Graduate School Guidebook

Office of Career Strategy
Yale University

Yale
Office of Career Strategy
Center for International and Professional Experience
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OFFICE OF CAREER STRATEGY

The Office of Career Strategy (OCS) offers programs that help students and alumni of Yale College define and further their career goals. Our role at OCS is to help you learn about yourself, learn about career options, and make informed decisions about your future in order to realize your goals. We do this through individual and group meetings, through the provision of research materials, and through the coordination of programs that put you in direct contact with professionals and organizations in a wide variety of fields.

We encourage you to begin connecting with our office early in your Yale career; by starting early, you may take advantage of all the programming available, adding interesting internship experiences and making valuable networking connections. Building toward a career decision is much less stressful than trying to do it all in one year, one semester, or one week.

All Yale College students – freshmen through alumni - are invited to visit OCS to learn about our services, programs and resources.

SERVICES AND RESOURCES

ADVISING
OCS offers individualized career and professional school advising appointments and mock interviews to Yale College students and alumni. In addition, you can take advantage of our same-day walk-in appointments available Monday through Friday for quick questions and application material critiques.

EVENTS
OCS offers workshops, information meetings, career fairs and career panels on campus during the academic year and collaboration with alumni in various cities during the summer.

JOB AND INTERNSHIP RESOURCES
OCS coordinates on- and off-campus job and internship interviews and directs summer internship programs in the U.S. and abroad. OCS also maintains peer mentoring and can assist you with identifying and developing job and internship opportunities that fit with your specific goals and interests.

WEBSITE
OCS maintains a website with a wealth of career information in addition to internship and job postings. You can explore this site at www.yale.edu/career. On our website you can explore various careers, view webinars on career search strategies and learn more about creating your application materials.
CHAPTER 2:
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Each year, many Yale students and alumni make the decision to attend graduate school. If you think this might be the path for you, this Guidebook will provide you a general overview of the process and the many factors you need to take into account. Keep in mind, there may be variations or additional guidelines depending on your specific field of interest or intended degree.

OCS Career Advisors are available to discuss how graduate school fits with your career goals and support you through the application process as a supplement to the specialized, discipline-specific advice provided by your faculty mentors, DUS, and academic advisors.

If considering pursuing an advanced degree in law or a health profession, make an appointment with a OCS pre-law advisor or a pre-health professions advisor to discuss the specific processes for these professional degrees.

BEGINNING THE PROCESS

WHY GRADUATE SCHOOL?

Before you begin researching programs or preparing application materials, you first need to reflect on your motivations for pursuing a graduate degree and honestly assess what you’re hoping to gain and why you feel a graduate degree is the right course of action. The decision to pursue an advanced degree should not be taken lightly. Graduate School is a tremendous investment of time, energy, and financial resources.

Use the questions below to begin the reflection process.

• Why do you feel you are ready to pursue a graduate degree? Are you committed to a specific field of study?
• What are your personal and professional goals, and how will a graduate degree help you achieve these goals?
• Are you pursuing this degree for yourself or to satisfy the expectations of others?
• In what ways might you benefit from a year or two of work experience before graduate school?
• Are you willing and able to make the necessary financial commitment to support graduate school?

Examine your reasons carefully. Are they logical? How committed are you? Think about your future career; what degree will best prepare you for that career? What type of educational preparation will be most valuable? Talk with professionals in your field of interest to gauge how the different degree options may be viewed by those in the field. You may find that there are a number of paths that may help you reach your intended destination, especially if focusing on careers outside of academia.

For those who are ready and committed, graduate school can move you one step closer to achieving your professional goals. If you don’t yet know what those goals are, you may want to consider taking time to clarify your goals before pursuing graduate study.

Graduate programs vary widely in terms of their focus, size, and financial resources. Even programs within the same discipline may have a very different focus. For instance, certain programs focus on training practitioners...
or clinicians, while others focus on preparing students for careers in academia or research. You need to have a clear understanding of your goals and intended outcomes prior to choosing programs to ensure you direct your efforts towards researching and applying to programs that fit your intentions.

**Reasons NOT to go to Graduate School**

You've been in school for a significant portion of your life, and you've been successful in that arena. It's comfortable and familiar. The job market, for many people, can be a source of anxiety, especially if you're not sure what your options are or how to begin the process of finding a job. Pursuing a graduate degree to avoid the job market is not the answer. In the short-term it may seem like a good idea, but in the long run it may not help you get any closer to figuring out your goals or career path. And even worse is finding out after you complete a graduate degree that your degree will not qualify you for the positions you're interested in, or that your degree will not give you a leg up in the fields you're targeting.

