



Harvey Mudd College Graduate School Guide



INTRODUCTION / TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome to the Office of Career Services

The Office of Career Services assists students in every stage of their career development. Whether you are selecting a major, exploring occupations, searching for jobs and internships, or preparing for graduate school, we can help.

Table of Contents

Graduate School	2
When to Go	2
Where to Apply	2
Application Process	3
Financial Aid	5
Where Alumni Have Studied	5

Location

Joseph B. Platt Campus Center

Contact

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Office Hours

During academic year

Weekdays,

8:30 a.m.–5 p.m.

Summer hours

9 a.m.–4:30 p.m.



Thinking of attending graduate school? Graduate school is a big step. Master's degree programs typically take two years to complete. PhD programs may require a commitment of six years or more. If you want an advanced education or specialized knowledge, and a graduate degree is required to obtain your career goals, then graduate school might be for you.

Questions to Ask Before Deciding on Graduate School

- What do you want to accomplish in your lifetime? (short- and long-term professional goals)
- Is graduate school necessary to achieve those goals?
- What's the community like at your preferred graduate school?
- Are you interested in specializing in an area of study?
- Will you possibly enjoy graduate school?
- Are you willing to invest the time and possibly money in another academic program?
- Are you simply delaying career decision-making? (Not a good reason.)
- What are the graduation rates?
- What are the outcomes? Do graduates go into industry? Research? Postdoctoral programs?

When to Go

There are no absolute guidelines about when to go to graduate school. It is highly advisable to speak with faculty advisors and with people currently pursuing programs of interest to you. But, ultimately, you must make your own decision.

There are pros and cons to both immediate entry and delayed entry. Preference can sometimes be given to individuals with a few years of life/work experience, which tends to give these individuals more knowledge on which to base their graduate studies.

However, many feel that going directly into graduate school after a bachelor's degree is easier, because there are many sources of information available on campus while an undergraduate. Also, faculty members are more likely to remember your achievements for recommendation purposes. If you're not sure whether to pursue a doctorate, start with a master's degree and re-evaluate afterward to decide if you would like to complete your PhD.

Where to Apply

You may want to consider asking a trusted faculty member for advice on programs they feel would be a good fit for you. What programs fit your interests? In what areas do you wish to specialize? Once you have an idea of to what programs to apply, consider the following factors:

- **The school and its department:** What is its reputation? How prestigious is it (if this is a factor for you)? What are the academic and professional objectives of that department?
- **Advisor:** A good advisor can make your study area even more exciting.
- **Faculty:** Do their research interests match yours?
- **Financial support offered:** research assistantships, teaching assistantships—for PhD programs within STEM, most are covered. For M.S. programs, some are.
- **Geographic location:** Do you like a big city? Do you care about the weather? Is your industry based there? Is there a social scene?
- **Community:** Are there student groups? Organizations you can join?
- **Size of student body and composition/cohort:** Is the department large? How large is the incoming class?
- **Structure of the PhD program:** What tests must be passed to advance? How many classes are you expected to take over how many years?
- **Faculty/student ratio:** How many students per faculty member?
- **Attrition rate:** Do all of their students graduate? If students leave, how many do and why?
- **Alumni:** What are alumni doing? Research? Academia? Industry? Postdocs? Are there networking opportunities with alumni?
- **Make Mudd connections:** Connect with Mudders who have attended graduate school via MuddCompass.

Helpful Resources

Gradschools.com— Schools by subject and type
USNews.com/education— Rankings of schools
Topuniversities.com— Worldwide graduate programs
Researchconnection.com— PhD program mentors at universities
cuc.org— Registry for undergraduate researchers

Application Process

Junior Year Fall

- Investigate potential programs.

Junior Year Spring

- Research programs (talk to faculty members about specific programs).
- Register for appropriate admission tests; check dates for specialty items.
- Check on application deadlines and rolling admissions policies.

Senior Year Fall

- Ask for letters of recommendation by end of October.
- Order official transcripts.

- Complete applications.
- Write, review and finalize personal statement.
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Financial Aid PROFILE, if required.

Senior Year Spring

- Arrange for campus visits where you've been accepted.
- Check dates and register for appropriate admission tests.
- Send thank you notes to people who wrote your recommendation letters.
- Investigate national scholarships and grants.
- If you haven't applied but plan to soon after graduation, ask your instructors and mentors for future letters of recommendation.

Application Forms

Most schools require only an admission application to graduate school. In some cases, an additional departmental application is required. Be aware of application deadlines. If admissions are handled on a rolling basis, it is to your distinct advantage to apply at the earliest possible date. Most applications are due between December and March.

Some schools will ask for a personal statement while others will ask for a statement of purpose. Some might ask for both. The key difference between the two is that the statement of purpose should solely focus on the program and your future goals.

Letters of Recommendation

Graduate school applications typically require three letters of reference (or recommendation). Be sure to request your letter in person rather than by email, and be gracious when asking. Give your upper-division faculty, research advisor or mentors at least four weeks, and up to eight, before your due date. It is important that the letter be a strong recommendation. (You should always ask, never assume this will be the case. Letters of recommendation that aren't substantive can actually hurt your application.) Consider giving your recommenders a copy of your resume and your personal statement. Give them a "cheat sheet" of topics you wish for them to cover in their letter. (You worked 15 hours a week on the Homework Hotline while carrying a full course load, you were a mentor or proctor of your dorm, you were an officer in a club on campus, etc). Give them a list of the programs to which you are applying and due dates, your personal statement, and unofficial transcript. Make it easy for your recommender by providing a bulleted list of your major accomplishments—Clinic results, class projects, grading/tutoring, etc. Finally, make sure to thank your references in writing, and keep them updated on your progress.

