

Academic Advising

A STUDENT'S INTRODUCTION TO GRADUATE STUDIES

ACADEMIC ADVISING GUIDE TO GRADUATE STUDIES



IN THIS PUBLICATION:

- ◆ Things to consider in your search for the right school
- ◆ The admissions process
- ◆ Financing your degree
- ◆ Your graduate studies workbook

We would like to extend our thanks to all the graduate students who made contributions to this publication.



FOREWARD

The graduate school experience is fundamentally different from the undergraduate one in which you are currently engaged. From the admissions process to the way your studies are structured, you will find many differences. As a result, you will want to do plenty of research well in advance of applying. In the pages that follow, we have tried to highlight some of the complexities you will experience during your research of, and subsequent application to, graduate studies.

This guide is not a listing of specific graduate programs. Rather, it provides you with an explanation of some of the key terminology and introduces you to the process you will encounter during your graduate-school research. In addition, we have included information to help you evaluate your goals and to help you think about how graduate school can help you achieve those goals.

There is one key theme that will continue to surface throughout these pages: the importance of research. There are few concrete answers: you must be prepared to research individual programs in order to find the answers that will work for you. In the final section of this guide, we have collected a number of online resources for you to begin your research.

Of course, as you do your research, should questions emerge, you are encouraged to discuss your progress with a faculty member or an Academic Advisor.

Sincerely,

Academic Advising



TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHAT IS GRADUATE SCHOOL?

MASTER'S DEGREES	1
DOCTORAL DEGREES	2
PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS	2
POST-DEGREE DIPLOMA PROGRAMS	2

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

WHY GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL?	3
OTHER IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK	3
A STUDENTS POINT OF VIEW	6

ADMISSIONS PROCESS

GRADES	7
LETTERS OF REFERENCE	8
STATEMENTS OF INTEREST	8
ADMISSION TESTS	

FINDING YOUR SCHOOL

ACADEMIC RESOURCES	10
REFEREE'S RECOMMENDATIONS	11
NUMBER OF STUDENTS	11
REPUTATION	11
RESEARCH INTERESTS	11
OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER STUDY	12
GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION	12
JOB PLACEMENT	12



SENIORITY OF PROFESSORS	13
LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT	13
POSSIBILITY OF FUNDING	13
COMPETITION	13
A STUDENT’S POINT OF VIEW	14
PAYING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL	
ONTARIO GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP	15
SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL OF CANADA	15
NATURAL SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING RESEARCH COUNCIL OF CANADA	16
WORKING DURING GRADUATE SCHOOL	16
YOUR GRADUATE STUDIES WORKBOOK	
TIMELINE	A
ONLINE RESOURCES	B
DECISION CHECKLIST	D
SELF REFLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE	E
YOUR NOTES	F



WHAT IS GRADUATE SCHOOL?

Graduate school or graduate study is an *advanced* program of education that is usually entered into once a Bachelor's degree has been obtained. Typically, graduate study requires the successful completion of an honours-level Bachelor's degree.

You should not think of graduate school as a simple continuation of your undergraduate life. The setting, the structure, and the workload are all significantly different from your undergraduate experience. As you proceed through your graduate studies, you will realize that more of your work is done on an independent basis. You will probably find that you spend far more time reading and researching and have fewer assignments and exams.

Typically, graduate study is divided into two separate levels of work: **Master's** and **Doctoral**. A Master's degree is almost always the first degree earned after the Bachelor's and is always considered to be a lower degree than the Doctorate.

MASTER'S DEGREES

A Master's degree is the first level of post-graduate qualification that you can obtain. Generally, it will take a full-time student from one to two years to complete the work for a Master's degree.

Depending on the school and/or the discipline, you will find that the degree will have differing requirements. It is sometimes seen as an advanced Bachelor's degree that requires at least another year of advanced courses. It can also be seen as a Junior Doctorate that requires some amount of creative, original research that culminates in the writing of a thesis or major research paper. Some Master's programs will give you the option of choosing either approach.