The decision to pursue a graduate degree should be yours and not impacted by the expectations of others. You're the one who will need to put in the time and energy engaging in in-depth study of your chosen discipline. You're the one who will need to complete a thesis, dissertation, or fieldwork. And you're the one whose future will be most directly impacted by the decision to pursue or not pursue a graduate degree and on what you choose to study. Though others may have advice or opinions, ultimately the decision needs to be yours.

**Timing**

When is the right time to pursue a graduate degree? This is a common question that students have. There isn’t one answer to this question because there are many variables that need to be factored in.

Are you ready to go into graduate school right after you finish your undergraduate degree? This is a very personal question, and the answer depends on your goals and your own personal situation. There are many reasons students choose to take time off before pursuing a graduate degree. These include the desire to gain practical work experience and explore career options before committing to a specific field of study; needing or wanting to take a break from academic study to avoid burnout; or to save money for graduate study. Others are ready and motivated to go straight into graduate study right after completing their undergraduate degree. In certain disciplines, such as those that require deeply academic and intellectual work, it may be advantageous to pursue graduate study immediately after completing your undergraduate degree.

Depending on your field of study, work experience may be necessary to make you a competitive candidate. In some cases, work experience is a pre-requisite. A foundation of practical skills may also allow you to make a stronger contribution to graduate courses. Also, depending on your career goals, a graduate degree may be a nice learning experience for you, but it may not be necessary in fields that value on-the-job learning and experience.

A few common concerns we hear from students are that delaying graduate study may derail plans to obtain an advanced degree, that it will be more difficult to get back in the academic routine after taking time off, or that it will look poorly on applications. For those who are committed to obtaining an advanced degree and invested in the subject they intend to study, taking time off will not derail your plans.

If you are passionate about your field of study, you are also likely to stay up-to-date by reading book and journal articles in your spare time; if you find that you don’t enjoy staying engaged with your field of study in your free
time, that may also be an indicator that your passion for the field, and advanced study in that area, is waning. Staying up-to-date will also help minimize concerns from application committees about your time away from school, and demonstrate to them that you have the current knowledge and unwavering desire to engage in in-depth study within your field of interest.

With every transition there is a period of adjustment; getting back into the swing of classes, writing papers, and engaging in academic research after working for a period of time will be an adjustment, but one that can be easily overcome if the motivation is there.
Chapter 3: Selecting a Graduate Program

General Thoughts
It is critical that you select the program and institution that is the best fit for your specific interests. This requires careful research, outreach to faculty and program alumni, and even a visit to the school. Academic disciplines at the graduate level can become tremendously specialized and certain institutions that offer superb facilities in one sub-discipline may be lacking in other areas. You cannot simply select an institution solely based upon their overall reputation. Sometimes, the finest departments of a particular sub-discipline are found at institutions with which you may not be familiar. Presume nothing. Like a good researcher, approach this task with an open mind, sifting through all the information before arriving at a conclusion.

While you may have some particular preferences that will limit the institutions you are prepared to consider, such as geography or funding, there are many other criteria you need to factor into your decision. The following section breaks the selection process down into three steps and provides resources and considerations relevant to each step.

Step 1: Research Programs
Start by identifying and gathering information on programs in your field of interest to develop a preliminary list of programs to evaluate further. There are many ways to identify programs, including seeking advice from faculty mentors and utilizing print and web resources.

Faculty
Your professors, Deans, DUS, Teaching Assistants, and PIs are all excellent sources of information on graduate programs. Remember, they have all completed, or are in the process of completing, graduate degrees. They can suggest specific programs for you to research further. They may know the scholars affiliated with those programs and be willing to make an introduction.

Print and Web Resources
Well-known general graduate school databases include www.gradschools.com and www.petersons.com. Both websites have searchable databases that you can use to begin exploring programs. Other general resources include US News and World Report; they gather information on graduate programs and issue a yearly guide to “Best Graduate Programs.” Keep in mind that these are general rankings that do not take into account your specific interests and criteria, so take the information provided with a large grain of salt.

