Graduate School Preparation Checklist

The following checklist was created to guide undergraduate students of *junior standing* through the graduate school application process.   This timeline is designed for students who wish begin graduate studies full-time in the Fall quarter/semester and are seeking an assistantship and/or fellowship. Keep in mind that you can certainly apply to graduate school at any time before the application deadline!

June	Graduate School Research
Think about what graduate program(s) you would like to pursue. Remember that attending graduate school should lead you toward your ultimate career goal, not just to avoid getting a job and going to work.	

Consider what you're looking for in a graduate program and what you'd like to do with a masters or doctoral degree. Research and compare your options. Factors to consider include:

Time commitment (e.g. 2 year program vs. 4-6 year program)	Faculty and teaching methods
Part-time vs. full-time programs	Program reputation
Private vs. public institutions	Placement success of program graduates
Entrance requirements	Tuition costs and financial aid available
Program approaches/specializations	Housing/living expenses
Geographic location	

☐ *Make a list of what you're looking for in a graduate program and what you'd like to do with a masters or doctoral degree.*

☐ *Create a list of potential schools/programs to which you are interested in applying.*

June	**Graduate School Research**
☐	*Contact/[Browse] the colleges/universities of interest/[web site]. Ask them to mail/email you [or search their web site for] information about the college/program, financial aid, and assistantships and a graduate catalog. Look for programs that have several potential faculty mentors, take note of any faculty members whose work interests you (at this point), and investigate the different options/emphases within a program.* (This summary includes edits by Greg W., UW Oshkosh Graduate Studies, April 17, 2015)

				☐ Yes ☐ No
	University/Program	**Date of Request**	**Method of Contact**	**Materials Received**
				☐ Yes ☐ No
	University/Program	**Date of Request**	**Method of Contact**	**Materials Received**
				☐ Yes ☐ No
	University/Program	**Date of Request**	**Method of Contact**	**Materials Received**
				☐ Yes ☐ No
	University/Program	**Date of Request**	**Method of Contact**	**Materials Received**

June/July	**Plan Ahead for the Graduate School Admission Test**

Determine if you are required to take a graduate school admission test [GRE (general test), GRE subject tests, LSAT (for law school), MCAT (for medical school), GMAT (for business school)]. Plan to take the required Graduate School Admission Test(s) the summer *before* your senior year. Many students will re-take the test and this will give you nearly three months to study the sections for which you need to improve your score(s).

☐	*Sign up to take any required graduate admission test.*

	Admission Test	**Test Date**	**Test Location/Address**
	Admission Test	**Test Date**	**Test Location/Address**
	Admission Test	**Test Date**	**Test Location/Address**

July	**Take the necessary Graduate School Admission Test(s)**

Things to remember:

- Consult test prep books to reference strategies for successful test-taking.

- Be sure to give yourself enough time before the exam date to sufficiently study for the test.

July	Take the necessary Graduate School Admission Test(s)

- Get plenty of rest the night before (this includes taking a break from studying).
- Get to the test facility at least 20 minutes early.
- Check test taking policies (rules about what you can/cannot bring into the test area).
- Eat a good breakfast (something that'll last for several hours).
- Remember to write down your score(s) (if allowed).

☐	*Take the necessary Graduate School Admission Test(s).*

August	Narrow the Field

Review all of the graduate schools that offer a program in your field of choice. Consider 5 - 10 program possibilities, and narrow your list to down to 3 - 4. Keep in mind that the average graduate school application fee is $50 and that fee is typically non-refundable.

To help narrow the list, you may wish to:

- Consult with professors and professionals in the field to discuss program highlights and their experiences in graduate school.
- Plan campus visits, and schedule meetings with program faculty members or current students who can answer your questions. You may want to email potential faculty mentors per program to see if they are accepting students in the following year.

☐	*Determine which programs you plan to apply to and begin the application process.*

	University/Program	Application Deadline
	University/Program	Application Deadline
	University/Program	Application Deadline
	University/Program	Application Deadline

August	Registering for Spring Semester

If all goes well, you will have several interviews in the spring semester. You may want to schedule Tuesday/Thursday courses, and/or have a lighter schedule in your final semester. This will enable you to participate in the interviews and maintain your course load during your last semester.

