GRADUATE GUIDE:
Everything You Need to Know

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After graduating from Armstrong with your bachelor’s degree, you may want to consider pursuing further education through a master’s or Ph.D. program. Graduate school is a significant commitment in terms of time, money, and energy and the decision about whether or not to attend should not be taken lightly. This guide is intended to walk you through the steps of deciding whether or not to attend graduate school, what you will need to do to apply, the appropriate timeline to follow, financial aid options available to you, and other helpful resources and websites.

If Career Services can be of any assistance to you throughout the process of applying to graduate schools, please contact us by calling (912) 344-2563.

WHAT YOU SHOULD CONSIDER WHEN THINKING ABOUT GOING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

Why go?
There are many factors to consider when thinking about if you should go to grad school and what kind of program and school to choose. Before you even begin visiting or applying to grad schools, think about the following:

- What kind of professional training do I need to enter my chosen field? Will a graduate degree help me reach my immediate and/or future goals?
- Is the timing right for me to attend grad school?
- Am I ready and do I want to fully immerse myself in a specific field of study?

Carefully consider the answers to the above questions before further researching specific graduate schools and programs. After thinking about these basic questions, you might also consider how long it will take to complete the program, how successful graduates are in finding job placements upon graduation, the cost of the program and available financial aid resources, and what kinds of classes or research opportunities you would be interested in pursuing. You should not go to grad school for any of the following:

- To please someone else.
- You don’t know what else to do.

HELPFUL TIP!
If you’re not sure if you want to earn a master’s or doctorate, think about applying for the doctoral program. If you’re accepted into a doctoral program, but later decide that a master’s would be better, most departments will let you switch.
**Where to go?**
After making the decision to attend graduate school in a particular field of study, you must then start to think about where you want to go and what kind of program you want to pursue. The websites mentioned at the end of this guide are a good place to start because they can help you understand which schools offer specific programs, as not every school will offer all graduate fields of study. You may want to then refine your research by talking with faculty or others working in your field of study because they will be able to give you very specific feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of various programs and universities. Career Services staff can also help you clarify your career goals and determine an appropriate course of study. You may want to consider the following questions in terms of what school to attend and what program to choose:

**Do I want to attend a large school or a small school?**
Most schools with graduate programs will be mid to large size schools simply because of the resources needed to support these programs. Large size schools may have larger classes and programs. Would you prefer to attend with a smaller group of people that you get to know or learn from a large, diverse group of classmates?

**Do I want to attend a school in an urban or more rural setting?**
What opportunities (research, internships, etc.) might be available to you in each setting? This may vary by program. For instance, you might not be able to find a better opportunity than studying international affairs or politics in Washington, D.C. or New York, but might find better marine biology programs in the southeast.

**What kinds of events are offered outside the classroom?**
While much of your time in grad school will be spent on coursework, you will have some time to explore the university, its student life programs, and what the surrounding area has to offer.
WHAT PROGRAM SHOULD I CHOOSE?

• Do I want to enroll in a program that is research or coursework based?
  – What are the requirements in terms of total credit hours to complete the program? Is there a thesis or final project that you must pass?
• What level program will I be able to gain acceptance to?
  – Research the average GPAs, GRE scores, and experience levels for accepted applicants to each program. Do your credentials fall in line? Will you be going into a master’s level program or can you apply straight to a Ph.D. program if you want to?
• Does the program require work experience as a necessity prior to entering graduate school?
• What are the major research and interest areas of the faculty in the program? Are you interested in similar areas?
• What kind of financial resources are available to students in the program?
  – Is every student offered an assistantship, scholarship, or other aid or do students compete for resources? Is funding guaranteed or will you have to reapply for it each year of grad school?
• What is the relationship between students and faculty?
  – Do faculty serve as mentors to students? Are they available and easily accessible to students? Do the faculty offer assistance outside of class in terms of your thesis/project and job search?

