

Graduate and Professional School Guide

by Margaret Krantz

Hanover College
Career Center

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Let us help! Career Center services

The Career Center supports students interested in pursuing graduate or professional school in several ways. We provide:

- An annual Graduate and Professional School Fair;
- Preparation for the GRE and other entrance exams;
- Critique of your admissions essays and CV;
- Strategies to select a program that suits you;
- Mock interviews tailored to your program;
- Printed resources listing all accredited programs in North America;
- A credential file service so you can request and store your letters of recommendation if you’re planning to delay grad school.

More school?

Is graduate or professional school for you?

Attending graduate or professional school can be an expensive, time-consuming endeavor. As you decide, some questions to consider include:

- Do you have a deep intellectual interest in the subject matter?
- Do you have a professional goal that requires this advanced degree?
- Is there a particular individual with whom you would like to study?
- Do your advisors, mentors, and other faculty who know you well encourage you in your goal?
- Do you have the academic credentials to earn funding, or will your (future) employer assist with costs?

Graduate or professional school?

What's the difference?

Graduate School

Objective: To develop scholars or experts in a body of knowledge who, through their research, contribute to that knowledge and/or through their teaching introduce others to it.

Ideal Candidates: Students with strong research, writing and analytical skills, high grade point averages and strong entrance exams scores. Research experience through an Independent Study (call it a "senior thesis"), REUs, research collaboration with faculty, and participation in professional conferences.

Professional School

Objective: To provide students with the knowledge base and training necessary to perform well within a profession or career field.

Ideal Candidates: Students who have an established aptitude for the field as demonstrated by related internships, volunteering or paid work experience, with academic credentials strong enough to indicate an ability to pass the program successfully. (Academic standards are higher in very competitive professions, such as medicine or law, or at very competitive professional schools.)

Application timeline

Sophomore Year

- Choose a major that interests you; find an advisor whose academic focus interests you, with whom you work well.
- Focus on developing strong skills in oral and written communication, research and analysis.
- Begin developing strong relationships with faculty in your academic department; don't skip class, and keep up with your course work.

Junior Year

- Take courses in your major; work hard to develop an intellectual base in the field and to get to know your faculty.
- Discuss graduate school options with your academic advisor.
- Attend a Career Center GRE workshop, if applicable.
- Begin to research websites for graduate school programs.
- Discuss your plans with faculty whom you may ask to write recommendations for you. Seek their advice and recommendations about specific programs.

Summer following Junior Year

- Investigate graduate entrance exams; plan a schedule to take them, and begin to prepare for them.
- If you are planning to apply to a research-based graduate school program, spend the summer conducting research and be sure to write an Independent Study before you graduate.
- In late summer, select faculty who can write positive, cogent letters of recommendation for you.
- Consider visiting the schools you find most interesting. Be sure to talk to current students in the program.

Fall Term, Senior Year

- Take entrance exams required by the programs you have targeted 2 - 3 months before the published deadline.
- Begin completing your applications early. This stage of the application process is so time consuming it will seem like a course-overload. Timing is critical here. If you apply early, the spots are less competitive and the financial aid more plentiful. Plan to send in your completed application at least a month prior to the due date (call the earlier date your "adjusted due date" and think of it as absolute).
- Ask faculty to write letters of recommendation for you 3 months before your adjusted due date.
- If you have attended multiple institutions, check each program to determine its policies on transcripts. Request official Hanover transcripts from the Registrar's Office.

Application components

Application components

Completing Applications

Applications are seen as an example of your work and thus must be flawless. If you submit an application that is sloppy or incomplete or that has mistakes, the implication is that your work in graduate school would have a similar lack of care and quality. As you begin work on your applications, be sure to:

- Fill out each space completely. If a section does not apply to you, type “N/A,” (not applicable). Avoid leaving blanks.
- Complete the forms online if possible. If not, make a photocopy of the original forms, fill out the copy first using a typewriter (available in the Career Center), in order to get a sense of the space required for each answer.
- Keep a file of your completed applications for future reference. It’s not fun to assemble all the obscure pieces of information a particular school may require; do it once and keep a copy for the next time it’s required.

