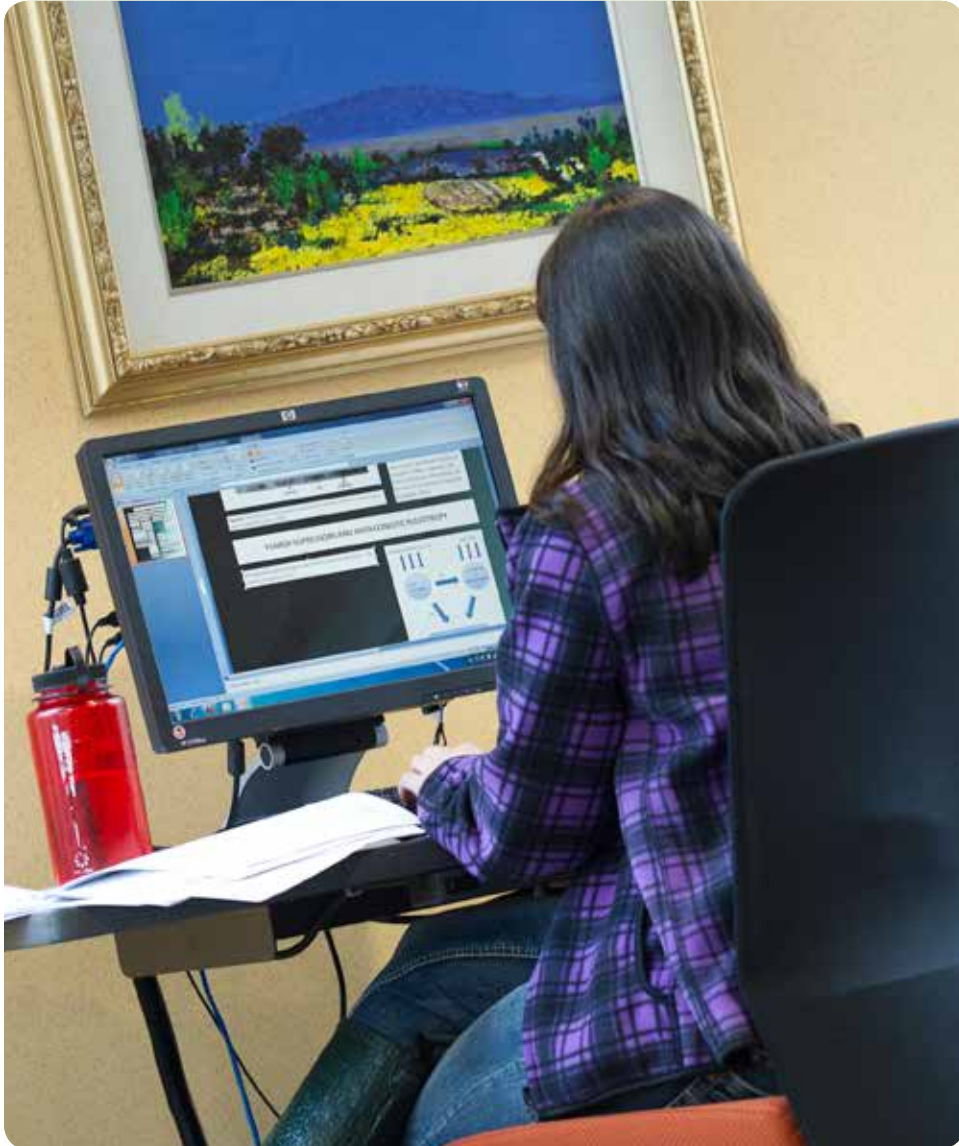
Check, double check, and have at least one other person review your essay for punctuation, spelling, and other grammatical errors. Be sure that the essay does not exceed the character, word, or number of pages limit.

WRITE A NEW STATEMENT FOR EACH SCHOOL:

Do NOT re-use the same personal statement for each school to which you are applying. While you do not have to write an entirely new personal statement for each school, make sure to read each application thoroughly and tailor your response to fit the specific questions and topics for each school.

HOW A COMMITTEE EVALUATES YOUR APPLICATION

- Does the candidate follow directions well? (This is when it matters that all of your documents are available and in the proper format!)
- Is the candidate qualified based on grades, coursework, and experience?
- Does the candidate demonstrate an understanding of the field?
- Is the personal essay well written, informative, and engaging?
- Do the recommendations support the candidate's application?
- Did the candidate prove he/she can contribute to our program?
- Did the candidate demonstrate that he/she knows our specific program well?



ADMISSIONS INTERVIEWS

An interview may be requested by some schools as a part of the application process. An interview is not only an opportunity for the school to get to know you better—it is also an opportunity for you to get to know the school better. The admissions interview is a chance for you to sell yourself in person and express your interest in the program and the school.

INTERVIEW TIPS

- Research the school ahead of time by reading the school's catalogue or familiarizing yourself with the information available on its website.
- Be familiar with the research interests and publications of faculty with whom you will meet.
- Dress professionally: business suit and polished dress shoes in conservative colors, minimal and non-distracting jewelry and body art, and no or only very subtle cologne or perfume.
- Be on time for your interview.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Shake hands with a firm grip (*i.e.*, one that is neither too soft nor too firm but just right); if you enter a room with one or more persons sitting around a table then walk around rather than reach across the table to shake their hands.
- Avoid distracting mannerisms (*e.g.*, playing with your hair, talking with your hands, tapping a bracelet or watch band against the table, etc.).
- Maintain good posture and be attentive.
- Discuss your strengths, skills, experiences, and career goals that are related to the program.
- Use specific examples from your academic, work, and co-curricular experiences to explain your qualifications.
- Avoid inappropriate, vague and nondescript words (*e.g.*, like, umm, uhh, thing, stuff, etc.).
- Keep responses to questions concise and relevant to what was asked.
- Be prepared to ask questions! Show an interest in the program/school and also ask questions that are important to your decision-making process.



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

POTENTIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Tell me about yourself.
- Tell me about Stonehill College.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Why are you interested in this graduate program at this particular school?
- What do you know about our program?
- What are your plans after you complete your graduate work?
- Are you interested in an assistantship? If so, which one(s)? Why?
- In college, what classes did you enjoy the most? The least? Why?
- What courses or experiences led you to think about graduate study in this field?
- How did you decide to pursue this field of study?
- What are your research interests?
- Describe a research project you have worked on.
- What other graduate schools are you considering?
- What are your plans if you should not be accepted into graduate school?
- What do you believe your greatest challenge will be if you are accepted into this program?

QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWER

- What characteristics distinguish this program from others in the academic field?
- How long does it take typically to complete the program?
- What types of financial aid and research or teaching assistantships are offered?
- What opportunities are available through the program to gain practical work experience?
- Can I talk with some new as well as seasoned graduate students who are in the program?
- Do most of the graduate students live on or off campus?
- Tell me about graduates of the program. What are they doing now?
- How are graduate test scores, grades, letters of recommendation, and personal statements evaluated for the admissions process?
- What is the selection timeline?
- When will candidates be notified about their acceptance into the program?





CAREER SERVICES

Kruse Center for Academic and Professional Excellence
Cushing-Martin Hall
508-565-1325

DEAN OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Office of Academic Affairs
Duffy Academic Center, Rm 134
508-565-1840