A Master's degree is often required for numerous positions in education, social work, and public health. It may also help you achieve more senior positions in private industry and public service. It is almost always a requirement for Ph.D. studies; however, in some disciplines, students may be admitted directly to a Ph.D. program based on the strength of their undergraduate work.



DOCTORAL DEGREES

A Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) or Doctorate is the highest form of academic qualification you can achieve. A Ph.D. will open advanced research and teaching career doors that would not normally be available to people without such qualification. In a Ph.D. program, you are trained to be a researcher in a specific field. You must usually successfully pass comprehensive examinations and produce an in-depth dissertation that demonstrates your ability to perform original, independent, research.

The **dissertation** is the culmination of a doctoral student's research. It is a lengthy paper that must demonstrate a distinctive methodological or theoretical approach to the analysis of the material in a particular discipline. The length of time it will take to complete a Ph.D. will differ between programs; however, it will usually take candidates at least 4 years to satisfy all Doctoral degree requirements. Individual departments will be able to provide you with information on average length of stay and attrition rates.

PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS

Professional school is an advanced program of study that is often entered into once a Bachelor's degree has been obtained. For some professional programs, you only need to successfully complete a year or two of undergraduate study in order to qualify for admission.

Professional school is geared towards training you in a specific profession. A professional program of study emphasizes the practical use of knowledge and skills; it prepares students to practice a professional career such as medicine, law, dentistry, business, etc. The time it takes to complete a professional degree will depend on the degree however.

POST-DEGREE DIPLOMA PROGRAMS

As an alternative to traditional graduate or professional programs, many colleges and universities offer post-graduate diplomas or certificate programs. Like graduate study, the course work is specialized, but it does not usually take as long as traditional graduate study, nor is it as rigorously structured.

Post-Degree programs are designed to provide practical, advanced-level, hands-on skills that will supplement your Bachelor's degree. Programs are often geared towards providing the qualifications needed to enter into a particular career or field.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

WHY GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL?

It is important that you spend some time evaluating your answer(s) to this question. Some of the usual reasons for wanting to pursue a graduate degree are that it is required or preferred for some jobs, that it gives you a chance to learn a great deal about a specific area, and that it provides you with an opportunity to develop your own ideas and perform some original research.

Choosing to go to graduate school because you want to delay your job hunt is probably not a good enough reason. Graduate school is a lot of work and requires strong motivation and focus. You must really want to be there to make it through.

It helps to talk with your professors because they are probably your single best source of information. Not only have they gone through the process of researching, applying to, and completing graduate programs, they are also actively engaged in the field and will know about current trends in research. But, before approaching your professors, you should have some ideas about your academic interests and about your reasons for wanting to pursue graduate studies.

Professorial input is an important part of the process because when the time comes to apply to graduate school, you will probably have to supply letters of reference from professors who are familiar with you and your work. By consulting your potential referees throughout the application process, you will have the opportunity to provide them with the specific information they need to write you strong reference letters.

OTHER IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

The following are several important questions compiled by Dr. Phil Agre from the Department of Communication at the University of California, San Diego. Spend some time thinking over these questions; your answers may help you make decisions about your academic future.



1. Do you love the field enough to obtain an advanced degree?

You really need to be enthused about the subject matter to be able to keep up with the demands and intensity of graduate life. Take some time to investigate your field of interest before applying. Talk to alumni or professors in the field and read resources on the subject. If you are not passionate about the subject you need to think about what will motivate you to succeed in the program.

2. Is an advanced degree required to enter a particular profession or obtain a certain level within the field?

In many professional fields, an advanced degree is a must. For others, a graduate degree can enhance your earning power in an occupation and could influence how far and fast you advance in the field. Many human-service fields are examples of this trend. However, possessing an advanced degree does not always guarantee employment in the area/career you desire. Do some research first; visit a Career Counselor for information on various careers and inquire about the educational requirements of those careers.