Admissions Essays

One of the most important components of a graduate or professional school application is the essay, which helps the committee get a more personal sense of you than is possible through transcripts and entrance exam scores. (See “Statement of Purpose” in this guide for tips in writing essays that are not in response to specific questions.) An effective essay conveys a sense of your maturity, sincerity, motivation, professional goals, intellectual interests and, not incidentally, your writing ability. Often weighed as heavily as letters of recommendation, or even, in some cases, grade point averages and test scores, your essay outlines the reasons you are interested in the program and why you feel qualified to attend it. Because of its importance, before you write your essay, consider a few rules:

- Write clearly and directly. Use first person singular, “I conducted research on the medical system in postapartheid South Africa.” Likewise, use the active voice, “I saw,” rather than the passive, “It was seen by me.”
- Be honest! Don’t express interests that you don’t have. Describe your related experiences clearly and accurately.
- Tailor each essay to the specifications of each school. “RTGDQ – Read The Gosh Darn Question!” says Donald Asher in Graduate Admission Essays- What Works, What Doesn’t and Why (2000); then, of course, answer it completely. Think of your essay as the first exam the school will give you; consider the question carefully, grasp its subtleties, and respond to each facet. Do not try to write a single essay that attempts to suit every single graduate program to which you apply; you’ll probably fail to appeal to any of them.

Letters of Recommendation

Provide faculty or others a clear sense of your goals and academic interests; a resume; a writing sample; stamped, addressed envelopes and ample time (at least two months) to write. For more information, see “Handling References,” published by the Career Center.

Selecting the right school for you

Steps to take:

1. Confirm that each school and program you consider is accredited.
2. Identify the factors that matter to you in a school and program.
3. Determine a weighted score for each based on its relative importance to you.
4. Research the schools you are considering to assign scores for each factor.

Sample decision model*

Factor	Score per school					
	Max. Score	School				
Suitability of Program						
Placement of Graduates						
Salary of Graduates						
Cost:						
Tuition						
Other education						
Other						
Reputation or rank						
Aid:						
Scholarship or grant						
Assistantship						
Loans						
Location/size						
Competitiveness						
Academic Environment:						
Faculty						
Library/Lab/Computer						
Social Atmosphere:						
Student body						
Organizations						
Mean # of Years to Degree						
Personal						
Total						

* Published in *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*/Winter 1993-94 with minor adaptations. Used by permission.

Selecting
a school

Statement of purpose

Graduate or professional school statement of purpose

If you are simply asked to write a “personal statement” without specific guidelines, the following steps may help:

1) Start by capturing the reader’s attention with an anecdote that illustrates your interest in the field. If possible, tell a concrete story with specific details drawn from your experience. Thus, if you had an internship that confirmed your interest in this field of study, describe the experience in a couple of sentences. For example, “Last summer, as an intern at Ford’s Theatre in Washington, I held a lock of Abraham Lincoln’s hair in my hands. As I looked at it, I was able to imagine the Civil War and Lincoln’s own assassination. I knew, then, that I wanted to pursue museum studies.” At the same time, avoid a tedious description of the path you took to get to that interest. (“I came to Hanover intending to be pre-med, but...”) and avoid beginning with the words, “I’ve always wanted to be a _____.” Note, however, that writing about an anecdote is not an effective approach if you don’t have a formative event to describe. If your interest in the field evolved slowly, that’s fine, too, but find a different introduction.

2) Establish the appropriateness of your background. Admissions committees look for evidence that you understand the nature of the field, or better still, have personal experience in it. Thus, if you are applying to a professional school program (e.g. medicine, law, business, social work, environmental management), you should mention the experience you have in the field through paid employment, volunteering, classes, job shadowing, research grants, leadership activities, etc. However, if you plan on attending graduate school (e.g. to earn a Ph.D. or Master’s degree in an academic discipline), the most related experience you can gain is through actual scholarship; in this case, you should mention the research experience you have, such as an Independent Study (call it a “senior thesis”) or directed study. Describe the presentations you have made, publications you have written, collaborative research you have conducted with faculty or others, conferences you have attended, and student memberships in academic societies. Finally, both for graduate and professional school, be sure to describe clearly the strengths that you will bring to the program.

3) Discuss your own professional goals. While you are not committing yourself to a specific direction, writing as clearly as possible about your intended career path can help the reader determine if their program is the correct setting for you. Therefore, the more your goals align with options made possible by their particular degree, the better.

