Guide to Graduate School Planning

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Division of Undergraduate Academic Affairs,
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

RUTGERS
University Career Services
New Brunswick
The undergraduate experience is about discovering yourself and your professional interests. Graduate school on the other hand, is a place for those who are firmly committed to a career path that requires additional training. Many Rutgers students plan to go on to graduate school at some point in their careers. For students entering the fields of higher education, law, and medicine, advanced degrees are required, and a major decision is whether to attend now or later. Some students go directly from their undergraduate programs but many plan to enroll later. It's important to do your homework and gain a better understanding of what's needed to succeed in the work you choose. In some cases, you may flourish with a bachelor's degree.

Graduate School Knock-Out Factors:

If the following statements apply to you, then it’s probably not the right time for you to pursue graduate school.

• The job market is really tight, graduate school is a good way for me to avoid the job search.
• Both job search and economic fluctuation are inevitable. You will face both throughout your life. This is not a reason to attend graduate school.
• I’m uncertain about whether my undergraduate major will get me a job. Therefore, pursuing graduate school right after graduating instead of pursuing a job search seems like a good idea.
• The link between an undergraduate major and a job is not clear in many professions. For example, Philosophy majors work on Wall Street, and Economic majors join non-profits. See for yourself by visiting What Can I Do With This Major? Or search the Rutgers Student-Alumni Career Connect database by major.
• I just heard about a ‘hot’ career industry that I want to break into, I should immediately apply to relevant graduate programs.
• Graduate School is a path for students who are committed to a specific field of study. It is not designed to explore or ‘try things out’ in the same way as an undergraduate degree. Graduate school is a significant investment in time and money, so you want to make sure you are serious about embarking on the journey.

Considering Graduate School:
Assess Your Readiness

If you are serious about considering graduate school, it’s important to have a clear understanding of what you want to do with your career, and how earning a graduate degree will help you reach that goal. If you have any doubt at all about your professional goals, consider putting off graduate school and, instead, spend some time working on some self-assessment and career planning.

Consider the Following Questions When Assessing Your Readiness:

• Why are you considering graduate school and what are your career goals?
• Which degree programs contribute to those goals?
• Are you aware of and prepared for academic challenges?
• Do you have the financial resources necessary to complete the degree?
• Is your passion for your intended field of study and career plans evident in your academic background and experience?

Is Graduate School Right for You?

The undergraduate experience is about discovering yourself and your professional interests. Graduate school on the other hand, is a place for those who are firmly committed to a career path that requires additional training. Many Rutgers students plan to go on to graduate school at some point in their careers. For students entering the fields of higher education, law, and medicine, advanced degrees are required, and a major decision is whether to attend now or later. Some students go directly from their undergraduate programs but many plan to enroll later. It’s important to do your homework and gain a better understanding of what’s needed to succeed in the work you choose. In some cases, you may flourish with a bachelor’s degree.
Evaluating Programs
School reputation is undeniably a factor; however, beware of relying solely on this often over-rated factor. In general, the most important criteria involves how well the program matches your specific interests, abilities, academic background, career interest, and finances. Moreover, employers and industries often have recruiting relationships with specific schools, based on a particular program. Research is critical. Do your homework and explore the following when evaluating programs.

Consult with Faculty and Students in Your Field of Study
Talk to professors and current students to learn about their graduate schools and experiences. Read professional journals to learn about professors who are researching and publishing in your area of interest. Take the initiative to contact them. You could gain valuable information to differentiate you in the application process.

Evaluate the Specific Program
The quality and reputation of an academic program and the professors with whom you’ll work will wield more clout than the overall status of the institution. Seek out faculty and coursework that correspond to your specialized interests.

Use the Student-Alumni Career Connect Database
Numerous alumni have offered to share their professional and academic experiences with you. Identify those in your chosen career and ask about the requisite training. Find alumni who have earned graduate degrees you’re researching and learn from their advice.

Consider the Best Financial Aid Package
Is there funding available? Which school offers you the best deal? Your package will depend on how much a school wants you. This might include financial support, assistantships, fellowships, and loans.

Common Application Elements
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<tr>
<th>Application (usually online)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application Fee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Required Exam Scores</td>
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<tr>
<td>Official Transcripts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resume/CV</td>
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<td>Essay/Personal Statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommendation Letters</td>
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<td>Admissions Interview (if applicable)</td>
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Resources
GradSchools.com
Petersons.com
PrincetonReview.com
UsNews.com

careers.rutgers.edu
CareerKnight
Your Key to Career Success

CareerKnight is your online career management system, developed specifically for Rutgers students and alumni. Through CareerKnight you can navigate every step of your career development plan with an abundance of resources:

- Schedule career advising appointments
- Register for upcoming workshops and events
- Develop resumes and cover letters
- View and apply for internship and job listings
- Participate in the On-Campus Interviewing Program
- Practice interviewing through “Mock Interviews”
- Learn about the latest career and internship fairs

[Careers.rutgers.edu/CareerKnight](careers.rutgers.edu/CareerKnight)

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**Graduate School Timeline**

**Year Before Applying**

**Spring/Summer**
- Research programs
- Review application process
- Visit institutions of interest (if possible)

**Fall**
- Create time-line for the application process
- Work on essay draft of personal statement
- Build resume/CV
- Formalize test preparation plan
- Start to identify faculty and others for recommendation letters

**Spring**
- Meet with faculty and/or a Career Development Specialist to discuss essay/personal statement and resume/CV
- Take required tests
- Revise and finalize essay/personal statements
- Start requesting letters of recommendation (provide forms and information to writers at least one month in advance of deadline)

**Application Year**

**Summer**
- Request transcripts of all post-secondary institutions
- Begin filling out applications
- Follow up with recommenders
- Check status of your application file - often!
- Start interview preparation or Sign up for a mock admission interview with a Career Development Specialist

**Fall**
- Re-take required tests if necessary
- Complete applications
- Obtain interview attire, if necessary
- Respond to interview invitations and Schedule an appointment with a Career Development Specialist to practice interviewing

**Spring**
- Send fall transcripts and other updates to schools still considering your application
- Accept or decline offers
- Submit financial paperwork
- Write thank you letters to writers and others who assisted you in the process
- Identify housing if necessary and plan a budget

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**Offices**

University Career Services at the Gateway Transit Village
106 Somerset Street, 4th FL
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
848-932-7997

University Career Services at the Busch Student Center
604 Bartholomew Road
Piscataway, NJ 08854
848-445-6127

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