In addition to general resources, you want to explore discipline-specific resources, such as professional associations and scholarly journals to gather information on programs and leading scholars in your discipline. Professional associations are nonprofit organizations focused on particular career fields. They serve a variety of purposes, such as establishing best practices, keeping members informed of industry trends and developments, organizing professional conferences, and publishing professional journals. Professional associations such as the American Bar Association, American Medical Association, and American Psychological Association maintain oversight of the legitimate practice of a profession.
Many professional associations have extensive information for students about particular fields and career paths, as well as information on graduate programs, including those that are recognized or accredited by the association. For example, the American Psychological Association has extensive resources for those considering an advanced degree in psychology along with information on scholarships and a network of students pursuing graduate degrees in psychology. The Career Roadmaps found in the Explore Careers section of the OCS website have information on professional associations specific to different fields. In addition, the Career Search tool found in the “Samples/Tools – Research Industries” section of the OCS website has a database of professional association searchable by industry.

**Master’s vs. PhD, what’s the difference?**

Master’s degrees that focus on academic and applied research fields, such as Anthropology, Linguistics, and Chemistry, are considered research master’s degrees. These degrees typically require the completion of graduate-level courses and seminars, and may also require passing comprehensive examinations in the major subfield of research and possibly one or more minor subfields. Preparation and defense of a master’s thesis may also be required, though such degrees may be awarded without a thesis by substituting a capstone project for the thesis. Research master’s programs are typically designed to expose and prepare students for higher level graduate study, giving students the opportunity to test whether further study is the right choice for them or, in some cases, to provide students with the necessary academic preparation to pursue a PhD.

Professional master’s degrees focus on providing preparation for applied professional work, emphasizing practical skills and application of theory. There is typically a specified set of course or seminar requirements, graded exercises, and a project or other requirement that is substituted for the thesis. Professional internships in supervised work settings may also be required. Examples of professional master’s degrees include Master of Social Work (MSW), Master of Business Administration (MBA) or Master of Architecture (M.Arch).

When researching programs, you may see some master’s degree programs referred to as terminal degrees, which indicates they are designed to provide students with knowledge or expertise necessary for career advancement or a career change, or to satisfy intellectual curiosity, and not as a stepping stone to a PhD. This is more common with professional master’s degree programs, though any master’s degree program can be considered terminal.

With doctoral degrees, there are similar distinctions between research and professional degrees. A PhD is a research focused degree. PhD candidates typically conduct original research using quantitative and qualitative methods. Depending on the discipline, they may also focus on theoretical arguments that bring several competing theories into conversation with each other. A PhD program typically includes completing a dissertation that consists of a body of original academic research.

Professional doctoral degrees train graduates for applied work and practice. Examples of professional degrees include MD, JD, PsyD (Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology) and EdD (Doctor of Education). In professional doctoral degree programs, the emphasis is on applications of research-based knowledge, as the intention is to prepare graduates for careers as practitioners. Depending on the program and discipline, degree candidates may be required to complete practical training rotations or internships, or similar to PhD programs, may need to complete a dissertation or doctoral research project in addition to completing graduate-level coursework and seminars. In addition, licensing by an accrediting body may be necessary prior to beginning practice.
As you go about your academic study, consider the prominent scholars in your field. Who are the people publishing the latest insights or research on topics of interest to you? Where are these individuals teaching? What institutions are they affiliated with? Research those institutions to determine if they have a graduate program. Also, depending on your area of interest, you should consider where collections or archives that you anticipate wanting to use for your study or research are housed, and explore whether those institutions have appropriate graduate programs.

**Step 2: Evaluate Programs**

After you’ve developed a preliminary list of programs, you want to begin evaluating each program to determine which ones may fit with your specific goals and interests. The following information highlights criteria you want to factor in when evaluating programs.

**Faculty mentors**

“Who did you study under?” In many disciplines this is a common question you will be asked, and the answer may carry more weight than the school you attended. Selecting the right faculty advisor is key. Remember, this person will serve as a mentor and role model, will guide your course of study and your research, and will also help launch your career.

As you’re reviewing information on graduate programs, you need to determine if there is a faculty member specializing in your area of interest. Ideally, choose programs that have several researchers engaged in work that interests you. You don’t want to rely on one person, especially given the often transitory nature of faculty positions. Try and set up a time to talk or meet with potential mentors prior to applying to make sure your personalities and interests are a good match. Meetings can be done via phone or Skype, or at professional conferences.

Below are a few questions to ask when connecting with potential advisors.

- What are the faculty in the department currently working on?
- Do they work with graduate students? Are they taking on new advisees? What is the likelihood of serving as your advisor?
- What is their advising style?
- What have their former graduate students gone on to do? Where are their advisees now?
- Are they planning to go on sabbatical or retire in the near future?

