



## APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

Deciding to attend graduate school is a big decision that should not be taken lightly. Unlike undergraduate school, graduate school requires even more independent study that will give you expertise in one field. It also requires much self-discipline and a serious commitment to a field of study—not to mention a huge financial cost. Students choose graduate school for many reasons, some of which are more valid than others.

Reasons you **should** attend graduate school include:

- The career you've chosen requires it for you to be successful in that field.
- You want to obtain professional training in a specific area.
- You love learning and want to advance your knowledge and skills in a particular field.

It is **not** wise to attend graduate school for the following reasons:

- You don't know what you want, and it stalls your need to make a decision.
- You feel like there's nothing better to do.
- You're afraid to start working.

If you are not certain about pursuing a graduate degree, it is wise to speak to professors and alumni in your field of interest to first see if a graduate degree is required and then to determine when would be the optimum time to attend. The bottom line is that you should consider graduate school only if you have already committed to a career choice and if your research has indicated that graduate school is required for you to succeed in that career.

Once you decide that graduate school is appropriate, the next step, as in a job search, is to develop a plan of action.

- By junior year at YU, you should start to investigate schools in your area of interest. A good resource is *Petersen's Guide to Graduate Programs in . . .*, available at the Career Center as well as online.
- Determine the cost, size, geographic location, entrance requirements, and quality of the programs. Talk to professors about their recommendations.
- Send for catalogues and review the materials, making sure you meet the necessary entrance requirements. Also, note who is on the faculty and review their areas of research. Determine whether they are working on topics that are of interest to you. Speak to alumni who attended the school to gain their feedback on the program.
- Begin to narrow your choices.
- Decide whether a location that has an active Jewish community is an important factor for you when deciding where to apply.

- Depending on the type of program, you might have anywhere from five to twenty schools on your final list. For example, it is common for psychology and pre-medical students to apply to as many as fifteen schools, while social work students generally apply to about five. Apply to a few schools you are certain you will get accepted to, a few that seem reasonable, and a few that are reach schools.

## **TESTING**

Many programs require you to take special tests for admittance. Tests vary in length from 1 hour to 6 hours. Most tests will ascertain your language/English/reading comprehension skills, your quantitative and logical reasoning skills, and your writing abilities. Some also focus on specific technical information in your area of study and are more like achievement tests. Examples of typical admissions tests include:

- The Graduate Record Exams (GRE)
- Miller Analogy Tests (MATs)
- Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT)
- Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)
- Medical Related Tests (MCAT, DAT, OAT)

Most schools publish the average test scores of their admitted students, so do your research to know the typical ranges. This will help you gain a realistic view of where you stand as you start to take practice tests and will help you determine if you should sign up for a preparation course. Test prep courses such as The Princeton Review and Kaplan can be costly, but may be a wise investment for you, especially if you tend not to perform well on standardized tests.

Note the filing dates, especially for Sabbath observers. Make sure you meet the deadlines. While most tests are computerized, there are still some paper and pencil administrations. For specific dates of test administration or names of local test centers, stop by the Career Center, call ETS at 609-771-7670, or contact other testing services.

## **ESSAYS**

Fill out your applications and write your personal statement early. Spend time on your essays—schools do read them! The essay is an opportunity to show the admissions committee that you are more than just your GPA or test scores. Schools want to know your ideas and goals in pursuing a graduate degree, and they want to assess your writing abilities. Some general rules to follow when writing the essay include:

- Tailor the essay to each school's application. The more academic the program, the more they want to hear about your research or a discussion of an academic issue in the field. The more practical and applied the program, the more personal you can be.
- Make sure you spend time thinking about what makes you different, so your essay can stand out. Avoid grandiose adjectives and resume-like lists.
- Discuss your accomplishments and how you have overcome challenges. Detail specific experiences and make it personal.
- Discuss your growth and what you've learned from your experiences, about either yourself, others, or the field.

- Be reflective.
- Make sure you've answered all the questions!
- **Proofread** for content, grammar, and spelling, and limit the essays generally to two pages. Have someone double-check it to make sure it reads well and there are **no mistakes!**
- Send your applications in early. For online applications make sure that each document is uploaded correctly. For paper applications, make sure each application is in the correct envelope.

## LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Most graduate schools request three letters of recommendation. In choosing references, you should:

- Ask people who know you well and who will write strong recommendations.
- Have at least one recommendation from a professor in your field of study. The others may be from faculty or job supervisors.
- Consider the type of program to which you are applying. The more academic the program, the greater number of academic references (professors with PhDs) you should secure.
- Remember that in writing a recommendation, someone is doing you a favor—be gracious and be sure to give them an ample amount of time to write the letter.

If you are uncertain whether or not to ask individuals to write you a letter, set up a meeting with them, discuss with them your intentions for graduate study, and ask them if they would feel comfortable writing a strong letter on your behalf. This gives them the option of saying no or insuring that if they say yes, your letter will be strong.

Interfolio, a credentials, dossier, and online portfolio service, is now available to students at Yeshiva University. Interfolio is an easy and affordable way for a student to collect and deliver application materials, such as letters of recommendation, for graduate school, academic jobs, fellowships, or other opportunities. Visit [www.interfolio.com/candidates](http://www.interfolio.com/candidates) for more information.

On the recommendation form, you will be asked to indicate if you wish to waive the right to see the recommendation. We suggest that you do waive the right as it usually increases the validity of the recommendation in the eyes of the admissions officers.

## INTERVIEWS

Not all schools require one, but they are usually required by medical schools, graduate programs in psychology and social work, and several others. You may request one if you feel it will strengthen your application. An interview can be a very important opportunity for you to persuade an institution's admissions office or committee that you would be an asset to its program. Interviewers are interested in the way you think and approach problems. You may be asked questions on such topics as:

- Your motivation for pursuing graduate study and that program specifically.
- Your personal philosophy.
- Your career goals, related research, and areas of interest.

As in a job interview, you need to prepare by speaking to alumni and professors and reading the school catalogue. Think about your answers to some of the questions above and do further research to discover other typical questions asked during interviews for your area of study. Also, be prepared to ask questions during the interview. Know your essay and resume inside out, as many questions may arise from them. Find out what kind of interview it will be: group, one-on-one (one interviewer for one candidate), three-on-one (three interviews for one candidate), whole day, half day, etc. Dress as you would for a job interview—professional attire.

## **APPLICATION MATERIAL COMPLETION**

It is your responsibility to be on top of the application process. You will generally need to send the following:

- Official transcripts—file a transcript request form in the registrar’s office.
- Official transcript from EACH school you have attended, including Israel, if you have not gone on the YU joint program or if you stayed on for a second year or an additional semester. You also need official transcripts if you have taken summer courses elsewhere and had them transferred to YU to graduate or if you enrolled in college level courses in high school and received college credit for them.
- Official scores from graduate admissions tests.
- Completed applications, essays, and letters of recommendation.

***If your admissions folder is incomplete, you cannot be considered for entrance. Pay attention to deadlines!!!***

## **FINAL NOTES**

In the end, the admissions committee will review the completed applications looking at GPA, admission test scores, essays, letters of recommendation, and interviews. There is no one factor that can guarantee admission, but rather a combination of all factors. Graduate schools are looking for a diversified class. If you do not get into graduate school on the first try, but are determined to reapply, it is advised that you call the schools and inquire as to why you were not accepted. See if there is anything you can do that will strengthen your application for next year when you reapply. This can often be viewed favorably. Ultimately, you will be the one to decide how committed you are to pursuing graduate school. You may need to expand your geographical range or the type of program to increase your chances of getting accepted, or you may need to gain further experience to enhance your application.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

For certain graduate schools, including law school and medical school, Yeshiva University’s advisement centers offer specialized assistance. Be sure to join the relevant email listserves if you are pre-law or pre-med, make an appointment with an advisor, and join the relevant student societies or clubs to get the most current information about applications and the entire graduate school process. There are also many useful websites, such as [graduateguide.com](http://graduateguide.com), [gradschool.com](http://gradschool.com), and [studentdoctor.com](http://studentdoctor.com) where you can find more information and resources.