

## **Printable on Graduate School Advising and Resources**

### **Graduate School**

This document contains the following information:

- UAR Advising and Resources
- UAR and other mailing lists
- Deciding on graduate school
- What can I do with a Ph.D.?
- The difference between the masters and doctorate
- Early preparation
- Selecting the right school for you
- The graduate school application
- Should I take a year off before graduate school?
- What are the possibilities of getting a master's degree at Stanford?
- Paying for graduate school

### **UAR Advising and Resources for Graduate School**

- One-on-one consultation with academic advisors with experience in your field or a related field. To arrange a consultation, contact [UAR@vpue.stanford.edu](mailto:UAR@vpue.stanford.edu); (650) 724-7562; or visit our online appointment request form at [uar.stanford.edu](http://uar.stanford.edu).
- Workshops during fall and spring quarters on writing personal statements. For current schedules and registration: <http://UAR.stanford.edu>
- The UAR has a list of graduate students in most departments who are also willing to answer questions about graduate school.
- One-on-one writing consultations with UAR advisors to discuss approaches, improve drafts, and finalize essays. To arrange a consultation, contact [UAR@vpue.stanford.edu](mailto:UAR@vpue.stanford.edu); (650) 724-7562.
- Binders of statements and essays by former Stanford undergraduates who have been successful in graduate admissions and fellowships/scholarship competitions. Binders are kept in the UAR offices on the first and fourth floors of Sweet Hall, and may be read during regular office hours (9:00 to 5:00 Monday through Friday). Essays may not be borrowed or copied.

### **Should I go to graduate school?**

Take time to make this decision carefully. Look into careers that interest you and the education required. Discuss with your professors whether pursuing an advanced degree is wise given your goals. Graduate school will most definitely be more challenging than your undergraduate experience. Graduate study requires initiative, self-motivation, self-discipline and persistence, particularly at the Ph.D. level. For people who are interested in ideas, creative thinking, and problem solving, the Ph.D. offers the greatest challenge and the greatest rewards.

The traditional career for recipients of the Ph.D. is college teaching. But in many fields, particularly in science, people with doctoral degrees find employment with corporations where research and development of new products or services are important, or with government agencies where the skill to analyze large amounts of complex data is essential.

### **What is the difference between Masters' and Ph.D. Degrees?**

The master's degree generally serves as certification of skill in an academic or practical area. The degree is used to sharpen ones employable skill (engineering, counseling, teaching, business, etc.) and/or to develop research and analysis skills (humanities and sciences disciplines).

People also use study for the master's as a way to determine interest in pursuing higher degrees. The doctoral degree requires four to six years of intensive study and research, although if you know you want a Ph.D., many schools will allow you to begin research before you complete the master's degree. In this situation, the time to earn both a Ph.D. and a master's degree can be as little as four years.

### **Prepare early for graduate school, fellowships, and scholarships**

- Enroll in a Stanford Introductory Seminar or Sophomore College course that corresponds with your intellectual interests.
- Develop good working relationships with faculty members, and stay in close contact throughout your undergraduate years.
- Attend campus conferences, colloquia, guest lectures, and other scholarly events relating to your interests.
- Read scholarly and professional journals in your field of interest.
- Engage in a research project, and work closely with a faculty mentor. Study abroad and cultivate relationships with faculty with whom you might like to work after college, supported by an international fellowship or scholarship
- Undertake an honors thesis late in your junior year and/or senior year.

**Choosing the right school.** The selection of the best graduate school is quite different from undergraduate choices. Because you will be closely allied with your specific department and your specific faculty mentors, the overall ranking of the school is irrelevant. Instead, learn about the focus and reputation of the faculty working in a specific field within your discipline. You will find that evaluations by field often depart from overall rankings. More important, though, is the identification of faculty who share your interests both topically and methodologically, and who will be supportive mentors.