HELPFUL TIP!
One good place to start research is the program’s website; you should always browse through the information available there. Do not hesitate to request further information or ask for a contact at the school if you have questions that the website does not answer. If you can get contact information from alumni of the programs you are considering, those people can often be the most help in determining the benefits and challenges of a particular program.
WHAT GRADUATE SCHOOLS CONSIDER WHEN DECIDING TO ADMIT YOU

The Admissions Process:
Applying to graduate school is different than when you applied to Armstrong and other schools for your undergraduate degree. Whereas you were likely evaluated on grades, SAT scores, and possibly outside activities as you were coming out of high school, graduate schools will take a much closer look at you as an individual applicant. When reviewing applications, graduate programs are trying to put together a diverse group of students who are academically prepared for rigorous study with classmates who are ambitious and thoughtful. Often for graduate study your application will be reviewed by an admissions officer to determine that you meet minimum qualifications, and then also by the specific department to which you are applying. Typically, the departmental faculty and program coordinators have the final say on who is selected for the program.

Pieces of your Application:
Every graduate program will require different application materials. However, most will require that you submit a basic application and fee, transcripts, resume, entrance exam scores (more on these in the next section), letters of recommendation, and a personal statement or multiple essays on specific topics given to you by the college.

HELPFUL TIP!
For grad school, the professors in the department make the decisions. It’s a much more personal decision. For that reason, you should visit as many schools as you can, and talk to the professors there. Let them know how much you’d like to work with them, and try to convey what a good student you are, and what an asset to the program you’d be.

Transcripts: Transcripts from all of your undergraduate coursework will be required by each college to which you apply. If you attended school at another college prior to Armstrong, you will also need to submit transcripts for those courses. You can obtain official copies of your Armstrong transcript by contacting the Registrar’s Office. A Transcript Request Form can be filled out via their website.
**Resume:** Your resume for graduate school admissions will differ slightly from a resume you might use to gain employment. Career Services can help you develop a resume specifically for your grad school applications. You’ll likely want to focus more on your undergraduate coursework, significant class projects, research you’ve performed, papers you’ve presented or had published, related organizations you’ve been involved with, and any collaborative work you’ve done with faculty members. If your employment has not been related to your field of study, it will be a less important piece of your resume. You can make an appointment to go over your resume with Career Services by calling (912) 344-2563.

**Letters of Recommendation:** Letters of recommendation are an important part of your application as they give the admissions committee a glimpse of your strengths as a student from those who know you best. Various schools may require different numbers of recommendations (three letters is most common) and they may have specific requirements as to who fills out recommendations for you. Typically you are asked to have faculty or previous supervisors write the letters. The best recommenders will be ones who can speak in detail about your academic strengths and personal qualities. Start developing relationships with your faculty members early to have the best recommendations possible. Ask professors for recommendations early and give them a reasonable deadline to complete them (four weeks is suggested). Remember, they are teaching classes, advising other students, and have outside commitments as well. Consider the school and yearly calendar—professors will be difficult to reach over the summer and on winter break.
**Interviews:** Finally, after turning in all of the above materials, you may also be asked to interview in person with the departmental faculty and/or current students. Interviews are sometimes optional, but can give you a good opportunity to sell yourself and gain more information about the campus and program. Before the interview, be sure to visit the university’s website, ask for brochures to be sent about your specific program, and research the faculty and their interests. You will make a better impression if you have done prior research and can answer questions specifically.

**Essays:** Personal statements or other essays are typically required for each graduate program. While you may be able to reuse pieces of these essays, it is recommended that you tailor each essay to the specific question and school. If asked to write a personal statement, consider discussing topics such as:

- What interests you about this specific field and the university
- Your level of experience in the field
- Your career preferences and objectives
- The faculty you would like to work with or have as an advisor
- Your interest in research performed by faculty and the work you would like to explore

If you are not asked to write a personal statement, you will likely be asked to respond to a series of essay questions assessing some of the above topics. Essays might also ask about your leadership abilities, mistakes you’ve made and overcome, difficult decisions or challenges you’ve faced, or why you should be accepted into the program. Each school is different, so take the time to carefully craft every essay. Career Services can help edit your admissions essays before you turn them in.