**Financial Resources**

Graduate school can be expensive. The percentage of graduate students programs are able to fund, as well as the level, source, and length of funding, can vary widely from program to program.

When researching programs, look into what financial support is available. Support may be in the form of graduate assistantships, tuition remission, grants, loans, or a combination of these. If financial support is an important factor for you, make sure to ask for details, including any terms or conditions of support. For example, does the program only offer assistantships to those who have completed at least a year of study? Do they limit the number of years they will provide tuition remission? Will tuition remission benefits cover only a portion of the time needed to complete your degree or extend throughout your entire program?

If loans are a primary means of support in programs you’re considering, then it’s important to consider how much debt you can afford to take on. Research average salaries for those in your target career, and determine if the amount of debt you will amass through graduate study is worth it. If financing graduate study is a concern,
focus your efforts on applying to programs with the financial resources to support graduate students. Though cost is only one factor in deciding where to apply, it is a factor that has long-term financial implications.

**Program Focus, Requirements, and Support**
When reviewing information on each program, consider the type of environment that is best for you. The program culture varies widely from institution to institution, as do the amount of support services and resources available to graduate students. Talk with program faculty and administrators, current students, and program alumni; how do they describe the culture? Do they describe it as collegial or competitive? Is it considered to be supportive, or is there a sink-or-swim mindset?

The program or department mission can also be very insightful. What do they state as their goal and purpose? Are they training the next generation of academics or scholars in their discipline, or are they focused on preparing students for careers in the private or non-profit sectors?

Beyond the mission and culture, you need to review the nuts and bolts of what will be required to earn a degree. Here are a few key questions to keep in mind as you review information on the structure of the program.

- How many courses are required and are those required courses of interest to you?
- Is there flexibility to tailor the program to include other disciplines relevant to your focus?
- How many electives will you be able to take? Are the electives focused on topics of interest?
- How often are electives of interest offered, when were they last taught and when do they expect to be taught again?
- Are there internship, research or practical training requirements? How are students fulfilling those requirements? What opportunities are students currently taking advantage of and what may be available in the future?
- Are students required to complete a thesis or dissertation? What does that entail? What are the expectations and criteria? What requirements will need to be met before you begin your dissertation?
- How long does it take, on average, for a student in the program to complete his or her degree?
- What are the program demographics? Are most students full-time or part-time? What are the profiles of those admitted (such as experience level or academic background)?

**Outcomes**
It’s also crucial to think beyond completing the program to post-graduate options. What is your intended outcome after completing graduate study? Are you preparing for a career in academia or are you planning to go into the public or private sector?
Review information on program graduates and where they end up. Historically, many PhD programs have focused on training students for careers in academia, and have provided little support for career paths outside of academia. Though this is slowly changing, the resources and support will vary widely from one institution to the next. For this reason, if you’re intending to pursue non-academic careers, you need to assure there will be services and resources available to support you in this.

For disciplines that require licensure prior to beginning professional practice, such as psychology, law, or social work, research the percentage of program graduates that successfully obtain licensing or certification. A low percentage is concerning.

**Beyond Academics**

Though your academic study will certainly command most of your time and attention, it won’t fill every waking moment. It’s important to consider other important components of your lifestyle and assure there are the appropriate outlets and supports to meet your needs. Look into religious, cultural, or community organizations both on-and-off campus that you can get involved with. Also consider what it would be like to live in the surrounding area, and consider area resources, including access to public transportation if needed, and proximity to stores and restaurants. Are there many housing options that are within your projected budget, and would you be comfortable living there? Is there convenient and affordable access to child care, if needed?

Once you’ve gathered information and reviewed all of the relevant factors, compare programs and narrow your choices down to a realistic number of schools. This realistic number may vary from person-to-person depending on factors including the number of programs that fit your specific needs and academic interests. Keep in mind that you will need to develop tailored application materials for each program you choose to apply to, and you may need to get specific letters of recommendation for each program; this, along with application fees, may also factor in to the number of programs to which you choose to apply. Make sure to touch base with your undergraduate faculty advisors throughout this decision-making process to assure you’re thinking through all angles, and not missing key criteria.

**Graduate School Abroad**

When considering graduate programs abroad, it is essential to connect with current students and faculty to discuss the program in detail, as well as with program alumni. Is there an emphasis on independent study and research or classroom lectures? What is the culture of the program and institution?