September	Re-take the Graduate School Admission Test(s)

Determine if you need to re-take a graduate school admission test [GRE (general test), GRE subject tests, LSAT (for law school), MCAT (for medical school), GMAT (for business school)].

Things to remember:

- Study the sections for which you need to improve your score(s).

☐   *Sign up to take any required graduate admission test.*

	Admission Test	Test Date	Test Location/Address
	Admission Test	Test Date	Test Location/Address
	Admission Test	Test Date	Test Location/Address

September	Seek Letters of Recommendation

Approach faculty members, employers, etc. to write a recommendation letter on your behalf. Choose your reference(s) wisely – a letter(s) of recommendation from an individual(s) in a department or field similar to the program for which you are applying is viewed more favorably than a recommendation letter(s) from a former employer or professor in a non-related field.

Identify references per graduate school application. Be sure to give your references ample time [2 to 6 weeks is suggested] to work on your letter. You are encouraged to provide your references with a personalized folder containing the following information:

- Transcripts (NOTE: If it's a professor, highlight the classes that you took with them so they can go into your records for that semester to see how you did compared to other students in the class).
- Personal statement (even in draft form).
- The name/description of the program.
- The deadline for the letter IN BOLD and an indication of how to submit the recommendation (online, printed letter, follow a link, etc.). If your reference(s) are required to submit a paper recommendation letter, be sure to provide a pre-addressed, stamped mailing envelope (and any forms that need to accompany the letter of recommendation).
- Include a resume or other information about what you have done that won't be obvious from the transcript.
- Send your references a friendly reminder one week prior to the due date for your recommendation letter.
- Be sure to send your references a handwritten thank you note!

☐   *Identify your references.*

	Reference Name/University	Date Letter Due	Date Reminder Sent

September	Re-take the Graduate School Admission Test(s)		
	Reference Name/University	**Date Letter Due**	**Date Reminder Sent**
	Reference Name/University	**Date Letter Due**	**Date Reminder Sent**
	Reference Name/University	**Date Letter Due**	**Date Reminder Sent**
	Reference Name/University	**Date Letter Due**	**Date Reminder Sent**

September	Getting Started

Draft your personal statement(s) or essay(s) for each university and have your statement/essay reviewed by a faculty member or your university's Writing Center.

Things to remember:

- Plan on asking multiple individuals to review your personal statement(s) or essay(s). This ensures that your ideas are understood by a diverse audience. Be sure to give your reviewers ample time [2 to 3 weeks is suggested] to read and comment on your statement/essay. You should plan to revise your statement/essay at least three times given the feedback you will receive from multiple reviewers.

- Send your reviewers a friendly reminder one week prior to the date in which you would like their feedback.

- Be sure to send your reviewers a handwritten thank you note!

☐	*Draft personal statement(s) or essay(s).*		
		☐	☐
	Reviewer Name	**Draft #1 Reviewed**	**Draft #1 Revised**
		☐	☐
	Reviewer Name	**Draft #1 Reviewed**	**Draft #1 Revised**
		☐	☐
	Reviewer Name	**Draft #2 Reviewed**	**Draft #2 Revised**
		☐	☐
	Reviewer Name	**Draft #2 Reviewed**	**Draft #2 Revised**
		☐	☐
	Reviewer Name	**Draft #3 Reviewed**	**Draft #3 Revised**
		☐	☐
	Reviewer Name	**Draft #3 Reviewed**	**Draft #3 Revised**

October	Compiling your Application(s)

Re-take the Graduate School Admission Test(s).

Things to remember:

- By this time you should be comfortable with the test(s), i.e. had plenty of practice, are familiar with different types of questions, have a time allotment strategy.
- See suggestions offered in July: Take the necessary Graduate School Admission Test(s) for other tips.

☐	*Take Admission Test(s).*

October	Compiling your Application(s)

Order transcripts from all post-secondary universities attended.

Things to remember:

- If Fall term grades are expected, then indicate on the transcript request form to mail "after current term grades."
- Be sure to ask the Registrar's Office if the current term grades can be sent in time to meet the graduate school application deadline.
- Most schools charge a fee for ordering/sending your transcripts.