3. Do I have the financial resources to cover the cost of graduate study?

Graduate study is more expensive than undergraduate study. If you do not have some money saved up, you may feel you need to take some time to work and save money to pay for more school. Many graduate students are able to cover a significant amount of the costs through scholarships and assistantships. Make sure you investigate your options before deciding. See page 15 for more information.

4. Am I postponing some tough decisions by going to graduate school?

Make sure that your decision to go to graduate school is for the right reasons. Some students may feel tempted to continue their education because they do not feel ready to face the many demands of "the real world" or are not clear about the career path they want to pursue. These reasons are precisely the reasons NOT to go to graduate school.

5. Am I burned out academically and do I need to take some time off?

Take some time to appraise your energy level. Do you have the motivation to stay in school for anywhere from one to seven more years? Many students find that after taking some time off to work, they are better prepared academically for graduate school and they have clearer defined goals. By taking some time off, you can gain the opportunity to determine exactly what program you need to be in to achieve your goals. In addition, some graduate and professional programs sometimes prefer students with prior work experience in the field.



6. Do I have the personal skills that are needed to be successful in graduate school?

As a graduate student, you are a member of a scholarly community; as part of that community, you will be expected to fulfill certain scholarly and social roles. Some of the skills that will contribute to your success include: intelligence, initiative, self-discipline, time-management skills, focus, persistence, and the ability to establish and maintain good working relationships with your fellow students and faculty.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GRADUATE SCHOOL SUPERSTARS

VISIBILITY: SUPERSTARS ARE MORE PHYSICALLY PRESENT IN THE DEPARTMENT, DURING, AND OFTEN, AFTER WORKING HOURS.

WILLINGNESS TO WORK HARD: SUPERSTARS ARE PERCEIVED AS HARD-WORKING BECAUSE FACULTY MEMBERS ACTUALLY SEE THEM WORKING HARD.

REFLECTION OF PROGRAM VALUES: SUPERSTARS' PROFESSIONAL VALUES ARE CONCORDANT WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE PROGRAM'S VALUES OF RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP.

TRUE INTEREST IN RESEARCH: SUPERSTARS VIEW RESEARCH AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THEIR DISCIPLINE AND A WORTHWHILE ACTIVITY FOR ANY PROFESSIONAL.

DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONSHIP WITH A MENTOR: ALMOST ALL SUPERSTARS ATTACH THEMSELVES TO A FACULTY MEMBER WITH WHOM THEY CONTINUE TO WORK WITH DURING THE COURSE OF THEIR TRAINING.

THESE CHARACTERISTICS DO NOT INCLUDE INTELLIGENCE, GRADES, OR WRITING ABILITY. SUCCESS IN GRADUATE SCHOOL IS DUE TO MORE THAN JUST RAW BRAIN POWER.

- ADAPTED FROM A STUDY PUBLISHED IN *A HANDBOOK OF THE MARIAN COLLEGE PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT*, BY D.C. APPLEBY [HTTP://WWW.PSYWWW.COM/CAREERS/SUPRSTAR.HTM](http://www.psywww.com/careers/suprstar.htm)



"If you are looking to pursue a graduate degree in mathematics there are two important things you must possess; a love of mathematics and determination. I don't think there is a word that can adequately describe the level of commitment required...But that being said, it is WELL worth the commitment! In the end you will not only have significantly enhanced your education, but you will have worked incredibly long and hard for the achievement.



A STUDENT'S POINT OF VIEW:

Stephanie Hicks BSc, BEd, MSc Candidate,
Nipissing University



Make friends! Knowing one or two people in your program will add to your experience, and make the whole workload process less daunting and a little more fun! In short, if you are committed, have good time management skills and above all, a passion for the field of study, it will strongly influence your ability to balance work, school and play!

Anonymous MEd Candidate, Nipissing University



ADMISSIONS PROCESS

There are numerous things you need to consider when applying to graduate studies. Admission requirements will vary from school-to-school and from program-to-program, however we have listed some common requirements below.