There are graduate programs at international schools, or international branches of U.S. institutions, where knowledge of another language is not required. Though keep in mind that even if the classes are in English, you will need to interact with people outside the institution at some point during your years abroad; speaking the native language and understanding the culture will make this considerably easier. Whether you have spent time abroad or not, there will be a degree of culture shock that comes with living and studying in another country for an extended period of time.

The initial steps of evaluating and selecting programs are the same; variations may come with the application process and timeline. Pinpoint what you want to study, what you are looking for in a graduate program, where you want to be, and identify programs that match your criteria. For those planning to pursue a professional degree in fields such as engineering, medicine, education or law, make sure the degree will be recognized by
professional associations and accrediting bodies in the country you plan to work in after graduation. Review the application process and requirements; requirements and application timelines may vary from one country to the next.

It is important to note that the time to degree may vary in different countries; for example, a Ph.D. in the U.K. may be completed in three years. This is mostly attributed to the fact that there is no Master’s Degree component to the Ph.D. in some countries. Therefore this may be a good option for those who are sure of their specific topic, but not the right choice for those who want to explore various areas.
Chapter 4:
The Application Process

The graduate school application process is similar to the process you used when applying to Yale and other undergraduate colleges; there are materials to gather and deadlines to be mindful of. The first step is to closely review the application requirements and deadlines for each program to which you intend to apply. Many students find it helpful to compile a spreadsheet to help them stay organized and avoid missing important deadlines.

Assembling all of the materials required to support your application takes time and organization and you need to plan ahead. Whenever possible, plan to send your materials in well ahead of any deadlines. Early decisions and rolling admissions policies are common, even if not explicitly stated.

Components of the Application

Standardized Tests

Standardized tests are used to gauge your preparation for graduate-level work. Tests may be general or subject specific, depending on the subject and program requirements.

Determine which, if any, standardized tests you need to take and gather information on how often the test is offered, testing locations, and cost. The GRE general test is offered throughout the year, while subject tests are only offered three times per year and require advanced registration. It can take several weeks for your test to be scored and the results sent to you and/or your graduate schools, particularly in the case of GRE Subject Tests, or in the case of GRE General Tests taken overseas, so plan accordingly.

Standardized tests can be stressful. The best advice is to begin preparing early. Think back to how you prepared for the SAT or ACT. What preparation methods worked best for you? Did you study independently or take a class? The method that worked well for you previously may be the best way for you to prepare now. There are test-prep companies who offer in-person and online classes, as well as a variety of study guides containing practice tests that are available in bookstores and online.

If planning to apply to professional programs in law or any health professions, please speak with a pre-law or pre-health professions advisor for specific information on the LSAT and MCAT.

Remember, standardized test scores are only one part of your application. Admissions committees have mixed opinions on the merits of standardized tests and give them varying degrees of consideration; some programs choose to omit them from their requirements and instead focus on qualitative factors. If they are required, it’s important to take standardized tests seriously and prepare thoroughly, but make sure the other components of your application receive equal, if not greater, attention.
Personal Statements

Preparing a well-written and effective personal statement (sometimes referred to as statements of purpose or personal essays) that clearly articulates your preparation, goals, and motivation for pursuing that specific graduate degree is critically important. You will need to spend a considerable amount of time and effort crafting these statements. Though you may be able to turn out a 10-page paper the night before it’s due, that doesn’t mean you can quickly write a thoughtful, intentional, and successful personal statement the week before the application deadline.

The focus, structure and length of personal statements vary from program to program. Some will have prompts or questions you need to answer, while others will leave the topic very open ended. The length varies widely as well. Read instructions carefully and make sure to adhere to all parameters laid out in the application guidelines.

Clear writing is the result of clear thinking. The first and most important task is to decide what you want to say. You must be highly selective, especially if there is a page or word limit. Decide on a message. Consider carefully which two or, at most, three points you wish to impress upon the reader. Remember the nature of your audience is composed of academics who are experts in their fields. Each paragraph should reflect one main idea. The logical flow of ideas should be clear, with movement and progression from one sentence to the next throughout the piece.

If no prompts are given, you can use the questions below to begin brainstorming content to include in your statement:

• Explain your background, academic preparation, and experiences that are relevant to the degree you’re seeking.
• Why are you choosing to pursue a graduate degree at this time?
• Why do you want to pursue this particular degree and how will this degree and the specific program fit into your career plans?
• Where you see this degree taking you in the long term?
• What specific topics are you aiming to explore?

