



**Alabama Connection**  
**ALABAMA GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL EXPO**

## **Grad School Tips & Advice**

# **GETTING STARTED**

### **GENERAL INFO FOR STUDENTS CONSIDERING GRAD SCHOOL**

#### **ADVANCED DEGREES**

After you have completed your undergraduate or Bachelor Degree program, you might consider continuing your education to obtain an advanced degree. Perhaps you are considering the possibility (or feasibility) of attending *graduate* or *professional* school in an attempt to get your *Master* or *Doctoral* Degree.

A *professional* degree program helps you develop skills necessary for a career in a specific type of work: medicine, law, pharmacy, engineering, journalism, nursing, social work, counseling, business. A *graduate* degree program helps you develop skills and conduct research in a broad academic area: English, history, political science, foreign languages, the arts, math, education, and the sciences.

Among the most popular advanced degrees are: PhD (Doctor of Philosophy), MD (Doctor of Medicine), EdD (Doctor of Education), JD (Juris Doctorate), MS (Master of Science), MA (Master of Arts), MBA (Master of Business Administration), MEd (Master of Education), MN (Master of Nursing), MSW (Master of Social Work).

#### **GET FOCUSED**

Examine your motivations. Should you go to graduate school? Is graduate school right for you? Why do you want to go to graduate school? Is it for the right reasons?

How focused are you on your career? How genuinely interested are you in this field? Will graduate school assist you in achieving your career goals? Is a graduate degree a good investment for you?

Evaluate your situation. Determine your career and life goals. Decide what work you want to do and how you'd like to spend your life. What kind of work do you hope to do? What type of career or vocation do you want for yourself? What will you specialize in?

#### **GOOD QUESTIONS**

Is a graduate or professional degree required in your field? Do successful people in your field typically have an advanced degree? How will a graduate or professional degree enhance your chances for success in your career? Learn as much as possible about your chances of succeeding in that field once you have the degree.

Can you do it? How well have you performed in your past academic pursuits? Do you have the academic and personal qualities to succeed? Graduate school is an enormous commitment of time, money, energy and effort. It is important to make an informed choice. Do you have the motivation and self discipline for another two to seven years of school?

#### **EXPLORING YOUR OPTIONS**

It is important to conduct thorough research and gather good information regarding your grad school options. How do you know which programs to apply for? How do you decide where to go? Do you know what to look for in a good graduate or professional school program?

Consider these critical components: The accreditation of the institution or program, credentials and reputation of the faculty and department, quality of the students, breadth and depth of class offerings, admission and application requirements, employment success of the graduates, job prospects, access to campus resources, and availability of financial aid.

Important questions: How competitive is the program? How difficult? How challenging? How long is the program? What courses will you take? What activities are available?

Other factors might include location and geography, housing and living conditions, and cost and expenses.

## **APPLICATION PROCESS**

Generally, most colleges require a completed application form (with processing fee) and official transcripts (confirming coursework, grades, and degree) from each institution you attended.

Components of the Application: Application Form, Resume or Curriculum Vitae, Statement or Essay, Portfolio or Samples of Work, Transcript of Courses and Grades, Grad Exam Scores, Letters of Recommendation.

Qualifications and Requirements: Grade Point Average, Coursework, Class Projects, Research, Publications, Extracurricular Activities, Club Membership, Employment Experience, Internship Experience, Leadership Experience, Community Service Involvement.

Entrance Exams: Graduate school applicants must present a satisfactory score on a prescribed graduate exam specified by the respective college or program. Among the most common exams are: GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT, MAT.

## **TIME LINE**

Procedures and requirements for entering graduate school vary from one institution to another. For specific admissions policies, contact the university you are interested in attending or visit their website. Begin the application process early. Give yourself enough time. Know your deadlines. Typically you should begin the process about a year and a half in advance.

STEP 1 — Define your goals. Research grad school programs. Gather literature and visit websites. Create your short list of schools.

STEP 2 — Research financial aid options. Research housing and living options. Determine test requirements. Register for and take the necessary tests. Request letters of recommendation.

STEP 3 — Begin writing your statement or essay. Submit application packets. Attend grad school expos and forums.

STEP 4 — Visit campuses of grad schools. Attend interviews. Compare and discuss options. Finalize your plans.

## **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

As part of the overall application packet, many institutions require a *Statement of Purpose* or *Statement of Professional Goals & Objectives*. This personal statement or letter of intent or essay is a written narrative through which the candidate provides a brief overview of his/her knowledge, experience, skills and credentials and promotes his/her qualifications and potential for success in the program.

The content of the essay may include: Reasons and Motivations, Career Goals and Objectives, Professional Background and Experience, Level of Preparedness, Education and Academics, Coursework, Identification of Interests, Skills and Values, Achievements, Awards, Accomplishments, Distinctions, Projects, Research, Publications, Extracurricular Activities, Memberships, Leadership, Community Involvement, Strengths, Personal Traits, Prospective Contributions to the Field

## **FINANCIAL AID OPTIONS**

Graduate Assistantships (Non-Academic)  
Teaching Assistantships (Academic)  
Research Assistantships (Academic)  
Fellowships (Grants and scholarships)  
Tuition Assistance / Reimbursement (Employer Funding)  
Direct Employment (Fulltime or Part Time Job)  
Student Loan (Bank or Credit Union)