## **Investigate graduate programs, scholarships, and fellowships**

- Research scholarship and fellowship programs that fit with your study, research, and career goals.
- Talk with faculty members about your graduate field of interest and ask their advice on good graduate programs to which you should consider applying
- Research specific graduate programs using the web and print resources
- Attend, as early as possible, information sessions offered by offices such as UAR and ORC
- Request application materials from admissions offices, fellowship/scholarship programs, or appropriate Sanford offices
- Consider contacting faculty at other universities with whom you may wish to study in graduate school. Discuss with them your scholarly interests and how they fit with their graduate program.

The questions below identify some key issues you will want to investigate during your search for the right graduate field and program. You should begin by discussing your scholarly interests with your faculty mentors at Stanford. Engage their help in determining what questions are most important for you and what criteria you'll look for to answer them. Next, use the web to explore graduate programs and departments in your field (both within the U.S. and abroad), referring to the topics outlined below.

Campus visits are often the best way to find out which graduate program will best suit your academic and career goals. These visits often take place after you have received your offers of admission, although some students choose to visit when deciding where to apply. Most graduate departments will invite you to sit in on classes, visit the library, meet with faculty and students, and talk with department chairs or directors of graduate studies. Most graduate programs will offer incoming students a financial support package, including grants, loans, as well as income from teaching or research; note the kinds of support and quality of teaching and research assignments that current students receive. Before you visit, try to identify a Stanford alumnus who is studying there and arrange to meet with him or her. Draw upon these questions to guide conversations with the people you meet.

### **Sample Questions about the University at Large:**

- How is the school rated in your area of interest? (Don't assume a school of excellent reputation is excellent in every department.)
- How integral is research to the university's mission?
- What is the quality of life beyond academics?  
What is the cost of living?  
What are the housing options?  
Do you like the area?
- What student support, social programming, and community-building does the university sponsor?
- What support or training does the school offer for graduate-student teaching assistants?
- What kind of social life do graduate students develop?
- What kind of financial support package will be offered to you?

What percentage of students are funded?

For how many years is funding guaranteed?

- If funding includes teaching and research assistantships, are these positions competitive or guaranteed?

What opportunities exist for summer funding?

What dissertation-year fellowships are available?

Is conference travel and off-campus research funding available?

- Can you defer admission?

### **Sample Questions about the Academic Life of the Department:**

What is the educational approach?

- Is the approach theoretical or applied?
- Is the teaching method memorization- or problem-based?
- Is the course format predominantly lectures or seminars?
- Does the program emphasize specialization or a broader program of studies?
- Does the department have a strong methodological bias within the field?

What happens to students after they enroll?

- How big is the first-year class?
- What is the attrition rate?
- What percentage of students who matriculate graduate?
- What is the format of the master's/Ph.D. exams?
- What are examples of graduate course offerings from past years?
- How many years do most students spend in the program?

What is the balance between strict curricular requirements and electives?

- Will you be able to take courses outside of your department?
- Will the courses which interest you be offered when you will need to take them?
- What are the foreign-language requirements, and what resources are there to help you meet them?

What research opportunities are offered?

- How much independence will you have in your research?
- What is the reputation of the research facility and/or faculty?
- Are there potential mentors who share your research interests?
- Is state-of-the-art equipment available?
- Are there opportunities for interdisciplinary research?

What extracurricular learning opportunities are offered?

- Internships or clinical opportunities?
- Research centers on campus?
- Summer travel or study institutes?
- Journals published or other editorial opportunities?

How much contact with faculty will you have?

- What is the faculty/student ratio?
- What programs and policies encourage informal contact between faculty and students?
- What faculty and peer advising is available?

What is the percentage of minority acceptances?

- What minority resources and community groups exist on campus?

## **Graduation and Career Placement:**

What career paths do graduates follow?

- What are their placement statistics?
- What jobs did graduates from the last three years take?
- Do graduates concentrate in a few geographic areas or take jobs nationwide?
- Do faculty and administrators show interest in their graduates' success?
- What job placement assistance is offered?
- Do faculty hire students as research assistants?
- Does the faculty have a strong history of actively supporting graduates in getting academic and other jobs?

