

A large, light gray paw print graphic is centered on the page. Overlaid on the paw print is the text 'Career Services' in a purple, cursive font.

*Career Services*

**GRADUATE SCHOOL  
GUIDE**

Jennifer Pickerell, M.A.	Jill Boehne, M.S.
Director	Assistant Director
618.537.6806	618.537.6805
<a href="mailto:jpickerell@mckendree.edu">jpickerell@mckendree.edu</a>	<a href="mailto:jrboehne@mckendree.edu">jrboehne@mckendree.edu</a>

[www.mckendree.edu/careerservices](http://www.mckendree.edu/careerservices)



McKendree University Career Services



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Graduate School	Page 3
Graduate School Timeline	Page 5
Questions to Ask Graduate Programs	Page 7
Writing a Graduate School Résumé	Page 8
Writing a Personal Statement	Page 9
Considering a Gap Year	Page 11

## GRADUATE SCHOOL

- A graduate program is generally more focused on a specific area of interest and on acquiring specialized skills to practice a profession or to do advanced research.
- The curriculum is generally a combination of coursework and internships (to practice professional skills).
- A master's degree usually requires 1 or 2 years of study, and a doctorate generally requires 5 years.
- A research master's degree will probably involve writing a thesis or taking a comprehensive examination.
- The most common professional degrees are the M.D. for medicine and the J.D. for law.
- The research doctoral degree (the Ph.D.) involves training in research, which provides the skills to discover new knowledge. This degree can provide many career choices.
- The first years of a Ph.D. involve coursework, while the final component usually involves original research and reporting on the research through a dissertation.

The decision to attend graduate school is an important one and deserves a lot of time and research. You need to determine if graduate school is right for you. Do you enjoy problem solving, learning new facts, reading, and exploring new ideas? If so, graduate school would give you the opportunity to do all of these things while learning more about the areas that interest you most. Graduate school can help determine how far you can advance in your career and can also benefit you personally.

### **When Should You Go?**

- ✓ When you know what you want to study
- ✓ When you can make it career-related
- ✓ When it's the right time in your life



### **Choosing a Graduate School**

As a potential graduate school student, you should carefully research programs to find the one that will best suit your needs and talents. There are more than 1,800 institutions in the United States that offer graduate degrees, and the varieties of programs are vast. In general, you probably want to choose a program with a heavy technology influence and with a strong global perspective.

### **Things to consider when choosing a program:**

- Interests, abilities, values
- Reputation
- Graduate success rates
- Library holdings
- Cost/funding
- Faculty research areas and bios.
- Size of institution and program
- Research facilities

## Where Do I Research Graduate Schools?

- Faculty and Career Services
- U.S. News and World Report
- [www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com) and [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)
- [CHEA.org](http://CHEA.org) (Council for Higher Education Accreditation)
- Business Magazines (Financial Times, Business Week)



## Tips About Correspondence with Graduate Schools

- **Letters of Recommendation:** Start early (6-8 weeks in advance) and begin by asking a faculty member, “Would you be comfortable in writing a recommendation letter for me?” If he/she is willing, it is best to set up an appointment with the faculty member and give him/her your résumé, transcripts, a portfolio sample, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Also, you may want to discuss what he/she will put in the letter and what your graduate school plans are. Treat it as a counseling session because he/she may give you some excellent tips and insight about graduate school. Show your appreciation and stay in touch!
- **Continuing Interest E-mails:** You may send a continuing interest e-mail early in the Spring semester to let a school know that you’re still interested and to get your name in front of them again. This letter may say something like, “I have been hearing back from some graduate schools, and I’m concerned that I have not heard back from you. I am still very interested in your program and believe it is a great fit with my background. Please contact me at your convenience.” Then send this e-mail to the Admissions Coordinator, Director of Graduate Studies, and Department Chair.
- **Faculty Intervention E-mails or Calls:** You may ask a faculty member (usually a faculty member in your targeted major) to send an intervention e-mail or call early in the Spring semester to show support for you. If willing to do so, he/she can contact the school.

## Tips for Funding and Support for Graduate School

- Get admitted first. Then ask, “What forms of funding and support do you have for graduate school?” (Do not go to the Financial Aid office first; they will simply offer loans.)
- Hear about the options: Grad Assistant (common in Career Center, IT, Admissions), Teacher Assistant, RA, GA, Principal Investigator, etc. – Many offer a waiver of tuition and a stipend.
- On applications, check all boxes for “Funding Interests.”
- Look into fellowships and grants:
  - [findaid.org](http://findaid.org) and [fastweb.com](http://fastweb.com)
  - *Foundations Grants To Individuals*
  - *The Best Scholarships for the Best Students* (Don Asher)
  - *Back-Door Guide to Short-Term Job Opportunities* (Michael Landes)
- For tuition waivers, ask, “Does this waiver include fees?” (Fees often double the total cost.)
- For loans, max out federally-guaranteed loans before going to banks.