**HELPFUL TIP!**
Your transcripts provide a quantitative evaluation of your strengths. Your personal statement fills in the blanks. Think about your achievements in the classroom and in your field. Your internship or research project could be the inspiration for a personal statement.
GRE (Graduate Records Exam): This is the general entrance exam for graduate school programs. If you are planning on entering medical, law, pharmacy, or business school you will take a different entrance test (see below for more details). For any other graduate program, you will likely take the GRE. The GRE test format and questions are changing in August 2011. The information in this guide reflects the new GRE.

There are three sections that comprise the GRE: Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Analytical Writing.

The Verbal Reasoning section no longer contains antonyms and analogies. Rather, its aim is to measure your ability to understand what you read and how you apply your reasoning skills. Text Completion questions omit crucial words from short passages, requiring you to fill them in by selecting words or phrases. Sentence Equivalence questions require you to complete a sentence while focusing on the meaning of the whole sentence. Finally, Reading Comprehensive questions test your understanding of a passage.

The Quantitative Reasoning section emphasizes data interpretation and real life scenarios, allowing you to use an on screen calculator for computations. For the Quantitative Reasoning section, you’ll need to know basic arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and data analysis skills. Both the Verbal and Quantitative Reasoning sections are scored on a new 130-170 point scale in 1 point increments (whereas you may be more familiar with the old 200-800 point scale which reported in 10 point increments).

For the Analytical Writing section, you will write two essays, one where you evaluate a logical argument, and another where you express your views on a critical issue. For each essay you will only be given one topic on which to write (rather than being able to choose from many) and your responses will need to be highly focused. The Analytical Writing section scores are reported on a 0-6 point scale in half point increments.

The GRE is offered most days of the year in testing centers throughout Savannah. Armstrong also administers the GRE, which offers you a convenient way to take the exam. Contact Testing Services to register.

For more information about the GRE, please visit: http://www.ets.org/gre/
**MAT (Miller Analogies Test):** The MAT is an alternative entrance test that some graduate school programs may accept in lieu of the GRE. Check with the individual programs to which you are applying to see if they will accept the MAT. The MAT is a 60 minute exam which is designed to test an applicant’s problem solving ability in the form of 120 analogy questions. A person’s success in solving analogies has often been shown to demonstrate their verbal comprehension and critical thinking skills, two of the skills necessary to excel in graduate school. If you are a student who has stronger verbal abilities, you may perform better on the MAT than the GRE.

The MAT can be taken in pencil and paper format or a computer based format. The scoring scale range is from 200 to 600, with the average score being approximately 400. Your score also comes with a percentile rank so you can see how you scored as compared to other test takers. In Savannah, you can take the MAT at Armstrong, making it a convenient option if your school accepts MAT scores.

For more information on the MAT, please visit: http://psychcorp.pearsonassessments.com/

**HELPFUL TIP:**
Most of the websites for each of the various entrance exams offer practice questions. As a test taker, you can go through and answer these questions to see how you might do on the real test with no preparation. Most test takers will choose to either take a test prep class or buy a test prep book with sample tests in it.

**GRE Subject Tests:** If you are required to take the GRE, you may also be asked to take a GRE subject test in the specific area for which you are applying to grad school. There are eight areas in which you can take subject tests: biochemistry/cell and molecular biology, biology, chemistry, computer science, literature in English, mathematics, physics, and psychology. Subject Tests are offered at paper-based testing centers three times per year in October, November, and April, so plan ahead!
**GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test):** The GMAT is typically taken by students looking to earn a MBA or other advanced degree in business. The GMAT also consists of three sections: Verbal, Quantitative, and Analytical Writing. The exam lasts about four hours and is given on a computer adaptive system, which adjusts to your level. In this format, you are unable to skip, return to, or change your responses to previous questions.

The Verbal section has 41 multiple choice questions covering Reading Comprehension, Critical Reasoning, and Sentence Correction. The Quantitative section consists of 37 multiple choice questions that measure your abilities related to problem solving and data sufficiency. These questions require knowledge of arithmetic, algebra, and geometry. The Analytical Writing section has two 30 minute writing tasks. One essay is an analysis of an issue and the second is an analysis of an argument.

