

GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION GUIDE 2009-2010

Dartmouth Career Services

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Application Checklist

SPRING

- Conduct research on graduate schools
- Talk to professors and other mentors about your interests
- Study for and take the required admission test
- Open a LEO Credential File with Career Services (<http://leo.dartmouth.edu>)
- Select letter of recommendation writers

SUMMER

- Study for and take the required admission test if necessary
- Request application forms and brochures from graduate schools
- Research, visit, and select graduate schools (note application deadlines)
- Prepare several versions of a statement of purpose and/or personal statement
- Check-in with letter of recommendation writers on progress

FALL

- Study for and take the required admission test if necessary
- Participate in the Career Services Graduate School Visits Program --
Informational meetings with admissions officers representing various graduate schools
- Attend Career Services workshops
- Make a short list of graduate schools
- Check online (<http://leo.dartmouth.edu>) that your LEO Credential File is complete – Request that letters be mailed to schools to which you've applied (please allow 3-5 days for processing)
- Complete and submit your applications and all supporting materials four to six weeks prior to stated deadlines

WINTER

- Confirm that your application file is complete, including letters of recommendation
- File your financial aid applications

SPRING

- Pay deposit by graduate school deadline

Making the Decision to Apply

Graduate school is a significant commitment financially, physically, and emotionally. There are long hours of studying, with many sacrifices. Careful reflection on your reasons for wanting to continue your education is necessary to ensure a sound decision. Before you apply to graduate schools, ask yourself the following questions:

- What kind of professional training do I need?
- Is the timing right?
- Do I want to immerse myself fully in this field purely for the love of it?

Evaluate your abilities and commitment honestly. If you believe graduate school is the right choice for you, your next step is to decide where and when to apply. Should you attend immediately after college or should you get some work experience? Most graduate schools expect you to have clearly defined interests and experiences leading to an area of specialization. You should have a focus and relevant experience before you apply to graduate school.

Why Should you Go to Graduate School?

- You have a compelling interest that can only be satisfied with graduate study.
- For increased satisfaction in your life.
- To be able to advance in your field.

Why Shouldn't You Go to Graduate School?

- To please someone else.
- You don't know what else to do.
- To avoid a tight job market.

Still Undecided? A Few More Things to Think About:

- Where do you want to be in regards to your career in 3-5 years?
- How long does it take to complete the program?
- What would the faculty, content, and research opportunities/specialization of a program that you would be interested in offer?
- What is the make-up of the student body and student life?
- How successful the program is in terms of job placement for graduates?
- Is the experience going to be worth the cost in tuition or loans or loss of income?
- What kind of assistantships, fellowships, and financial aid programs are available?

Selecting a Graduate School

Step One: Identify Possible Schools

To identify programs in your field of interest, speak with faculty, mentors, alumni, Career Services, and use a variety of print and on-line resources.

Consult faculty members or others who have specialized in the discipline of your choice. Faculty are excellent sources of information about graduate programs in their specialties and the strengths and weaknesses of programs at various universities. Consult also with a career advisor and the graduate school advisor in Career Services to clarify your interests and to discuss career options.

Researching Programs:

- Send for **catalogs and application forms** in the summer or early fall, a full year before you plan to matriculate. At the same time, request information about the specific department, including the major research interests among the faculty and financial aid information. Many programs also have catalogs and detailed information on their **websites**.
- **Peterson's Annual Guide to Graduate Study (www.petersons.com)** lists U.S. programs in various disciplines and specialties within disciplines. A printed set of the guide is available in Career Services has two-page summaries of some individual programs, published at the choice of the graduate institution described.
- **Graduate School Guide (www.graduateguide.com)**
- **Grad Schools.com (www.gradschools.com)**

- **Dartmouth Career Network** (<http://alumni.dartmouth.edu/default.aspx?id=312>) Searchable by graduate degree and school
- **Graduate School Advising Network** – Database of Dartmouth faculty and staff who have an interest in sharing information and advice with students exploring graduate school (available in Career Services)

Step Two: Prioritize your choices and gather information on specific schools.