The statement is your only opportunity to speak about yourself. Your statement should show that you are able to think logically and express your thoughts in a clear and concise manner. Writing your statement will take time. Start preparing early and give yourself more than enough time for necessary revisions.

Refining, Simplifying, and Polishing

After you’ve written a first draft, start the work of editing, refining, simplifying, and polishing. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Providing specific examples helps illustrate your point and back up your interests, intentions, and motivations.

Remember that the reader has a record of your activities and your transcript readily at hand; avoid simply restating your resume and transcript. Also, avoid overstating your experiences, background or qualifications, be honest and genuine. Is any section, sentence, or word superfluous, ambiguous, apologetic, or awkward? Are your verbs strong and active? Have you removed most of the qualifiers? Are you sure that each activity or interest you mention supports one of your main ideas?

Spelling and grammatical errors are inexcusable. Don’t rely on spell-check to catch all errors; read your statement aloud and have it reviewed by multiple people whose opinion you trust. If possible, have your statement reviewed by a writing tutor.
LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Graduate programs will commonly require two to three letters of recommendation. Letters of recommendation allow an admissions committee to understand your strengths, weaknesses, and potential from another person’s perspective. The letters can make or break your application; take them seriously.

Programs may specify the type of recommendations they require, such as academic or employment, meaning the recommendations need to be written by someone from your previous academic or employment experiences. In some cases, there may be a form that recommenders will need to submit with their letter, or there may be specific questions the program requests recommenders address in their evaluation of your candidacy.

Whom should you ask to write a letter of recommendation? You want to ask recommenders who know you well and who can best speak to your qualifications and potential for graduate work. They should be able to describe your work positively and be able to favorably compare you with your peers. Professors, PIs, summer research or program mentors, internship supervisors, Deans and advisors may all serve as recommenders. Focus on asking recommenders who will be able to write a thorough and meaningful letter, as opposed to recommenders who may have a prestigious title but are unable to speak to your qualifications.

Once you have decided whom you’d like to ask, set aside time to approach them in person. Contact them to schedule a meeting. Bring a copy of your resume with you. Be prepared to discuss why you’re approaching them specifically, and ask if they would be willing to write a letter on your behalf. Not everyone will be willing to write a letter of recommendation for you; make sure you have others in mind in case those you ask first decline.

Don’t wait until the last minute to ask for letters. Be respectful of your recommenders time; they have many competing obligations, and if you wait until the last minute to approach them they may not be able to accommodate your request.

Set a firm date for when you need the letter, giving each recommender at least four-to-five weeks to complete it. As the deadline approaches, make sure to follow up with a gentle reminder that the letter was sent. And always send recommenders a thank you note to express your appreciation, and keep them apprised of the outcome.

Confidential vs. Non-Confidential Letters of Recommendation

The recommendation forms supplied by graduate programs require you to decide whether to waive or retain your rights to see your recommendation letters. Choosing to keep letters confidential means that you, the applicant, cannot see the letters, whereas non-confidential means that you are able to view the letters written on your behalf. Graduate programs prefer confidential letters, as they feel that it displays more confidence on the part of the applicant, and that it allows recommenders to be more candid and honest in their assessment of applicants than they may be with non-confidential letters.

Placement Files

Your residential college Dean’s office will maintain a “placement file,” consisting of letters of recommendation that you have solicited from instructors and other recommenders. Your Dean’s office, on your instruction, will forward copies of your letters to the institution that you designate. Some institutions will require that letters be sent directly from the recommender, and will not accept the letters from your Dean’s office; check with the programs to which you are applying to learn about their preference.

Contact your Dean’s office for more information on establishing a placement file.
Application Forms

Program application forms are typically available on the program web site; you can also call the program to request application materials. Pay special attention to any directions given and complete application forms exactly as instructed. Do not simply refer the recipient to your résumé; answer all questions completely and thoroughly.

Transcripts

Graduate schools may require that you submit official transcripts from all institutions of higher education as part of your application. You can request your Yale College transcript online through the Student Information System (SIS) or by contacting the Office of the Registrar. If you completed courses at another college or university or studied abroad, you will need to contact those schools directly to request official transcripts. For courses taken abroad, you may be required to get a translation of your transcripts if it is in another language.

Résumés and CVs

Graduate programs often require applicants to provide a résumé or CV (curriculum vitae). The OCS StyleGuide provides résumé samples that you can use as a guide when developing your document. For further assistance in developing your résumé or converting a résumé into a CV, schedule an appointment with a OCS Career Advisor. Before submitting your résumé or CV you should have it reviewed by a OCS Career Advisor or Peer Advisor to assure it is free of errors and is effectively marketing your skills, background and experiences.