GRADES

The exact cut-off averages will often change from year-to-year. In addition, the minimum requirements will vary from program-to-program. You will want to find out exactly what grades the selection committee will be assessing. For instance, will they be assessing all your marks or just the last two years of undergraduate study; perhaps they will only focus on subject specific courses.

Many Master's-level programs publish a minimum grade requirement in the B/B+ range. Achieving that grade does not mean that you are guaranteed entrance however. Similarly, most Ph.D. programs publish minimum grades in the A-/A range.

As a general rule, the better grades you achieve, the better chance you have at getting into graduate school. But, while strong grades may help you stand out from other applicants, some of the items that follow could be of equal importance.

LETTERS OF REFERENCE

As part of your application to graduate studies, you will probably be required to provide schools with letters of reference. Most schools will supply a form as part of the application package that requires the professor to assess your abilities in provided categories. Letters of reference are usually regarded as confidential and should be returned to the schools sealed and signed by the referees.

You will need to ask professors who can vouch for work and your abilities. That means you should be sure to choose a faculty member who thinks well of you. Selection committees will often assess the quality of your referees, so make sure you choose appropriate people. Friends, clergy, members of government, cannot reliably attest to your academic abilities; avoid using them.



STATEMENTS OF INTEREST

As part of the application package, most programs require that you submit a statement of your scholarly goals and how you think you will be able to achieve them in the program to which you are applying. Prospective departments often want to ensure that you have researched their program thoroughly and are able to articulate just how their particular program will suit your scholarly goals. That means you may need to spend some time drafting and redrafting a strong letter to the selection committee. You will need to convince the reader that you have researched the institution and that you will be able to enrich it.

ADMISSION TESTS

In some cases, depending on the school and program, you may be required to write an entrance test as part of your application. A list of many of the exams follows.

Law School (LSAT)

The Law School Admission Test (LSAT) is a half-day, standardized test administered at designated testing centres throughout the world. All American Bar Association-approved law schools, most Canadian law schools, and many other law schools require applicants to take the LSAT as part of their admission process. Many law schools require that the LSAT be taken by December for admission the following fall. However, taking the test earlier – in June or September – is often advised. Some schools place greater weight than others on the LSAT. Visit: www.lsac.org.

Dentistry School (DAT)

The Dental Aptitude Test Program is conducted by the Canadian Dental Association (CDA) to help students assess their aptitude for a career in dentistry and to assist dental schools in selecting first-year students. The testing program is designed to evaluate general academic ability, comprehension of scientific information, two- and three-dimensional visual perception and manual dexterity. Visit: www.cda-adc.ca.

Medical School (MCAT)

The Medical College Admission Test is a standardized, multiple-choice examination designed to assess problem solving, critical thinking, and writing skills in addition to the examinee's knowledge of science concepts and principles prerequisite to the study of medicine. Scores are reported in each of the following areas: Verbal Reasoning, Physical Sciences, Writing, and



Biological Sciences. Some medical college admission committees consider MCAT scores as part of their admission decision process. Visit: www.aamc.org/mcat

Masters of Business Administration (GMAT)

The Graduate Management Admission Test is a Standardized test that measures verbal, mathematical and analytical writing skills. It is intended to help the graduate schools of business assess the potential of applicants for advanced study in business and management. The GMAT tests the fundamental skills - Reasoning and Comprehension included - and does not require any subject-specific theoretical study. Visit www.gmac.com.

Graduate Records Exam (GRE)

Broken into two tests, the General Test, which measures analytical writing, verbal, and quantitative skills that have been acquired over a long period of time and that are not related to any specific field of study, and GRE Subject Tests, which are designed to help graduate school admission committees and fellowship sponsors assess the qualifications of applicants in specific fields of study. The tests also provide students with an assessment of their own qualifications. Visit: www.gre.org.