4) Demonstrate your interest in that specific school by mentioning the aspects of its program that appeal to you. Be as specific as you can. The correspondence of your research interests to those of the faculty is of particular concern to graduate schools (but not to professional schools). Familiarize yourself with the curriculum, specific courses offered, reputations, strengths, and weaknesses of the program (the Career Center can help you research this!)

Finally, give your Statement of Purpose to faculty for their input and bring it to the Career Center for review. If a length is not specified, it is customary to restrict yourself to about 2-3 pages of 12 point, double-spaced (flawlessly produced) type.

Curriculum Vitae: an academic resume

Academics use a style of resume referred to variously as a “curriculum vitae”, a “vita”, and a “C.V.” While most employment resumes include descriptive details to emphasize the related tasks that the writer has accomplished, C.V.s are typically limited to lists of academically-oriented activities. Below are possible section headings to include in a C.V. and, when relevant, examples of ways in which past Hanover graduates have participated in them. Include those in which you have strengths.

Contact Information:

Name, address, land and cell phone, e-mail address

Education:

Undergraduate degree, institution, major(s), minor(s), cumulative grade point average

Research Experience:

Independent Study, Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REUs), collaboration with faculty, directed studies, research grants

Teaching Experience:

Lab assistant, learning center tutor, teaching assistant, seminar presenter, interpretive naturalist, departmental tutor, intensive inquiry member

Presentation experience:

Undergraduate research conferences, national conferences, campus research presentations

Publications:

Papers co-authored with faculty, “senior thesis” (I.S.), Kennings, Hanover Historical Review

Grants:

Intensive inquiry, research grant, SWEPT Fund, STAR grant, etc.

Community Service/Committee Work:

Faculty Evaluation Committee, faculty search committees, Curriculum Committee, Student Academic Assistance Committee, Student Senate, Baynham Faculty of the Year Committee, volunteer activities

Honors and Awards:

Summa Cum Laude (expected), academic prizes, Mortar Board (senior honor society), Alpha Lambda Delta Academic Honor Society, Dean’s List (specify number of terms)

Languages:

Phrase this as “Reading knowledge of x”, or “fluent in y”

Professional Experience/Employment:

Typically you should include only those activities that relate to the field you are seeking to enter.

Professional Society Memberships:

Societies give a membership dues break to students to encourage them to join. Do so.

Sheryl Sullivan

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Education

Bachelor of Arts (expected) May, 2012
Hanover College, Hanover, IN
Psychology Major, Political Science and English Minors
Cumulative Grade Point Average: 3.78; Psychology Grade Point Average: 3.76

Research Experience

National Science Foundation Research Experience for Undergraduates, 2011
Supervised by: Dr. James W. Grice, Oklahoma State University

- conducted independent research culminating in a poster and presentation, integrating theory of self-discrepancy and contingencies of self-worth
- participated in seminars on advanced statistics and research methods

Senior Thesis, Hanover College, 2011 – 2012

Physiological Arousal Characteristics of Threat Within a Contingency of Self-Worth

- examining whether a threat in a domain of worth produces a unique pattern of physiological responses
- utilizing measures such as blood pressure and pulse

Contingencies of Self-Worth Lab Supervisor, Hanover College, 2010 – 2012

- centrally involved in the development of unique hypotheses and study design
- responsible for training lab members, data entry, and data analysis
- rumination and classroom goal findings to be presented at 2003 Society for Personality and Social Psychologists Conference (see “Presentations”)

Independent Research on Stereotype Threat, Hanover College, 2010

- produced a study examining the effects of certain personality traits on resilience to stereotype threat

Presentations

Sullivan, S., Barrie, T. (2010, February). *Dispositional rumination as a mediator of the negative relationship between trait self-esteem and contingencies of worth dependent on external, interpersonal feedback*. Poster to be presented at the 5th annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychologists, Los Angeles, California.

Sheryl Sullivan

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Barrie, D., Sullivan, S., Smith, N., Wolfe, C., Winters, M., (2011, February). *Dispositional rumination as a mediator of the negative relationship between trait self-esteem and contingencies of worth*. Poster to be presented at the 5th annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychologists, Los Angeles, California.