The score for Analytical Writing is an average of the two essays, and is reported on a 0-6 point scale in half point increments. This score does not factor into your overall composite GMAT score. The Verbal and Quantitative sections are scored on a 0-60 scale in one point increments. Verbal scores below 9 and above 44 and Quantitative scores below 7 and above 50 are rare. However, the most often reported score is your overall composite score for the GMAT. To get the overall score, your Verbal and Quantitative raw scores (from 0-60) are converted to a range from 200-800, reported in 10 point increments. Two thirds of all test takers end up with composite scores in the 400-600 range.

For more information on the GMAT, please visit: http://www.mba.com/

**PCAT (Pharmacy College Admissions Test):** The PCAT is the entrance exam for students wanting to continue on to pharmacy school. The test is a computer based format and offered three times during the year in the months of January, July, and September.

The PCAT takes four hours and has 280 questions total. There are five sections on the PCAT: verbal ability, biology, chemistry, reading comprehension, and quantitative ability. In addition to the five sections, a writing sample is also included.

For more information on the PCAT, please visit: http://www.pcatweb.info
**LSAT (Law School Admissions Test):** Anyone wishing to go to law school must take the LSAT, which is a half-day, standardized test administered four times per year (February, June, October, and December). Generally law schools will require that you take the LSAT by December or earlier to be admitted the following fall, so plan ahead!

The test consists of five 35 minute sections of multiple choice questions. Four of the five sections are scored, while the fifth section is used to test new questions and does not contribute to the overall score. A 35 minute writing sample is also administered at the end of the other five sections. The LSAT is designed specifically to measure the skills needed to be successful in law school: reading comprehension, analytical reasoning, critical thinking, and evaluation of arguments. The LSAT is scored on a range of 120-180 with one point increments. You will receive your score approximately three weeks after taking the test.

For more information on the LSAT, please visit: http://www.lsac.org/

**HELPFUL TIP!**

Most students taking the LSAT & MCAT will take a prep course. Kaplan and Princeton Review are both companies which offer test prep courses either in person or online.

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**MCAT (Medical College Admissions Test):** Almost all students wanting to attend medical school will need to take the MCAT. It is a standardized, multiple choice exam with four major sections covering: physical sciences, biological sciences, verbal reasoning, and a writing sample (two essays). The three multiple choice sections are scored on a 15 point scale, while the writing sample receives a letter score J (lowest) through T (highest). Your total score is reported as a combined multiple choice score and writing sample score. For example, if you earned a 10, 12, and 13 on the respective multiple choice sections and a P on the writing sample, your combined total score would be 35P.

The MCAT is administered multiple times from late January through early September. Consider carefully when trying to decide when you will take the MCAT. Will you want to take the exam more than one time? If so, you should schedule your first attempt sometime between January and April. This will give you enough time to get your scores back, prepare, and take the exam a second time before the end of testing season in September. The exam schedule also means that you will likely be taking the MCAT a full year or more before you plan on attending medical school. For example, if you want to start medical school in fall 2013, you would need to take the MCAT in spring/summer 2012. This means that most students take the MCAT the spring of their junior year or the summer between junior and senior year.
Deadlines

Deadlines for graduate school applications are typically between December 1 and February 1, though every school is different. Whereas you may have been able to apply to college just weeks before entering for your freshman year, graduate school programs do not typically operate on such a flexible schedule. It is important that you know the application deadlines for each school in which you are interested. Also note that some schools may ask you to send different parts of your application to different offices on campus. Pay attention to all the instructions so that there are no delays with your application. Since deadlines for admission are typically in the winter of your senior year, you need to begin the process early. What follows is a sample timeline that may be helpful for you to keep in mind. Note that some entrance exams (such as the MCAT and LSAT) are only offered at certain times of the year. This may alter the below timeline—plan ahead!