The Miller Analogies Test (MAT)

The Miller Analogies Test (MAT) is a high-level mental ability test requiring the solution of problems stated as analogies. You will be presented with a pair of words that have some logical relationship. Then the choices present other pairs of words. You have to choose the pair that has the same kind of relationship as the first pair. There is no foreign-language edition of the MAT. No one is permitted to use a dictionary or any other reference aid when taking the test. Visit: www.milleranalogies.com

English Language Test (TOEFL)

The Test of English as a Foreign Language measures the ability of nonnative speakers of English to use and understand North American English as it is used in college and university settings. Scores on the test are required by more than 4,300 two- and four-year colleges and universities, professional schools, and sponsoring institutions. In addition, government agencies, scholarship programs, and licensing/certification agencies use TOEFL scores to evaluate English proficiency. Visit: www.toefl.org.



“GRADUATE SCHOOL ADMISSIONS ARE FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT THAN ANY OTHER ADMISSIONS PROCESS YOU MAY HAVE WITNESSED OR ENDURED. THIS PROCESS IS NOT LIKE APPLYING TO UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES; ...

IT BECOMES INCUMBENT UPON YOU AS A GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICANT TO SET YOURSELF APART FROM AND ABOVE THE COMPETITION. ...USE YOUR STRENGTH, CREATIVITY, AND SHEER WILLPOWER TO BOLSTER YOUR CANDIDACY; THESE TRAITS ULTIMATELY WILL BE ESSENTIAL IN CATA-PULTING YOU TOWARDS YOUR GOALS.”

-DAVE BURRELL, GETTING IN: AN APPLICANT’S GUIDE TO GRADUATE SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

FINDING YOUR SCHOOL

There are numerous resources to help you research graduate programs. Besides giving you an idea about the breadth and scope of programs available, these resources can provide you with relevant contact information.

You should begin to request brochures, and application materials from each school. Once you have reviewed these materials, you should address any specific questions to the graduate secretary or program director. By considering the many factors involved in selecting a graduate program, the research process will be knowledgeable from the start. The following is a list of things you should consider during your decision-making processes.

ACADEMIC RESOURCES

Library size is, no doubt, something you will hear about in promotional material. You may think, "Who cares? How many of these billion trillion books, am I actually going to read anyway?" In truth, you will probably



use only a very small percentage. However, if you decide to do a research paper on a unique topic, you may be happy to find a few valuable resources nearby. In addition, options such as science labs, computer centers, and archival holdings can help demonstrate the institution's dedication to providing resources for its graduate students. Try to find out what schools offer up front and evaluate how their offerings match your needs.

REFEREES' RECOMMENDATIONS

Think about where the people who are writing your references obtained their degrees. Admissions committees will often evaluate the qualifications of the recommenders. Alternatively, ask your recommenders if they can recommend any particular programs for your interests and background.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS

Think about whether you would prefer being a student in a program with a few students or one with several hundred. Some students believe that a smaller student body translates into more personalized attention, whereas others see additional classmates as resources for name recognition. It might also be to your advantage to keep in mind that the more faculty and alumni a program offers, the bigger that program's network will be.

REPUTATION

At the graduate level, reputation is an important factor to consider. Some people believe that graduating from a school with a solid reputation gives your degree some notoriety and this will be advertised in many guidebooks. However you may want to consult with your professors first. They will know where the leading researchers in your field are working despite a school's reputation and this may not be reflected in the guidebook rankings.

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Graduate programs often have specific research foci. If you have research areas that you especially enjoy or dislike, this focus can make a big difference. In fact, the school with the best overall reputation may not be the one that excels in your particular area of interest. On the other hand, you may decide to change your intended specialty after you enter graduate school. You should consider how much the program's research focus will affect your happiness and success at a particular school.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER STUDY

You may want to consider schools that offer a related Ph.D. as well as the Master's degree, since they can often offer richer resources, stronger faculty, and a broader base of students and alumni. Plus, if the time comes that you want to move into a Ph.D. program, you may choose to continue working in familiar surroundings. Alternatively, you will want to determine the prevailing attitude towards Master's students in such programs. You may find yourself in a program that gives priority to its doctoral students over its Master's students.