Information adapted from University of Buffalo’s Career Services Center and a graduate school presentation by Donald Asher, Asher Associates.

## **GRADUATE SCHOOL TIMELINE**

### **Sophomore and Junior Year**

- Decide if graduate school is of interest to you. Do you enjoy problem solving, learning new facts, reading, researching, and exploring new ideas?
- Continue research on your career interests and think more about your future goals. This can be accomplished by: talking to professionals in your areas of interest about what they do and graduate programs that they recommend, reading more about these areas, talking to faculty about graduate programs in your field of interest, and visiting the Career Services office to discuss our resources.
- Get involved in research projects, activities, honor societies/clubs, and volunteer service.
- Become familiar with the various programs available. It is important to make some decisions early about what type of graduate or professional school you are interested in, especially for a program such as medical school, where the deadlines are so early. The more you know, the more in control you will feel your senior year over the entire process. Visit [www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com), an excellent resource when researching the various graduate programs. Two other resources are [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com) and U.S. News and World Report.
- Begin researching schools, financial aid, scholarships, and graduate assistantship options. Keep in mind that this is a LONG process that takes a great deal of time.
- Do not be afraid to have several options at this point; you can always eliminate later.
- If a medical student, take the MCAT your junior year and register with the application service.

### **Spring and Summer Prior to Senior Year**

- Request applications from all of the schools on your list. Seven to nine is a good number because you can apply to: 1. Your top schools, 2. Schools you are fairly confident into which you can gain admission, and 3. Schools where you know you will be accepted.
- Begin writing your personal statement, which should be customized to each school. The Career Services office has books on this area for your use. Have faculty members and the Writing Resource Center assist you.
- Contact the Admissions Departments at your schools of interest to inquire about their acceptance rates, test score requirements, and GPA requirements. A lot of this information can be found on their websites.
- Register and start preparing for your required admissions exam (GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT, VCAT, PCAT). This information can be found on our website.
- Continue research about financial aid options and request aid materials from schools.
- Visit your schools of serious interest so you can personally meet with admissions staff, students, and faculty.
- Consider taking your examination in the summer if your schools of choice have early deadline dates. One example of this would be law school. This also gives you time to take the test again if your scores are not as high as you would like.

### **Early Fall of Your Senior Year**

- Continue visiting your “top choice” schools.
- Request letters of recommendation from people who can speak well of your academic and work success. Give writers a packet of information. This includes your résumé, personal statement if it is finished, self-addressed and stamped envelopes, deadline dates, and any other pertinent information. Make sure to give them at least 6-8 weeks to write the letter for you.
- Take your graduate examination.
- Order “official transcripts” from all colleges/universities attended and compile all other application materials.
- If planning on attending law, medical, or dental school, make sure to register with the application service (AMCAS, LCDAS). This is a service that will collect your materials and submit them to your schools of interest.
- Have the Writing Center, faculty members, and Career Services review your materials.

### **Middle Fall (October) of Your Senior Year**

- Submit applications for admission to schools that have early decision programs. Each program is different, but your application materials may include a personal statement, letters of recommendation, transcripts, standardized tests, an application for admission, an application for financial aid, an application for fellowships, your income tax return, and other materials.
- Take the required graduate exam if you have not already done so.
- Continue to have Writing Center, faculty members, and others review your personal statement.

### **Late Fall (November and early December) of Your Senior Year**

- Make sure to submit your applications before the deadlines, and then contact the schools to confirm that all of the required information has been received.
- Complete financial aid applications.
- Outline contingency plans in case you are not accepted to your “top choice” schools.

### **Spring of Your Senior Year**

- Send continuing interest e-mails and consider asking faculty to send intervention e-mails/calls between January and March.
- Wait to hear from schools on whether or not you have been accepted.
- Solidify your financial aid plans.
- Contact the graduate schools where you have applied after you have made a decision; this will give other applicants an opportunity to be accepted by that school.
- Write thank you letters to people who wrote recommendation letters or helped you.