Once you have a list of programs to consider, narrow your possibilities to a manageable number. To evaluate programs, consider the following:

- Evaluate the number of accepted applicants to the last entering class versus the total number of applicants in a year.
- Ask for the 25th and 75th percentile scores for the last entering class on required admission tests.
- Is the institution/program research-oriented or coursework-oriented?
- Does the department have faculty in a variety of research groups or does the strength rest on one or two members?
- Do the research interests of the faculty represent specialties within the discipline? Does the department's strength lie in a particular area or are many of the subspecialties equally strong? Look for the faculty publication list. If this is not in the catalog or online, request it from the department chair.
- What is the mentor relationship between students and faculty? Are faculty members accessible to students? Ask graduate students about their experiences in the program and about potential faculty advisors.
- How closely do graduate students work together and discuss their work with each other?
- How much financial aid is available in the form of scholarships, teaching assistantships or research assistantships? Learn how many students receive funding and what criteria are used to grant funding.
- If you enroll in a Master's program, will you be able to change to a Ph.D. program easily if your performance is satisfactory? Must you obtain an M.A. or M.S. before you enroll in the Ph.D. program?
- How many Ph.D.'s are granted annually? What is the average length of time required to complete the doctoral work? How many students drop out of the program?
- What employment opportunities will be available after you complete this graduate program? Ask some graduate students about their plans; check with the department chair or the career services office for information on recent graduates.
- If possible, visit several schools to meet with faculty and students.
- Ask the admissions office and/or program chair if you can communicate with current students via email or phone.
- Geographical location can affect the quality of your total life. Inquire about location, housing and type of recreation and social options available.
- From time to time, graduate schools send representatives to Dartmouth to describe their programs. These visits will be announced on the Career Services Blitz Bulletin.

Step Three: Complete and Submit Applications

- Ask a faculty member, the Career Services graduate school advisor, or The Student Center for Research, Writing, and Information Technology (RWiT) to review your application essay(s).
- Study for and take the required admission test.
- File your applications 4-6 weeks prior to stated deadlines.
- Investigate funding and/or financial aid options and submit appropriate applications six weeks prior to stated deadlines.
- Call the program 2-3 weeks before the application deadline to confirm that your file is complete.

Applying To Graduate Schools

Graduate schools are looking for diverse, thoughtful, well-prepared, ambitious, and mature candidates who stand out in the applicant pool.

Application

Tailor your application: Explain why this particular program at this particular university is a good fit for both you AND the institution. Mention potential faculty members with whom you would like to work and/or have as an advisor. Discuss your interest in their publications, and further avenues of research that you would like to explore.

Tips for a good application:

- Check spelling, grammar, and proofread.
- Leave nothing blank.
- Send something – a resume or paper that is directly related to the program to which you are applying.

- If you've been published, share this information.

The Graduate Record Exam (GRE -- www.gre.org)

The GRE consists of two types of tests: a **General Test** and a **Subject Test**. The **General Test** is a computer-based test and contains analytical writing, verbal, and quantitative sections, and is required by almost all graduate programs. This test is offered year-round at testing centers around the world (Lebanon College in Lebanon, NH is nearest to Dartmouth).

The **Subject Test**, an achievement test offered in eight major disciplines may also be required by some graduate programs. The subject areas are Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Literature in English, Mathematics, Physics, and Psychology. The Subject Test is a paper-based test and may be taken at Dartmouth in April, October and November.

Test dates in spring of junior year or the following summer, certainly no later than October of senior fall, are recommended for students applying senior fall, unless courses relevant to the Subject Test will be taken during fall term. Registration bulletins are available in Career Services and online at www.gre.org.

Letters of Recommendations

Faculty letters of recommendation are an important part of your application. Before requesting letters, consult the graduate school applications for specific instructions. Usually two or three letters are required. Since recommendations are weighed heavily in the admissions decisions, make your choices carefully, gathering strong evaluations from persons who have had an opportunity to observe your academic strengths and your personal qualities.