Spring of Junior Year:
- Conduct research on graduate schools
- Talk to professors and other mentors about your interests
- Study for and take the required admission test
- Select letter of recommendation writers

Summer after Junior Year:
- Study for and take the required admission test if necessary
- Research, visit, and select graduate schools (note application deadlines)
- Request application forms and brochures from graduate schools
- Prepare several versions of a statement of purpose and/or personal statement
- Check-in with letter of recommendation writers on progress
**Fall of Senior Year:**
- Study for and take the required admission test if necessary
- Make a short list of graduate schools
- Complete and submit your applications and all supporting materials four to six weeks prior to stated deadlines

**Winter Break of Senior Year:**
- Confirm that your application file is complete, including letters of recommendation
- File your financial aid applications

**Spring of Senior Year:**
- Pay deposit by graduate school deadline

**HELPFUL TIP:**
Engage your professors, and let them know of your interest in getting into graduate school. See if there’s any way you can be of assistance to them in their teaching or research. Not only would such experience be a real plus on your grad school application, but the professor would be able to give you an outstanding recommendation, in contrast to the run of the mill one they might write if you were just another of their students.
ASSISTANTSHIPS (TA, RA, GA):

**Assistantships:** Many graduate programs will offer students the opportunity to participate in Assistantships as a way to help pay for grad school. Assistantships and their compensation vary from school to school, but generally, an Assistantship requires you to work on campus about 20 hours per week. In exchange, your tuition (but not your fees) are paid for, and you are also given a small monthly stipend. You will not get rich with an Assistantship, but the stipend is generally enough to cover your bills, and allow you to graduate with little to no debt. At some schools, housing will be included with your assistantship. You may be required to have health insurance or be able to work certain hours, so be sure to check on the specifics with each school to which you are applying.

**Teaching Assistantships (TA):** A TA is someone either assisting a professor in teaching a class (usually a large lecture hall style class), or someone responsible for teaching an introductory section of the subject in which they are earning their graduate degree. For example, if you were going to graduate school for psychology at a large school, you might help a professor who teaches an Intro to Psych class of 300 students grade papers, prepare assignments, or even teach some lessons. Alternatively, you could be assigned your own smaller section of Intro to Psych to teach completely on your own.

**HELPFUL TIP:** Apply to grad school early to be considered for an assistantship!

**Graduate Assistantships (GA):** GA is a general term for a graduate student with an assistantship who works in an office on campus. Often this role will have you doing some administrative work (making appointments, talking with students/visitors, etc.) A GA is also typically involved in some higher level, project oriented tasks. You might be charged with starting and implementing a new program, supervising undergraduate workers, doing outreach to students, or finding new and better ways for the office to operate.
Research Assistantships (RA): A RA is more often found in technical fields, such as biology, chemistry, physics, engineering, psychology, sociology, or areas of business. As a RA, you will help an assigned professor with a research project on which they are already working. You might help come up with the experimental design, run part of the experiment, collect data, review relevant research, or write reports.
HELPFUL WEB SITES:

**AllAboutGradSchool.com**: Provides a search for business, engineering, law, medicine, and online grad programs by geographic location. Also has general tips on the grad school process and Entrance Exams.

**GradSchools.com**: Uses an extensive advanced search that allows you to narrow down a specific program, degree level, format (campus or online), state, and city to find graduate programs that fit your needs. One of the best searches out there.

**GraduateGuide.com**: Site allows you to search by zip code or program and see all available master’s and doctoral programs at a given university. Hard copies of this guide are available in Career Services.

**KapTest.com**: Kaplan Test Prep offers preparation for students on any of the graduate entrance exams, at a variety of price points and methods. Also provides a general overview of each entrance exam and gives tips on applying to and selecting a graduate school.

**Petersons.com**: Provides a significant amount of general information about graduate school, such as planning timelines, what to expect in grad school, admissions info, scholarships, and much more. Also has a search engine to locate graduate programs of interest to you.

**PrincetonReview.Com**: Offers tools for exploring graduate school and programs. Also offers various levels of test prep for each graduate school entrance exam, at varying price points.

**USNews.com**: Conducts the most well known ranking of graduate schools for virtually all programs. Also provides general information about applying to and paying for grad school.

HELPFUL TIP: Once you find some programs you are interested in, contact the faculty or program director at the school and ask questions about the program!

*Career Services does not operate or endorse any of the above websites or preparation programs. Explore each website and program on your own and make informed decisions about the resources you use.*