Keep in mind that the major focus of many doctoral programs is researching and publishing. Find out what the average length of time to complete a dissertation is. Discover the subjects that have been featured in previous Ph.D. candidates' dissertations. Ask about whether funding is available to students after finishing the comprehensive exams. Such questions will illuminate the priorities and problems that may define your doctoral work at any school.

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

For personal reasons, applicants sometimes have a certain geographic range of schools to which they can apply. Try to be as open as possible to different regions; your prospects may increase dramatically the further away you look. But, you may also want to consider that the school's reputation and alumni network will probably be strongest within a few hundred kilometers of the school, and therefore many of your post-graduation job prospects might come from this region.

JOB PLACEMENT

Some programs offer co-op terms as part of a Master's degree. During these co-op terms, you will have the opportunity to put your advanced skills to work in a job placement that is related to your area of research. If you plan to be using your degree to move into the workforce, the possibility of gaining some practical experience and some professional contacts may prove to be valuable to you.



SENIORITY OF PROFESSORS

It may be a drawback to have professors at the twilight of their careers, possibly unmotivated and not abreast of current conditions in the profession. Alternatively, it may prove unfortunate to have young professors primarily concerned with making a name for themselves in the field rather than investing their time and energy into you and your research. Talk to faculty and students to get an impression of the situation at the different schools.

LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT

Several programs require that you have reading proficiency in at least one language other than English for your Master's degree, and two languages for the Ph.D. In both cases, you will usually be required to take a proficiency test or be able to demonstrate your experience in a second or third language.

POSSIBILITY OF FUNDING

You will likely want to think about how you are going to pay for your schooling. Many institutions offer scholarships, bursaries, etc. In addition, schools may offer teaching or research assistantships to help offset the cost of your degree. You may want to consider how this financial factor will play into your decision.

COMPETITION

Think about who you will be competing against for admission to your prospective program(s). Are your grades and test scores comparable? Don't get hooked on a school for the wrong reasons, especially if your qualifications and interests do not match that of the competition. However, realize that you can offer a unique set of academic and personal traits to any graduate program.



**A STUDENT'S
POINT OF VIEW:**

"Graduate school capitalizes on your interests, and allows you to explore your passions on a deeper level...Know what you're passionate about. Consider your past education. What courses made you tick? What about your current experiences? What do you love? If you can answer these questions, then selecting a program should be easy for you.

Anonymous MEd Candidate, Nipissing University

"When selecting a university for graduate studies, you need to make sure that you are comfortable with the faculty members with whom you will be working."



Stephanie Hicks, BSc, BEd, MSc Candidate,
Nipissing University



PAYING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

A graduate degree is often more expensive than an undergraduate one. The good news is that there are several government funding opportunities to help you offset the costs. For detailed information on all funding opportunities, contact the School of Graduate Studies (F307, ext. 4198, sgs@nipissingu.ca).

In addition to the large, government-sponsored awards, be sure to do plenty of research about any other funding for which you may be eligible. You may be eligible for external awards through organizations to which you or your family members belong. Also, be sure to ask about funding if and when an offer of admission is made to you. Since graduate departments realize that funding may be a contributing factor in your decision to choose one over another, don't be afraid to ask if there is any offer of funding being made as well.

ONTARIO GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP (OGS)

The Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS) program is designed to encourage excellence in graduate studies at the master's and doctoral levels. An Ontario Graduate Scholarship is awarded for one academic year, which may consist of two or three consecutive terms. The current value of the OGS is \$5,000 per term. Each institution will set its own deadline for application. As such you will want to contact your intended institutions as soon as possible.

SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL OF CANADA (SSHRC)

SSHRC supports university-based research and graduate training in the social sciences and humanities. The current value of a SSHRC Masters Scholarship is \$17,500 for one year of study and \$35,000 per annum for a Doctoral Scholarship:

The internal deadline for applications is December 10. Visit: www.sshrc.ca



NATURAL SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING RESEARCH COUNCIL OF CANADA (NSERC)

NSERC supports university-based research and graduate training in the sciences and engineering. The current value of an NSERC Masters Scholarship is \$17,500 for one full year of study. The internal deadline for this application is November 1. Visit: www.nserc.ca

WORKING DURING GRADUATE SCHOOL

Graduate departments may break your funding down into numerous **assistantships**. As a teaching assistant, you may be paid to help a faculty member with teaching: leading seminars or labs, assisting with lectures, and doing the marking. As a research assistant, you will have the opportunity to work closely with a faculty member on his/her research.

Some graduate students will earn extra money by taking on a part-time job. However, most professors would advise against this. A graduate student's workload is very heavy and managing a full course load, and/or assistantship, as well as working a part-time job could be a substantial juggling act that may not allow you the time you need for your studies.

“APPLY DIRECTLY DURING YOUR SENIOR YEAR TO THE GRANTING ORGANIZATION FOR A NATIONAL FELLOWSHIP. REMEMBER, YOU CAN FIND FINANCIAL AID. START LOOKING FOR IT. READ THE BROCHURES CAREFULLY FROM THE PROGRAMS YOU ARE CONSIDERING AND SEE HOW MUCH YOU CAN EXPECT FROM EACH. THEN CONTACT THE UNIVERSITIES' FINANCIAL AID OFFICES, TALK TO THE PEOPLE THERE, AND READ THEIR FINANCIAL AID MATERIAL. SURF THE INTERNET AND READ THE BOOKS AND GUIDES. APPLY FOR EXTERNAL FUNDS IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE A REASONABLE CHANCE OF SUCCEEDING. ABOVE ALL, MAKE YOUR APPLICATIONS THE BEST THAT YOU POSSIBLY CAN.”

- RICHARD AND MARGOT JERRARD IN THE GRAD SCHOOL HANDBOOK ([HTTP://WWW.GRADSCHOOLS.COM/FEEDBACK/HBK3A.HTML](http://www.gradschools.com/feedback/HBK3A.html))



YOUR GRADUATE STUDIES WORKBOOK

TIMELINE

The following is a timeline based on the one that appears in [Peterson's Guide to Graduate Study](#). This is a general guide and should be adapted to your individual situation and deadlines.

First and Second Year: *Explore*

- Develop an awareness of your abilities, values, goals, and interests by exploring different academic disciplines
 - See a Career Counselor and explore the idea of more education.
 - If you are planning to go to graduate school, declare your major in that field if possible.
 - Talk to faculty about relevant courses and the possibility of getting involved with research projects.
 - Keep your grades up.
-

Third Year (Fall/Winter): *Conduct Research*

- Research connections between graduate school and potential occupations.
 - Research graduate school/professional school programs.
 - Begin to investigate provincial and national scholarships.
 - Talk to professors about your search; ask what schools they might recommend.
 - If you are planning to apply to professional schools, begin researching and registering for required tests.
 - If you haven't done so already, try to get involved in faculty research.
-

Third Year (Spring and Summer): *Begin to Take Action*

- Consider taking any required admissions tests.
 - Begin to isolate those programs of greatest interest.
 - Order materials from prospective schools: course catalogues, detailed program information, applications and financial aid materials.
-



-
- Visit graduate schools of interest and introduce to relevant staff.
 - Begin to write any required essays or personal statements.
 - Research scholarship competitions (OGS, SSHRC, NSERC, etc). Keep in mind that some scholarship deadlines are early in the fall semester.
-