Good grammar and writing are extremely important. In addition to OCS, seek help from faculty and the Writing Center if you need advice and guidance preparing your personal essay or other application materials. Write, rewrite and edit your essays!

For Personal Statements and/or Statements of Purpose, ask a mentor to review your draft statement(s). This may be particularly helpful for good discussions of technical topics and help with setting an appropriate professional tone.

Personal Statement

Tailor your personal statement to the school to which you are applying. Is it a master's or PhD program? Is it a specialized program which lends itself to industry or academia? This may influence the content of your statement. Begin with an outline that includes the following topics:

- Personal background – What unique experience or background do you bring to the program? Did you overcome some challenge(s) which make you a particularly interesting candidate?
- Interests – How did you become interested in the field? Why do you want to study this field?
- Experience – What experience do you have in the field? Did your research include field/lab work which confirmed your interest in your area?
- Future Goals – What do you want to do after you finish your graduate degree? Where do you see yourself working?
- Graduate Program Appeal – Why do you want to join this particular program? Mention in your statement two to three possible faculty members that you would like to work with and why. (It is extremely important that each statement be unique to each program/institution!)
- Conclusion – Summarize your thoughts: goals, experience, strengths and motivation.

Statement of Purpose

Requirements vary widely in this regard. Some programs request only one or two paragraphs about why you want to pursue graduate study, while others require five or six separate essays in which you are expected to write at length about your motivation for graduate study, your strengths and weaknesses, your greatest achievements, and solutions to hypothetical problems. The statement should not be taken lightly.

Transcripts

All transcripts must be official; that is, transcripts must be sent to admission offices directly from the Office of the Registrar.

GPA may be viewed in different ways:

- Cumulative
- Major
- Last two years
- Field of interest
- Changes (e.g., improvement)

Remember, while grade-point averages are important, they are not examined in isolation; the rigor of the courses you have taken, your course load and the reputation of Harvey Mudd College are also considered. The College sends a document explaining its grading system along with your official transcript.

Graduate Admission Tests

Most programs will not accept scores more than three to five years old.

- Graduate Record Examination (GRE)
- Law School Admission Test (LSAT)
- Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)
- Engineer-in-Training (EIT)
- Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT)
- Dental Aptitude Test (DAT)
- Veterinary Aptitude Test (VAT)
- Optometry College Admission Test (OCAT)
- Pharmacy College Admission Test (PCAT)

Note: Some programs require subject-area exams.

You may wish to purchase a preparation manual for the specific test you plan to take, or you could consider private short courses. Most test preparation companies, like Princeton, Kaplan and Test Masters, offer free trial run tests online and sometimes at other Claremont Colleges. Watch for announcements.

Interviews

Many programs require interviews as part of the admissions selection process. Be sure to check out our career guide for interview tips and schedule mock interviews with the Office of Career Services.



Financial Aid

Types of Aid Available

Financial Aid: Grants, Scholarships and Fellowships

Most are outright awards that do not require repayment. Often they provide the cost of tuition and fees plus a stipend to cover living expenses. Some are based exclusively on financial need, some exclusively on academic merit and some on a combination of need and merit. Grants are awarded to those with financial need; fellowships and scholarships often are based on ability—financial need is usually not a factor. Examples of federal agencies that fund fellowship and trainee programs for graduate students in STEM are National Science Foundation (NSF); the National Institutes of Health (NIH); and the National Consortium for Graduate Degrees in Engineering Science (GEM).

Note: Most PhD programs in STEM do not require you to fill out financial aid forms because they assume you will be getting tuition and fees paid, as well as a stipend for living expenses.

Work: Research (RA) and Teaching (TA) Assistantships

Most universities offer RA and TA opportunities for graduate students. As a research assistant, you will receive full or partial tuition and/or a stipend in exchange for working in a faculty member's lab. As a teaching assistant, rather than a researcher, you will earn a stipend (and/or free tuition) teaching or assisting with undergraduate courses.

Loans (Federal Aid)—FAFSA

All applicants for federal aid must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). This application must be submitted after January 1, preceding enrollment in the fall. It is a good idea to submit the FAFSA as soon as possible after this date. There is a paper form, or you can apply online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Report your income and asset information and specify which schools will receive this data. Two to four weeks later, you will receive an acknowledgment, the Student Aid Report (SAR), on which you can make corrections.

Can I defer?

Most programs will allow you to defer if you receive a prestigious fellowship, and most understand if you have a personal emergency. However, this isn't acceptable if you're just not ready.

Where Alumni Have Studied

Recent graduates have gone on to prestigious master's and PhD programs at universities such as:

- Caltech
- Carnegie Mellon University
- Cornell University
- Georgia Institute of Technology
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Northeastern University
- Princeton University
- Purdue University
- Stanford University
- UC Berkeley
- UCLA
- UC San Diego
- University of British Columbia
- University of Chicago
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- University of Maryland College Park
- University of Oregon
- University of Washington
- University of Waterloo

For additional details on the options our graduates pursue, please visit our website at hmc.edu/career-services/mudd-senior-outcomes/.