Barrie, D., Smith, N., Wolfe, C., Winters, M., Sullivan, S., & Crocker, J. (2011, February). *The school competency contingency of worth as a mediator between performance-oriented achievement goals and performance outcomes*. Poster to be presented at the 5th annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychologists, Los Angeles, California.

Travers, D., & Sullivan, S. (2010). *Individual differences in resilience to stereotype threat*. Poster presented at the Butler Conference for Undergraduate Research, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Employment

Research Associate, Hanover College, 2010

- selected by department faculty to serve as Summer Research Associate,
- responsible for analysis of complex survey data, helped design projects for upcoming academic year based on findings,
- assisted in data coding, library research, and data analysis

Psychology Department Worker, Hanover College, 2010 – present

- assisted department faculty with administrative duties, library research, data entry, and data analysis

Honors and Awards

Psi Chi Psychology Honor Society
Student Body President (2011 - 2012)
Mortar Board Senior Honor Society
Eli Lilly-Trustee Full Merit-based Scholarship Recipient
Dean's List (all terms)
Phi Eta Sigma Honor Society
Gamma Sigma Pi Honor Society
High School Valedictorian

Professional Society Memberships

American Psychological Society, Student Affiliate
Society for Personality and Social Psychologists, Student Member

Web Sites

Useful Web Sites

GRE Homepage: www.ets.org/gre

Includes Math Review (covers all math topics that will be tested on the quantitative section of the GRE), provides an introduction to the Analytical Writing Section (AWS), the entire pool of possible topics for the AWS, free access to PowerPrep, ETS's own GRE prep materials (2 full length practice tests, lots of sample questions with complete explanations, target scores, etc.)

Program Rankings: www.phds.org/rankings

Allows you to find PhD programs that match the criteria that you desire in graduate schools and includes rankings from the National Research Council (graduate faculty assessing each other based on such factors as reputation of the faculty, quality of the curriculum in preparing scholars, and mean year to degree).

Researching Program Faculty: scholar.google.com

Enables you to search for individual faculty publications as you look for the graduate schools at which the faculty research interests overlap most fully with your own. Includes not only the scholars' own publications, but also links to the publication titles in which the scholars' works have been cited.

Listings of Graduate and Professional School Programs: www.petersons.com

Lets you search for programs by institution name or keyword, or to sort them by location, degree program, or program title. Provides general information for most programs including application deadlines and fees, contact information, program profile and grants available.

Financial Aid: www.gradschools.com/article-category/financial-aid-34

Provides links to many of the best websites for financial aid, fellowships, and grants for funding graduate school study.

Career Center: <http://careercenter.hanover.edu/students/gradschool>. Includes our downloadable Intro GRE PowerPoint program, and an array of tips on how to apply to grad school.

Current and Recent Admissions Results: <http://thegradcafe.com>

Lets you learn how other applicants are faring and join the discussion forum for your field.

Undergraduate Research Registry: www.cur.org/ugreg/

Allows undergrads with research experience in various science fields, Economics, Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology to upload their CVs into a registry searchable by graduate school representatives. Sponsored by the Council on Undergraduate Research.

Career Center Resources

A Few Helpful Career Center Resources

Peterson's Guide to Graduate School, 2012. A six volume set listing every accredited graduate and professional school program in North America.

Life after Grad School: Getting from A to B., by Jerald M. Jellison, 2010. For those not moving into academia, this book provides advice on how to make the transition from graduate school into jobs in for-profits, government and not-for-profits.

Graduate Admissions Essays: Write your Way into the Graduate School of Your Choice, by Donald Asher, 2000. Helpful advice and many critiqued examples of admission essays.

The Academic Job Search Handbook, by Mary Morris Heilberger and Julia Miller Vick, 2001. Once you've gone through graduate school, you'll be on the job market; this book gives practical advice on how to search for jobs and how to apply for them. Provides sample curriculum vitae, the resume format used by academics.

Researching PhD and Master's Programs

To do your research well, expect to spend hours looking up every program that your professors think should be on your long list. Don't worry; it will be fun, or if it's not, then maybe you should rethink grad school. Every time a school or professor sounds interesting, make a note of the reasons they caught your eye; when you are finished, you will have a good enough list to start discriminating between programs, selecting those you like best.

Step 1. Meet with your major advisor; share your academic aspirations, discuss (or clarify) your specific interests, and request suggestions of possible schools to explore.