Writing Samples and Creative Portfolios

Depending on your discipline, you may also need to submit writing samples appropriate to your intended area of specialization, such as poetry, fiction, or journalism. For those pursuing advanced degrees in performing or visual arts, you may also need to submit a portfolio of your work or audition tapes. Review the specific requirements for the programs you’re considering, and speak with your faculty advisor or OCS Career Advisor to discuss your needs.

Interviewing

A graduate school interview should be approached in the same manner as a job interview. Preparation and practice are essential. Be ready to discuss your academic preparation and motivations for seeking a graduate degree, as well as specific areas of interest within the field of study, and your goals following your degree completion. Also, be prepared to discuss any internships, fieldwork, research, or clinical experiences and the impact they had on you. After the interview, don’t forget to send thank you notes.
Timeline for Applying

The following timetable is a guide to assist students who plan to apply for Master’s degree and PhD programs. Because the range of programs and requirements varies across the academic spectrum, the information below is a general framework. The process typically begins in the first semester of junior year or two years prior to application. Students should plan on submitting application materials by the end of first semester senior year.

Spring/Summer Prior to Applying
• Identify the area of study you would like to pursue, set goals
• Research and develop list of schools
• Speak with faculty members, advisors, alumni and current graduate students about programs
• Determine test requirements, prerequisites and application deadlines
• Register for and take standardized exams (GMAT, GRE, MAT)
• Review information on fellowships, and research financial aid possibilities, including assistantships and scholarships

Summer Prior to Applying
• Finalize the list of schools you plan to apply for
• Prepare for and take standardized tests
• Research financial aid possibilities, including assistantships, fellowships, and scholarships
• Begin working on personal statements

September/October Prior to Applying
• Finalize the list of schools you plan to apply for
• Take standardized tests
• Write and finalize personal statements
• Request recommendations from faculty

November and December
• Order official transcripts from the Registrar’s Office to be sent to graduate programs
• Finalize personal statements
• Mail applications as early as possible. Deadlines usually fall between December and March; however, it is in your best interest to apply early!
• Confirm recommendations have been submitted and that applications are complete
• Apply for financial aid or assistantships

January-March
• Have your fall semester transcripts sent to target programs
• Contact schools about the possibility of visiting and/or scheduling an interview if applicable
• If applying for financial aid, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

February-April
• Evaluate letters of acceptance and offers of financial aid. Discuss offers, waitlist notices, negative responses and other options with family, a faculty advisor, and OCS
CHAPTER 5:
FINANCING GRADUATE SCHOOL

You need to have a realistic expectation of the costs involved in attending graduate school - it can be very expensive. Financial assistance exists in several forms. Availability of financial assistance will vary depending on your field of study and the schools/programs to which you are applying. Ideally, you should research funding options early, as many have application deadlines in the fall for the following year.

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS
Awarded by federal and local governments, private organizations, and institutions of higher education, fellowships and grants come in different types and sizes. Many provide tuition and a stipend. Most are granted on the basis of academic merit; therefore, it is important to apply for those that match your interests and strengths. Not everyone will be eligible to compete for major national awards, but there are many other less well-known fellowships and awards that are worth investigating.

Possible private sources of grants and fellowships include professional associations, non-profit foundations, or local clubs and charities. There may be specific criteria you are required to meet, such as professional goals, career plans, religious affiliation, ethnic background, minority group membership, or gender. Don’t expect to have your graduate education completely paid for by these resources, as full financing is not the norm especially if pursuing a PhD. Plan to apply for these resources as a way of supplementing other financial resources. Check with the program to which you are applying for information on grants or scholarships they may have available and how you can apply. Also refer to the resources available at www.yale.edu/fellowships.

ASSISTANTSHIPS
There are three types of assistantships that may be available through your institution, program, and/or other campus departments. These include teaching assistantships, research assistantships, and graduate assistantships.

In exchange for your work, you may be offered a stipend, tuition remission, or some combination of the two. In addition, some institutions may offer health care benefits. Stipend amounts can vary greatly depending on the institution, department, number of hours per week you will be expected to work, and the level of responsibility you will be given.

Check with the graduate school and department to which you are applying to determine if there are opportunities available and to learn about the application process. Keep in mind that assistantships not only help finance graduate education, but also provide you with a valuable set of transferable skills you can draw upon once you complete your degree.

