



# CAREER SERVICES

## McKENDREE UNIVERSITY

### GRADUATE SCHOOL GUIDE

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# GRADUATE SCHOOL



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 will 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 benefit you personally.

- 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 often a combination of coursework and a practicum.
- A master's degree usually requires about two years of study and a doctorate generally requires four to seven years, all depending on how many classes an individual takes each semester and the program layout.
- 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.

**<https://www.petersons.com> has helpful information about graduate school. Go to [www.khanacademy.org](http://www.khanacademy.org) and [www.kaplan.com](http://www.kaplan.com) for FREE test preparation materials, or to find out more information about Kaplan's fee-based courses.**

## Possible reasons for graduate school

- You know what you want to study.
- Your career goal requires an advanced degree.
- The degree will provide additional career opportunities. Please note that an advanced degree does not always guarantee a higher starting salary or make you more qualified for all jobs.
- It is the right time in your life from a career and personal standpoint.
- You are excited to learn more about a subject and want to study the subject in depth.

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

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

## WHERE DO I RESEARCH GRADUATE SCHOOLS

- [www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com)
- [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)
- U.S. News and World Report
- [www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org) (Council for Higher Education Accreditation)
- Ask faculty for recommendations
- Business magazines (Financial Times, Business Week)

## RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

- **Letters of Recommendation:** Start early (about six to eight weeks in advance), and begin by asking faculty members and other relevant individuals if they are comfortable writing a recommendation letter for you. If so, give them your résumé, transcripts, and personal statement, along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope if they must mail. Provide information about your program, interests, and goals. Waive your right to view the letter; many graduate schools prefer this because they know the writer will be more candid. Keep the faculty members updated on your progress, and send them a thank-you letter when you reach a decision.
- **Continuing Interest E-mails:** You may send a continuing interest e-mail early to let a school know that you are still interested, believe that this program is a good fit, and to get your name in front of them again. Send this e-mail to the Admissions Coordinator, Director of Graduate Studies, Department Chair, or whoever you have been communicating with the most.

## FUNDING AND SUPPORT

- Get admitted first, and then ask Admissions and Financial Aid about the forms and types of funding.
- Learn about various options such as a Grad Assistant, Teacher Assistant, Resident Assistant, and other related areas, since many offer a waiver of tuition and a stipend. Ask if tuition waivers include fees.
- On applications, check all boxes for “Funding Interests.”
- Look into fellowships and grants:
  - [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org) and [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)
  - Foundation grants for individuals
  - *The Best Scholarships for the Best Students* (Don Asher)
  - *Back-Door Guide to Short-Term Job Opportunities* (Michael Landes)
  - 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.*

There are funding options available for both the master's and doctoral level, so make sure to conduct research in this area.

# GRADUTE SCHOOL GENERAL 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 Career Services.
- 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 since the deadlines are so early. PLEASE NOTE that some programs will have different timelines! Visit [www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com), an excellent resource when researching the various graduate programs. Two other good 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 and will take 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, you should take the MCAT during the summer after sophomore year at the earliest and April of your application year at the latest. Make sure to also 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 your top schools, schools where you have a good chance of gaining admission, and schools where there is a very high likelihood of acceptance.
- Begin writing your personal statement and customize to each school. The Career Services office has books on this area for your use. Faculty members, Career Services, and the Writing Resource Center can assist with essay review.
- 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, such as the GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT, VCAT, or PCAT.
- 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, including your résumé, personal statement if it is finished, self-addressed/stamped envelopes if they need to mail, deadline dates, and other pertinent information. Make sure to give them at least four to six weeks to write the letter.
- Take your graduate examination if you have not already done so.
- Order “official transcripts” from all colleges/universities attended and compile all other application materials.
- If planning on attending school for law, medical, dental, physical therapy, or occupational therapy, make sure to register with the application service (AMCAS or CAS through LSAC as examples). The above areas each have a service that will collect your materials and submit them to your schools of interest.
- Have the Writing Center, faculty members, and/or Career Services review your materials.

## MIDDLE FALL (OCTOBER) OF YOUR SENIOR YEAR

- Submit admission applications before deadline, noting which ones are early decision programs. Each program is different, and so it is important to carefully read what you are supposed to submit for your application materials. Note that some professional/graduate schools follow a different (possibly earlier) timeline.
- Take the required graduate exam if you have not already done so.
- Continue to have Writing Center, faculty members, and Career Services review your materials.

## LATE FALL (NOVEMBER AND EARLY DECEMBER) OF YOUR SENIOR YEAR

- Submit your applications before the deadlines, and then contact the schools to confirm that all of the required information was received if you don't get an online confirmation.
- 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 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.