## **Prepare and submit your applications**

- Write your personal statement and other required essays, leaving time for multiple drafts and feedback from faculty and writing consultants in the UAR and Stanford Writing Center. Be sure to consult on the statement with people who've been through the process of applying to graduate school in your field, or a closely related field.
- Request letter of recommendation from faculty at least four weeks before the application deadline.
- Take the GRE tests by November of the year you are applying for graduate school.
- Order transcripts from Stanford and other schools attended.
- Submit applications as they are due. International scholarships often are due in early October. Most undergraduate merit scholarships are due in November. Most graduate school deadline fall between mid-December and mid-January
- Follow up with your recommenders, thanking them for supporting your candidacy and informing them of the results.
- Visit graduate programs where you have been accepted, referring to the sample question above to guide your conversations with faculty and graduate students.

## **Letters of Recommendation**

Establish a graduate school reference file at the Career Development Center. This service will save you time and energy by taking care of distributing your letters of recommendation to the schools that you designate should receive them. Your best references will come from faculty who know you well. These can be those with whom you established a good relationship when taking their class, faculty with whom you have worked on independent projects or research, or your faculty advisor for your major. Learning to approach faculty early is one key to asking for recommendations later in your college career. To ask a professor who only knows that you got an A in the class for a reference is unfair to the professor and not very helpful to you.

In some fields that value practical experience, another source of recommendations is your job supervisor, particularly if your job is in a field related to the discipline you want to study. Again, the key is to find someone who knows you well enough to comment convincingly about your potential for successful graduate study. Some programs are very strict about who may write a recommendation letter. When in doubt, contact the department to ask.

### **Should I take a year off before graduate school?**

Taking a year or two off before graduate school is certainly an option to consider. It may make you a stronger applicant if your interim pursuit is related to your future study and you can demonstrate your continuing awareness of the current research questions in your field.

If you plan to take time off from school before applying, keep in mind that your GRE scores are valid for five years and that the CDC's reference file service will keep recommendation letters for several years. You should ask for recommendations while you are still on campus and professors are familiar with you and your work. It is up to you whether you want to take the GRE before you graduate. Some students like to take the tests while schooling and study are routine for them. Others prefer to take some time away to regroup, take more courses, or concentrate exclusively on preparation before taking the tests. You decide what's best for you.

You may also want to consider applying during your senior year and then deferring for a year or two. Contact the individual departments to ask whether this is an option.

### **What are the possibilities of getting a master's degree at Stanford?**

The coterminal degree program at Stanford allows students to work toward the master's degree immediately after or while completing the bachelor's degree. The UAR handout "Majors, Minors and Coterns" summarizes common questions about the coterminal program and lists admissions requirements for the various programs. If you miss the coterminal program application deadline, you may also, in most departments, apply to the regular master's and Ph.D. programs which are open to students from any undergraduate institution.

### **How do I pay for graduate school?**

An important item to remember is that many Ph.D. programs in the disciplines fund their admitted applicants for up to four years. This funding also includes tuition and a stipend. University departments have different methods of funding, but most programs expect you to work for the department or a faculty member as a research assistant, teaching assistant, lecturer, or tutor. In addition, some funding may be automatic, while some may rely on competition within the department. You must ask detailed questions to find out how funding works for the programs to which you are applying.

External fellowships come in a wide variety of types and sizes, including government grants, private foundation funding, state and local agencies or university-funded aid. Quite often, fellowships cover tuition and a stipend for multiple years. Loans are similar to ones

you experienced as an undergraduate also funded by government agencies or private lenders.

Not only will earning a fellowship reduce your financial stress, but it will also make you more desirable to potential research advisors after you are admitted. Particularly in the sciences and engineering, students funded by the department may be limited in the research advisors and projects from which they can choose. Students with an outside fellowship have more freedom. Undergraduate Advising and Research offers workshops and individual consultations to help you with your fellowship applications, and can help you find fellowships for your area of interest.

For academic planning, help with the application process and with the essay/personal statement; quarterly workshops; go to the UAR Sweet Hall, 1st Floor, or make an appointment by using our online appointment request web form at [uar.stanford.edu](http://uar.stanford.edu).

Look at Stanford's financial aid office website for other graduate school loan resources.