*Please keep in mind that this is a general timeline. Certain programs, such as medical school, have early deadlines, so we encourage you to visit Career Services with questions and to obtain more information about admission tests, the application process, and requesting letters of recommendation from individuals.*

## **QUESTIONS TO ASK GRADUATE PROGRAMS**

1. What do you teach at this institution? What are the goals of this program?
2. What is the largest and most typical class size for a graduate class? Are classes restricted to graduate students? To majors?
3. What are the criteria and processes for selecting TAs, RAs, and Fellows?
4. Will I be allowed to develop my own topics, or will I be expected to work on a professor's ongoing research?
5. What facilities are available for graduate students? Are there any restrictions on access?
6. What is the average time to complete (a) coursework, (b) research, and (c) thesis or dissertation? (That is, what is the average time to complete the master's or Ph.D.?) Ask about the program as a whole, but also ask about the professors.
7. What is your attrition rate? Of those who do not finish, what are their reasons?
8. What kind of student thrives in your program?
9. How reliable is your financial support year to year? Is the first-year offer always sustained, given attainment of academic goals?
10. What are the age range, gender balance, ratio of married/single, and geographical origins of graduate students in the program?
11. May I have some bibliographies of recent publications by faculty? Which professors have won awards and grants lately? (These presumably need graduate assistants.)
12. Can you tell me about your student success/placement rates and types of jobs obtained by recent graduates? (Avoid relying on testimonials and anecdotal evidence.)
13. May I meet some currently-enrolled students? (In person, or later via telephone or email, be sure to ask about their research topics and be sure to take notes on specific professors mentioned.)
14. How can I be a strong candidate for a program like this?
15. What type of practicum opportunities do your students have? (This is a good question for psychology and sociology students.)
16. With what organizations/companies have students been employed in the past?
17. What type of career planning and job search assistance does your institution provide?
18. Is the coursework very structured, or is there room for electives and individual selection of courses?



**See the Career Services Office to schedule a mock interview.  
We also offer information on various graduate school programs  
and admittance testing requirements.**

## WRITING A GRADUATE SCHOOL RÉSUMÉ

Graduate programs want candidates who are leaders, motivated, and hard-working. The content of your résumé should demonstrate these characteristics, specific to a particular field.

### **Jane A. Smith**

222 Main Street  
Swansea, Illinois 62226  
618-999-9999  
jan smith@email.com

#### **OBJECTIVE**

Entrance into the Master of Business Administration program at McKendree University

#### **EDUCATION**

McKendree University Lebanon, IL  
**Bachelor of Business Administration in Economics and Finance** May 2012  
GPA 3.8/4.0; Dean's List

#### **PUBLICATIONS**

McKendree University Alumni Wire April 2011  
*A Planning Guide to Personal Retirement Options and Investments for Working Recent Graduates*

McKendree University Journal of Undergraduate Research Fall 2010  
*Is Banking System Reform in China Critical to Economic Growth?*

#### **AWARDS AND HONORS**

Board of Trustees Scholarship, City Chamber of Commerce Scholarship, Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society, Sigma Beta Delta National Business Honor Society, St. Louis Regional Business Council Mentoring Program

#### **ACTIVITIES**

Future Business Professionals Group and McKendree University Student Government Association

#### **BUSINESS AND FINANCE EXPERIENCE**

Regional Investments, LLC Greatville, IL  
**Financial Analyst** May 2010 – Present

- Analyze current client finances and financial goals
- Provide advice and service for financial planning
- Discover financial solutions that meet unique needs of clients
- Research competitor products to assist in marketing process.

#### **Intern**

Spring 2010

- Assisted a team of business management specialists
- Marketed a wide variety of financial products to a diverse clientele.
- Performed successfully in a fast-paced environment

McKendree University, Dr. Peter Simon, Business Division Chair

Lebanon, IL

#### **Research Assistant**

January 2007 – May 2009

- Collected data showing success rates of various banking systems
  - Gathered and marked resources for information on comparative banking systems

## **WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT**

A personal statement is just that: a “personal” statement. This essay is where you disclose who you are and what you want. Graduate schools want to know why you want to enroll, what life experiences impacted your decision, what you have done that qualifies you for the program, and how you plan to use or apply your graduate education. They want to learn about you, the potential you have as a graduate student, and your ability to communicate and write.

### **GRADUATE ADMISSIONS LOOK FOR:**

- 1) Correct grammar and spelling.
- 2) Creative style and content. (Do not try to be a clown.)
- 3) Confidence in self and goals, personal and professional, short-term and long-term.
- 4) Capability to mix a conversational tone with facts. Write about your interest areas.
- 5) Strong introductory paragraph describing your motivation and intent.
- 6) Clear idea of what you want and why, and specific reasons why you are interested in a particular area. (Think beyond the “I want to help people” reason.)
- 7) An answer to their question(s) (sometimes given with application).
- 8) Enthusiasm for the program and the field.
- 9) How you are different from the other candidates.
- 10) Evidence of professional and personal development and growth.
- 11) Ability to address any problems or inconsistencies.