# QUESTIONS TO ASK GRADUATE PROGRAMS

*Some institutions require an interview before admittance to their program. Please contact Career Services to schedule a mock interview.*

*Be aware that questions can vary widely based on the program. Below are questions that candidates can ask during the interview, but first make sure the information is not available on the website.*



## PROGRAM AND INSTITUTION

- What is the expected timeline to complete this program, including the coursework, research, and possible thesis or dissertation?
- Is an internship/practicum required for the program? If not, is an internship/practicum an option?
- What is the largest and most typical class size for a graduate class? Are classes restricted to graduate students? To majors?
- What facilities are available for graduate students? Are there any restrictions on access?
- What kind of student thrives in your program?
- What do you consider as the greatest strength of this program?
- What future changes do you see in this profession?
- Can you tell me about your student success rates and types of jobs obtained by recent graduates? (Avoid relying on testimonials and anecdotal evidence.)
- What type of career planning and job search assistance does your institution provide?
- Is the coursework very structured, or is there room for electives and individual selection of courses?
- How can I be a strong candidate for a program like this?
- What is your retention rate? Of those who do not finish, what are their reasons?
- What type of practicum/internship opportunities do your students have?
- May I meet some currently enrolled students? (In person, or later via telephone or email, be sure to ask about their research topics and take notes on professors mentioned.)
- With what organizations/companies have students been employed in the past?
- Do students develop individual research topics, or do they work on a professor's ongoing research?
- Why do students leave the program?
- Overall, how do graduate students at your institution fit with the campus culture?
- How diverse is the student body?
- What kind of academic, financial, and career counseling is available to students?
- How long does it take students to complete a dissertation, on average?
- Is the program accredited? By whom?
- What do you enjoy most about this institution?
- Do you have any advice for me in relation to this program?



**FACULTY**

- What is the student to faculty ratio?
- How many faculty members does the program have?
- Do students choose their mentor/advisor or are they assigned to one?
- What are research interests and publications of your faculty?
- May I have some bibliographies of recent publications by faculty? Which professors have won awards and grants lately?
- What do you teach at this institution? What are the goals of this program?

**FINANCIAL/COSTS**

- Does the institution offer assistantships, fellowships, or grants?
- What are the criteria and processes for selecting Graduate Assistants (or Teacher Assistants, Resident Assistants, and Fellows)? Do you apply each year or are there longer contracts?
- What types of financial aid does the institution offer?
- How consistent is your financial support year to year? Is the first-year offer always sustained, given attainment of academic goals?
- What is the cost of the program, including all fees?



# 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 and be specific to a particular field.*

## Jane A. Smith

222 Main Street; Swansea, Illinois 62226  
618-999-9999; janesmith@email.com  
www.linkedin.com/janesmith

### EDUCATION

McKendree University; Lebanon, IL

**Bachelor of Business Administration in Economics and Finance**

May 20xx

GPA 3.8/4.0; Dean's List (six semesters)

### RELATED EXPERIENCE

Regional Investments, LLC; Greatville, IL

**Financial Analyst Intern**

August 20xx - 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

Ran Assets; St. Louis, MO

**Intern**

January 20xx - May 20xx

- 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, meeting all goals

McKendree University; Lebanon, IL

**Research Assistant for Dr. Peter Simon, Business Division Chair**

August 20xx - May 20xx

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

### PUBLICATIONS

McKendree University Alumni Wire

January 20xx

*A Planning Guide to Personal Retirement Options and Investments for Working Recent Graduates*

McKendree University Journal of Undergraduate Research

Fall 20xx

*Is Banking System Reform in China Critical to Economic Growth?*

### AWARDS AND HONORS

President's Scholarship; 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

**Brooke N. Taylor**

123 Main Street; Belleville, IL 62220  
(618) 234-5678; btaylor@mckendree.edu

**EDUCATION**

**Bachelor of Arts in Psychology**, Minor in Speech Communication, May 20xx  
McKendree University; Lebanon, IL  
GPA of 3.92/4.00

**RESEARCH/PRESENTATIONS**

*"The Effectiveness of Anti-Smoking Ads to Teenagers"*; Experimental Psychology  
Senior Thesis; March 20xx

*"Dieting and Resulting Poor Effects on Children"*; ILLOWA Psychology Conference  
February 20xx

*"The Dangers of Online Social Networks"*; McKendree University Brown Bag Series  
October 20xx

**RELATED EXPERIENCE****Foster Care Intern**, Fall 20xx

Catholic Social Services; Belleville, IL

- Assisted Foster Care caseworkers with placement of children into foster homes by assessing the needs of each child.
- Worked with foster care families to ensure successful completion of paperwork and family training requirements.
- Recruited families to provide homes for foster children by presenting information at agency open houses.