Fourth Year (Fall): *Take Action*

- If you have not already taken the required tests, do so now.
 - Select the schools/programs to which you want to apply.
 - Ask for letters of recommendation well in advance of the deadline.
 - Order transcripts from the registrar's office; have them sent directly to the schools to which you are applying. Order extras for any scholarship competitions that require them.
 - Apply for scholarships.
 - Complete statements of personal interests/professional objectives.
 - Gather and edit papers you might need as examples of your writing.
 - Send applications to graduate schools. Check specific deadlines; they are often as early as the beginning of January (if not before that). **BEFORE THE PUBLISHED DEADLINES**, check with the schools to make sure they received your application package, and that it is complete. If not, provide the school(s) with the documentation they may still require.
 - Determine a Plan B. What will you do if you don't get into your program of choice?
-

Early Spring (Shortly After Graduation): *Complete the Process*

- If you are unsure about where you want to go, visit schools that accept you, if you have not done so already. Make an appointment with the various graduate secretaries/advisors to discuss their program.
 - Make your decision.
 - Notify your school of choice that you plan to attend; pay required deposit and complete any required forms.
 - Notify other schools that have accepted you that you will decline their offer.
 - Send thank-you notes to those who wrote letters of recommendation for you.
-



ONLINE RESOURCES

Association of Colleges and Universities of Canada: oraweb.aucc.ca
The AUCC website allows users to search an extensive database of university and college programs (including graduate programs) across Canada.

Ontario Council on Graduate Studies (OCGS): ocgs.cou.on.ca
The OCGS website provides an up-to-date listing of all graduate programs in Ontario in all disciplines. The listing is organized both by university and subject. You can download a .pdf file or follow the weblinks to the various schools.

Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS): www.cags.ca
The Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) was created to promote graduate education and university research through meetings, publications and advocacy.

Graduate Guide: www.graduateguide.com
Search American and Canadian institutions by name or program.

Gradsources Magazine: www.gradsource.com
Gradsources publishes articles and feature reviews of graduate schools in both Canada and the United States.

Gradschools: www.gradschools.com
Although the site is primarily designed for American students, there is an excellent search engine that allows users to search for programs worldwide. Search results will often yield all the relevant contact information for the school.

Graduate Schools in the UK: www.qaa.ac.uk
The Centre for Quality Assurance for Higher Education is a good starting point for information about higher education in Britain.

School Finder: www.schoolfinder.com
Search for schools and programs in Canada, Australia, Grenada, Ireland, New Zealand and the United States.

Working in Canada www.workinginCanada.gc.ca
Identify the job market as well as the skills and training necessary to pursue your career of interest.



DECISION CHECKLIST

You haven't done all of the work until you've answered these questions:

- What do you want to do after grad school?
- Have you spoken with a Career Counsellor?
- Does your desired career require an advanced degree? What degree?
- Are you better off getting practical experience instead?
- Should you take some time off? Are you afraid of burnout?
- Do you have the necessary experience and/or academic preparation?
- Are you sure about what you want to study?
- Have you spoken with faculty members about your interest in going to grad school?
- Have you narrowed down some potential programs and schools?
- Can you afford more schooling right now? Have you researched funding opportunities and applied to all applicable awards?
- Are you most interested in a Master's or PhD? For your specific program, do you know whether or not you must complete a Master's degree first?
- How many more years are you prepared to devote to your studies?



SELF REFLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Why do you want to go to graduate school?

Where do your research interests lie?

How do you plan to finance your degree?

Who will be able to support you throughout your degree?

What will keep you motivated?



YOUR NOTES

At Academic Advising, our goals include assisting students in making informed and responsible decisions regarding their academic programs, seeing the value in learning, setting priorities and making realistic plans. We do so by providing accurate information about the university, its programs, policies, procedures and resources.

Prepared by:

Academic Advising
100 College Drive, Box 5002
North Bay, ON P1B 8L7

Phone: 705.474.3450 ext. 4358
Fax: 705.474.6773

TTY/Teletypewriter users: 705.474.8797

E-mail: advising@nipissingu.ca

Website: [www.nipissingu.ca/
academicadvising](http://www.nipissingu.ca/academicadvising)