### **TIPS FOR WRITING:**

- 1) Brainstorm about your academic and personal life.
- 2) Begin your essay with something attention-grabbing, such as a quote, question, or descriptive story.
- 3) Research the school and program to learn what type of student they want.
- 4) Write a statement geared towards the specific school and program.
- 5) Make the tone of your essay persuasive, and always be sure to give concrete examples.
- 6) Let the statement reflect who you are, and highlight your strengths.
- 7) Do not recount résumé information, but instead use more personal information.
- 8) Do not dwell on crisis. However, if you had a bad semester and/or worked full-time, make sure the reader is aware how you overcame hardships.
- 9) Use life experiences and choices that influenced your decision.
- 10) Get feedback from professionals in the field or someone you trust. One example is to use the McKendree Writing Center.
- 11) PROOFREAD!

### **WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT: (Remember that Fit & Match matter more than Grades & Scores.)**

- 1) Leadership potential.
- 2) Unique work or service experiences.
- 3) History of overcoming disadvantage.
- 4) Demonstrated skills and talents.
- 5) Clarification or elaboration on other content of application.

**FORMAT:**

- 1) Follow the guidelines given by each institution. Does the school require more than one essay? What is the word limit? If none exist, you should write approximately 2 double-spaced pages.
- 2) Remember that standard essay structure and grammar rules apply.
- 3) Use appropriate font styles, such as Times New Roman or Arial.

**DO NOT:**

- 1) Try to impress your reader with your vocabulary.
- 2) Write an autobiography, or simply list what is already on your résumé. You want to engage the reader.
- 3) Rely solely on spell and grammar check.
- 4) Use generic statements such as, "I want to help people," or something similar.
- 5) Make things up.
- 6) Get on a soapbox or sound preachy.
- 7) Write the following words or phrases without explanation, from <http://career.berkeley.edu/Grad/GradStatement.stm#1>:

Appealing aspect  
Appreciate  
Challenging  
Enjoyable/Enjoy  
Exciting/Excited  
Fascinating  
Feel good

I like it  
Incredible  
Interesting  
Invaluable  
It is important  
Meaningful  
Gratifying

Helping people  
Remarkable  
Rewarding  
Satisfying  
Significant  
Stimulating  
Useful



## **CONSIDERING A “GAP YEAR”**

*Information adapted from presentation by Donald Asher, Asher Associates.*

A gap year is the year following your undergraduate education that you can use as an alternative to graduate school or the typical path into the working world. This year is also an opportunity to gain some excellent skills and experiences that will look good on a résumé and make for interesting conversation in an interview.

### **Here are some great ideas of what you can do in your Gap Year(s):**

- **Peace Corps (2 years-27 months):** Travel overseas to make real differences in the lives of real people.
- **AmeriCorps (1-2 years):** Learn new skills, acquire qualities of leadership, and gain a sense of satisfaction from taking on responsibilities that directly affect peoples' lives.
- **City Year (10 months):** Serve full-time in schools, working to improve student attendance, behavior, and course performance in English and math.
- **Coro (1 year):** Develop skills; master tools needed to engage and empower communities; gain experience in government, business, labor and not-for-profit community organizations; and participate in special community and political problem-solving processes.
- **Language Intensive Program (4 months):** Research ways to become bilingual in 120 days.
- **Teach for America:** Work to ensure that kids growing up in poverty get an education.
- **JET Program (Japan Exchange and Teaching Program):** Serve in Japan’s local government offices, as well as public and private elementary schools, junior high and senior high schools.
- **Catholic Charities:** Provide food, build strong communities, strengthen families, provide housing, respond to disasters, and meet basic human needs.
- **Boy Scouts of America:** Lead youth to become responsible, caring, and competent citizens, while enabling yourself to learn new skills and build lifelong friendships.
- **Post-Baccalaureate Internship:** Instead of acquiring a regular job, find an internship to learn if it’s a career/company/organization for you.
- **Walkabout Adventure:** Design a tour or travel experience that fits your interests in a country of your choice.
- **Write a novel or make a film:** Take the time to be creative and unique. It may just pay off.
- **Start a business:** Figure out what you love to do and design a small business around it. You may just attain the American Dream.
- **Volunteer:** Find an organization to which you can give back to the community.

The key here is: “Intentionality”...Do something practical instead of just waiting around for a job. If you decide to do a gap year, just plan your re-entry into work or graduate school approximately 9 months before it’s over. You always want to have a plan of action.