**Resident Assistant**, August 20xx to May 20xx

McKendree University; Lebanon, IL

- Assisted in selection and training of new residence hall staff.
- Guided 45 residents in the development of a community atmosphere.
- Served as a liaison between Hall Director and students.

**HONORS**

Pi Gamma Mu International Honor Society in Social Sciences, Board of Trustees Scholarship, President's List (six semesters), and Varsity Soccer Scholarship

**ACTIVITIES & VOLUNTEER SERVICE**

Kappa Sigma Tau Social and Service Sorority: **President**, Fall 20xx; **Pledge Mistress**, Spring 20xx;

**Secretary**, Spring 20xx; **Parliamentarian**, Fall 20xx; **Pledge-Class Secretary**, Spring 20xx

Psychology Club

Volunteer service for people with developmental disabilities

**COMPUTER SKILLS**

SPSS; Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel; Adobe PageMaker

# WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

*A personal statement is just that, a “personal” statement. Graduate schools want to know why you want to enroll, what life experiences influenced 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.
3. Confidence in self and goals: personal and professional, short-term and long-term goals.
4. Capability to mix a conversational tone with facts. Write about your interest areas.
5. Strong introductory paragraph that describes 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), which schools sometimes give with application material requests.
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; 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:

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 exists, you should write approximately two to two and a half double-spaced pages.
2. Remember that standard essay structure and grammar rules apply.
3. Use appropriate font styles such as Arial, Calibri, or Times New Roman.

## 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.

Check out  
<https://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools/graduate-personal-statement.aspx> for helpful information on personal statements!



# CONSIDERING A "GAP YEAR"



*A gap year is the year following your graduation that you can use as an alternative to graduate school or the typical path into the working world. The key here is intentionality, so do something practical instead of just waiting around for a job. Make sure to plan your re-entry into work or graduate school at least nine months before your program ends.*

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

- **Peace Corps (two+ years):** Travel overseas to make real differences in the lives of real people.
- **AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA (one to two years):** Learn new skills, acquire qualities of leadership, and gain a sense of satisfaction from taking on responsibilities that directly affect the lives of people.
- **City Year (10 months):** Serve full time in schools, working to improve student attendance, behavior, and course performance in English and math.
- **Coro (one 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.
- **Green Corps (one year):** Training program for environmental organizers.
- **Teach for America (two years):** Work to ensure that kids growing up in poverty get an education.
- **JET Program (Japan Exchange and Teaching Program for one year):** 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.
- **L 'Arche:** Communities in the United States that provide homes and workplaces where people with and without intellectual disabilities live and work together as peers, create inclusive communities of faith and friendship, and transform society through relationships that cross social boundaries.
- **Language Intensive Programs (four months):** Research ways to become bilingual in 120 days.

- **Lutheran Volunteer Corps (one year):** Places volunteers in full-time service positions at social-justice organizations across the United States for one or two years.
- **LaSallian Volunteers (short- and long-term assignments):** Responds creatively to the educational needs of those in poverty by providing volunteers, living in community with Brothers and other LaSallian partners.
- **Jesuit Volunteer Corps (one year or more):** Largest lay Catholic full-time volunteer program in the world and has been a pioneer in the service landscape for 40 years.
- **Fulbright U.S. Student Program (one year):** Gain experience in countries around the world.
- **Rostro de Cristo (one year):** Volunteer and retreat group immersion program in Duran and Guayaquil, Ecuador.
- **Post-Baccalaureate Internship:** Find an internship to learn if it is a career/company for you. Example sites are [www.internships.com](http://www.internships.com) and [www.internshipprograms.com](http://www.internshipprograms.com).
- **National Urban Fellows:** Develops accomplished and courageous professionals of all ethnic and racial backgrounds, particularly people of color and women, to be leaders and change agents in the public and non-profit sectors. Candidates should have a strong commitment to social justice and equity. Fellows are mid-career professionals.
- **Diversity Abroad:** International organization which connects diverse students, recent graduates and young professionals with international study, intern, teach, volunteer, degree and job opportunities.
- **NCAA Leadership Development:** Provides education and training for college athletes, coaches and administrators to assist with the transition to life after college sports, to foster the growth of the next generation of leaders, and to encourage athletics administrators to translate lessons learned through competition.
- **Various Fellowship and Scholarship Opportunities:**  
<http://www.mckendree.edu/academics/achievements/fellowships.php>

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