Contact your professors early. Make an appointment with each of your letter writers to discuss your course work and other interests as well as your plans for graduate school. Provide your writers with an idea of what you feel they could share that would be relevant to the admissions committee and with information about yourself. Information to assist writer: Resume; Transcript; application essay draft (if written); a statement on why you are choosing to go to graduate school; a summary of what you learned from your experience with the writer; a copy of a paper you wrote for their class (with their comments); writing samples.

Specify a reasonable deadline; professors are busy, and they write letters out of interest in you and in your future. Given the Dartmouth calendar, they may be on leave when you need to have your letters, so check their schedules early. It may take more than one reminder and a longer time than you might expect, so allow at least four weeks from the time of request.

The Dartmouth College LEO Credential Service (<http://leo.dartmouth.edu>)

Dartmouth students and alums may establish a file with LEO (Letters of Evaluation Online) to collect letters of recommendation from faculty and employers. You may use LEO to open a file, print letter request forms and to request Career Services to mail letters to designated schools.

Career Services will mail letters only to schools, and will never release the confidential letters directly to the applicant. All files will be maintained for ten years following graduation. It is your responsibility to check online through LEO that letters you have requested have arrived in Career Services. Please note that we require 3-5 days from the time of your request via LEO to process and mail your letters of evaluation. LEO cannot send letters electronically to schools.

Although many graduate school applications include recommendation forms with their applications, these forms are usually not required. Please check with your professors and schools for the preferred method of letter submission. Dartmouth professors and administrators prefer to write recommendations on their letterhead stationary and send them to your file in Career Services or directly to the schools. LEO does not process recommendation forms provided by the school or letters that a writer tailors to a specific school. If a professor chooses to write a school specific letter then they must send it directly to the school. LEO only accepts general letters.

Transcripts

Graduate programs require official transcripts from all colleges and universities where you earned credit. Although credit for coursework completed elsewhere is recorded on your Dartmouth transcript, grades are not; consequently, transcripts from all institutions you attended must be sent to schools. Any Citations received will be sent to the schools with your transcript.

Transcripts are ordered through the Office of the Registrar by completing the **Dartmouth College Registrar Transcript Request Form** available online at (www.dartmouth.edu/~reg/services/transcripts.html) and submitting it to the Registrar in person (105 McNutt Hall), by fax (603-646-2247), or mail (6014 McNutt Hall, Room 105, Hanover, NH 03755). Questions

regarding transcripts should be directed to the Registrar's Office (603-646-2246). Transcripts must be ordered at least one week in advance of the required mailing date.

Personal Statements and Statements of Purpose

Many schools require an essay or series of essays discussing such topics as your experiences in your field of study, your level of academic achievement, what specialty is of particular interest, and your career preference. Individually tailored essays to each school are recommended. You should discuss why you want to join this particular graduate program at this particular university, the faculty with whom you would like to study and/or have as an advisor, your career goals, and what you have to offer. Discuss your interest in their publications, and further avenues of research that you would like to explore. Make sure to have a faculty member read it over. Remember to proofread!

Tips for a good essay:

- Write strong opening and closing paragraphs
- Substantiate your interests in the program
- Tell what distinguishes your candidacy
- Make sure that your essay is clear and concise

Interviews

Interviews are often optional, but may be useful, both to obtain information about the programs and to present your strengths. Before the visit, read the website, catalog and any other brochures the department supplies and review faculty interests. You will make a better impression if you have done your homework in advance and can ask specific questions. A visit is always helpful even if an interview is not required.

Deadlines

Common deadlines are generally between December 1 and February 1. Getting your materials in early can only help your case (November is fine). All application materials are not always sent to the same office. For example, applications and transcripts may go to a centralized Graduate Admissions Office, letters of recommendation to the specific department, financial aid forms to the Financial Aid Office. Read the directions carefully.

Deferring Entrance

Some schools will admit you and then allow you to defer entrance for a year or two, some schools will not. It is best to learn the school's policy before you apply. If you plan to apply for graduate study one or more years after graduation, get an early start: open a LEO credential file and take the GRE.