LOANS
The process for applying for federal financial assistance in the form of Stafford Loans is essentially the same for graduate students as it is for undergraduates. The primary differences are your loan amount eligibility, your dependency status, and the type of loans available. As a graduate student you can take out a maximum yearly
Federal Stafford Loan of $20,500. Graduate students are classified as independent for financial aid purposes. As an independent student, you are not required to provide parental information on the FAFSA. Depending on eligibility, as an undergraduate there are two types of loans, subsidized and unsubsidized. Only unsubsidized loans are available to graduate students. These loans are not awarded based on financial needs. Any eligible graduate student can take out unsubsidized Stafford loans. With unsubsidized loans you will be charged interest from the time the loan is disbursed, to the time the loan is repaid in full. More information on the Federal Student Loan Program can be found at www.fafsa.edu.gov.

International students are not eligible for federal loans and should look into alternative financing options, including private loans and institutional aid.

Private loans are an option for financing graduate school, though these should be considered as a last resort as interest rates for private loans are typically higher than the rate for loans through the federal lending program. Keep in mind the loan terms, including fees and repayment information, and evaluate your options carefully.

For more information on federal or private loans speak with financial aid representatives at the colleges or universities to which you are applying.

**Working While Attending Graduate School**

Attending graduate school while working full-time can be an option, albeit an exhausting endeavor. For those who need to have a reliable income, the question may not be whether to work, but how you can manage to simultaneously work and attend graduate school. Though completing a degree may take longer while working, the amount of debt accrued may be significantly less. There are graduate and professional programs that cater to part-time students. The choice to go part-time will limit your options because many programs either require full-time attendance or have restrictions on the number of hours you can work per week while attending classes.

A possible benefit of working while in graduate school is employer tuition reimbursement. The extent of employer tuition benefits vary; some cover all tuition, fees, and associated expenses, while others are limited to a set number of courses or maximum payout per year. Restrictions may apply, including limits on which institutions you can attend and what type of degree programs will qualify for the tuition benefit. The degree you pursue may need to be related to your current position or somehow connected to the industry in which you are employed.

**Food For Thought**

Though financial assistance is available, the cost of completing an advanced degree may be significant. Depending on the cost of attendance and living expenses, the financial assistance you receive, and your earning potential, you may end up paying educational loans for up to 30 years. Earning a master’s or doctoral degree is not a guarantee that you will earn a comparatively higher income than if you had decided to continue working and forgo graduate school. This is not to dissuade you from considering an advanced degree, but rather to give you factors to consider when making this decision.

How much educational debt can you afford? Realistically, your total educational debt should not exceed your expected starting salary and your monthly educational loan payments should not exceed 10-15% of your monthly income. A general repayment estimate is for every $10,000 you borrow, you can expect to repay approximately
$125.00 per month. Repayment can take anywhere from 10 to 30 years, depending on the amount of money borrowed and terms of your loan. Do your research; get as much information as you can to estimate how much you may need to borrow to cover tuition, educational expenses, and living expenses. Use this information to evaluate your options.
Chapter 6: Evaluate Your Options

After receiving acceptances, it’s time to decide where you want to matriculate. It’s essential that you take time to reflect on your goals for graduate study and to assess which programs would best help you achieve your goals. Talk with your faculty mentors and advisors to assist you with this process.

If you have not already visited campuses, now is a good time. Meet faculty and current students and ask any remaining questions. Explore the area; do you see yourself living there? Are there support networks available to you through religious, social, or cultural organizations? Will this program help you achieve your career goals?

Review your financials. Were you offered any stipends, grants, tuition remission benefits, or assistantships? Is there a possibility of receiving any in the future? Evaluate the cost of living. How much will you need to borrow to meet monthly expenses including housing, transportation, meals, health insurance, and incidentals?

Accepting and Declining Admissions Offers

Pay attention to acceptance deadlines and necessary paperwork or information that must be provided to officially accept. After accepting, contact schools that offered you admission and formally decline.

Now it’s time to celebrate and share the good news! Write thank-you notes to all who helped you along the way.

Setbacks

What if you don’t get accepted? Minor setbacks happen to everyone, and though it may not feel minor, it is. The key is to not let this discourage you from pursuing your goals. Talk with your DUS, faculty, Dean or OCS to discuss next steps and options.

Ultimately, you must decide what program is best for you, or whether pursuing a graduate degree is the right option for you. A wise choice can be the launching point into a stimulating academic experience and a successful career.