Step 2. At www.phds.org/rankings, do a sort of the PhD programs that most closely match your interests, selecting the features you are seeking in a PhD program. With that information, refine or add to the list of schools developed with your advisor.

Step 3. Look up each department's home page, reading every single page of it. Look at the curriculum: Does it encourage interests like yours? Does the program have a slant (that is, for example, if the program is Classics, does it emphasize literature, philosophy, history, archeology, etc.)? If so, can you live with the emphasis? Note the names and research interests of each professor. Note also where they got their PhDs, which may help you to expand or refine your list.

Step 4. Look up the professors above on scholar.google.com to see what they have published and when they did so; note how many times each was cited to see how influential it was. Click on the links to read abstracts of their papers or even the publications themselves. Now the big question: you'll basically be apprenticed to a professor for at least 5 years, and they want someone who's excited about the research they've been doing: who is doing work in an area that you find fascinating?

Step 5. Try to find out or intuit how many people each program admits each year. Are they admitted straight into the PhD or are they encouraged to take the intermediate step of earning a Masters? If this information is not provided outright, then count how many current grad students they have: if they list the year they were admitted, then note that as well to help you calculate the class size. The size of the department may impact the access you have to faculty (as you will have found by attending Hanover); however, smaller programs may be more competitive.

Step 6. What do they say about funding, teaching assistanceships, etc?

Step 7. Look up all the programs again on www.phds.org/rankings to see how long it takes people to earn degrees, the reputation of the programs, etc.

Step 8. Look up the towns in which the schools are located on Craigslist and Google Images; is this an environment that suits you?

Step 9. Meet again with your advisor to discuss your revised list. What other things matter to people in the field you're pursuing? Facilities? Library? Ask your advisor for insight.

To do a good job on your research, you cannot take shortcuts and, unfortunately, no one else can do this work for you no matter how well they think they grasp your priorities. As you read and learn, you will gain subtle impressions that will matter; give yourself time to absorb them. PhD programs average 6 years to complete: be sure you are well-suited to the program you attend.

Researching PhD and Master's Programs

GRE Preparation Flow Chart

GRE Preparation Flow Chart

Take ETS's PowerPrep II's full-length Practice Test to assess your current abilities, and to become familiar with the structure and pacing of the GRE. (Download PowerPrep II at www.ets.org/gre/revise_general/prepare/powerprep2).

Find the target GRE score for your grad school field in PowerPrep II under: Reports > By area of Graduate Study.

Legend

If you have limited time for GRE prep, at least use these suggestions.

Must be purchased.

Based on your performance on the practice test:

If you want to improve on the Verbal Reasoning section:

Work through practice questions for each VR area you want to target.

For reading comprehension:

Read periodicals, ask yourself questions about the passages*

For vocabulary:

Learn Greek and Latin roots, prefixes and suffixes.*

Buy GRE vocabulary flash cards or flip books. Plan a schedule to expand vocabulary based on time remaining.

Use new vocabulary; read extensively; do crosswords.

If you want to improve on the Quantitative Reasoning section:

Work through practice questions to become familiar with the format of GRE math questions.

Work through PowerPrep's Math Review. Answer the questions following each section; identify your areas of weakness and focus on them. Give yourself time limits on questions to improve your pacing.

Seek help from the Learning Center for shortcuts and for strategies to handle questions you find challenging.

If you want to improve on the Analytical Writing section:

Familiarize yourself with the focus of this section: read and review the sample questions and tips for the AWS found at www.ets.org/gre/revise_general/know.

Write at least one timed practice essay for each of the two areas: "Your Perspective on an Issue" and "Analyzing an Argument". (For the entire pool of questions, go to www.ets.org/gre, General Test > Test Preparation and select "Writing Topics".)

Bring your completed essays with the question prompts to the Career Center for comments and scoring.

For official ETS scoring of your practice essays, use *Score it Now!* found at www.ets.org/gre/general/prepare/scoreitnow. (\$13)

Use a GRE Prep book for tips on questions you find challenging and for strategies to improve pacing. (However, don't rely on their practice tests for an accurate sense of the GRE itself).

Take a second full-length practice test to see what you should focus on until your test date.

* Related handouts are available from the Career Center.