Financial Aid

Financial aid is often based on a combination of merit and financial need. Applicants should begin by contacting the schools to which they're applying to determine what support is available and to obtain the financial aid application forms. Note that financial aid deadlines may be earlier than your program application deadlines. All schools require applicants to complete a **FAFSA form** (Free Application for Federal Student Aid; www.fafsa.ed.gov) for federal aid. Applicants are automatically considered independent after graduation, although some schools require parental information for the purpose of determining the applicant's eligibility for private institutional funds. **FinAid** (www.finaid.org) and **The Access Group** (www.accessgroup.org) have information on loans, scholarships, and grants.

Private aid represents a major source of funding. Students enrolled in arts & sciences graduate programs generally receive tuition assistance from the institution, which usually covers the full cost and includes living stipends for teaching and research assistance. In addition to general university funds, many graduate departments have special awards, scholarships, and research or teaching assistantships. Private bank loans also are available. **FastWeb** (www.fastweb.com) matches your interests to available scholarship opportunities.

For general information on financial aid consult the **U.S. Department of Education** web site (<http://studentaid.ed.gov>). In addition, consult a financial aid advisor at the school you wish to attend for specific information and instructions. Due to the highly regulated and complicated system of aid, you will want to find out exactly how the funding works, what the aid covers, and the application deadlines, which are strictly enforced.

Look into scholarships administered by agencies outside the universities. **Dartmouth's Scholarship Advising Office** provides students with general advising, mentoring and support on issues related to national scholarship/fellowship processes. There are a wide range of foundations and several endowment-gift accounts that can support your graduate school goals. Please monitor

the Scholarship/Fellowship Options Blitz Bulletin and meet with Dr. Kristin O'Rourke, Scholarship Advisor in the Dean of the Faculty Office in Wentworth Hall, Room 114. You may reach the office by phone at 603-646-8647 and online at www.dartmouth.edu/~scholarship/.

Graduate School Resources available in Career Services or Online

Researching Graduate Programs

Career Services Website - Graduate & Professional School section (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~csrc/gradschool.html>)

Dartmouth Career Alumni Network - Networking database, searchable by graduate school and degree
(<http://alumni.dartmouth.edu/default.aspx?id=312>)

Graduate School Advising Network – Database of Dartmouth faculty and staff who have an interest in sharing information and advice with students exploring graduate school (available in Career Services)

Graduate School Guide (www.graduateguide.com)

Grad Schools.Com (www.gradschools.com)

MentorNet (www.mentornet.net) Provides all students in engineering, science and mathematics the opportunity to be matched in one-on-one e-mentoring relationships with mentors who have work experience in industry, government, and higher education.

Petersons.com (<http://www.petersons.com>) Search for graduate schools and programs

Peterson's Annual Guide to Graduate Programs – Printed guide, listing degree programs by field and faculty research

Book 1 - Graduate & Professional Programs: An Overview

Book 2 - Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences

Book 3 - Biological Sciences

Book 4 - Physical Sciences, Mathematics, Agricultural Sciences, the Environment & Natural Resources

Book 5 - Engineering & Applied Sciences

Book 6 - Business, Education, Health, Information Studies, Law and Social Work

PhDs.org – (www.phds.org) Information on both master's and PhD programs

U.S. News & World Reports Best Graduate Schools (<http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools>)

Application & Essay Information

Graduate Record Exam/GRE (www.gre.org)

Graduate School Admissions Adviser by a nationwide team of graduate school admission advisers

Graduate School Admissions Essays by Donald Asher

How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School by Richard J. Stelzer

Financial Aid and Scholarship Resources

Dartmouth Scholarship Advising Office (www.dartmouth.edu/~scholarship)

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (www.fafsa.ed.gov)

U.S. Department of Education Federal Student Aid (<http://studentaid.ed.gov>)

Council of Graduate Schools: Fellowships & Financial Aid - list of graduate fellowship opportunities
(<http://www.cgsnet.org/Default.aspx?tabid=163>)

The Access Group - A non-profit group that provides education financing to eligible students (www.accessgroup.org)

Nellie Mae EDvisor – Provides loan programs and information on financing an education (www.nelliemae.org)

FastWeb - Resource for local, national and college-specific scholarships (www.fastweb.com)

FinAid - Sponsored by the National Association of Student Financial Administrators (www.finaid.org)