☐	*Order transcripts for all of the universities for which you are applying to.*		

		☐ Yes	☐ No
University Department/Program	**Address**	**Transcripts ordered?**	
		☐ Yes	☐ No
University Department/Program	**Address**	**Transcripts ordered?**	
		☐ Yes	☐ No
University Department/Program	**Address**	**Transcripts ordered?**	
		☐ Yes	☐ No
University Department/Program	**Address**	**Transcripts ordered?**	

October	Compiling your Application(s)

Continue revising your personal statement(s) and/or essay(s).

November	Wrapping it Up

This is the time to compile all of the parts of your application.

Things to note:

- You should be in "wrap-up" mode. This will include working on the final edits to your personal statement(s) or essay(s), resume, and/or any other documents, admissions test scores should be submitted, transcripts should be provided.

- Your letters of recommendation should either be sent or near completion.

- Aren't you glad you started early?

☐	*Complete your personal statement(s) or essay(s) and resume and/or any other documents.*
☐	*Admissions test(s) completed.*
☐	*Transcripts requested.*
☐	*Letters of recommendation submitted.*

Dec./ Jan.	Mail or Submit your Application(s)

Mail or submit your application(s) before the specified due date.

Things to note:

- Applying early will put you in line for the best assistantships, fellowships and/or financial aid packages. You can certainly apply later, but you may lessen your chances for receiving some form of financial aid.

- Many graduate schools send out acceptance letters as early as March for a Fall start date.

☐	*Mail or submit application(s).*

			☐ Yes ☐ No
	University	Address	Submitted
			☐ Yes ☐ No
	University	Address	Submitted
			☐ Yes ☐ No
	University	Address	Submitted
			☐ Yes ☐ No
	University	Address	Submitted

Jan./Feb.	Post Application

Request scholarship/fellowship/assistantship information from each university that you applied to.

Things to note:

- You may have to do a lot of research to find out what positions are available.

☐	*Contact the universities and ask them to mail/email you information about scholarships/fellowships and/or assistantships.*		
			☐ Yes ☐ No
	University/Program	**Date of Request**	**Materials Received**
			☐ Yes ☐ No
	University/Program	**Date of Request**	**Materials Received**
			☐ Yes ☐ No
	University/Program	**Date of Request**	**Materials Received**
			☐ Yes ☐ No
	University/Program	**Date of Request**	**Materials Received**

Jan./Feb.	Post Application

File your Federal Income Tax Return (required before you can complete the FASFA).

Things to remember:

- Make sure to keep a copy of all tax documents for reference when you complete the FASFA.

☐	*File federal income tax return.*
	Date Filed

Jan./Feb.	Post Application

Complete the FASFA online.

Things to note:

- You'll need your own tax information as well as that of your parents.

- You'll need to identify all of the universities who you want to have your FASFA to be made available to (visit the FASFA website [http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/] to find the appropriate school code).

- Make sure you have a PIN for electronic signature (should be the same as the one from last year).

☐	*Complete the FASFA.*
	University/Program **School Code #**

Jan./Feb.	Post Application	
	University/Program	School Code #
	University/Program	School Code #
	University/Program	School Code #

Jan./Feb.	Post Application

Start preparing for any admission/assistantship interviews by scheduling mock interview(s) with faculty/staff.

Things to note:

- You should ask your research mentor or other professor for a 30-minute appointment to do a mock interview or at least discuss the interview process and what to expect.

☐	*Schedule admission/assistantship interviews.*	
	Name	Date of Mock Interview
	Name	Date of Mock Interview
	Name	Date of Mock Interview

Jan./Feb.	Post Application

Have a Plan-B, just in case.

Things to note:

- It is always a good idea to have a back-up plan, so begin exploring employment options. That way if graduate school is not an option for you at this time, you will have already begun a preliminary job search.

☐	*Make a list of possible backup plans.*	

Mar.-May	Follow-up

By this time you should be hearing back from the universities that you have applied to.

Things to note:

- Visits as many schools as you can in order to meet faculty, get a sense for the city and culture of the area, and meet other students who were accepted.
- Put those practice interview skills to work.

☐	*Make your final decision.*

	University/Program	Pros	Cons
	University/Program	Pros	Cons
	University/Program	Pros	Cons
	University/Program	Pros	Cons

Mar.-May	Follow-up

Submit commitment forms and/or fees to the institution you have chosen and register for classes (if applicable).

Things to note:

- Take time to celebrate getting into graduate/medical school!

☐	*Submit commitment forms.*

		☐ Yes ☐ No
	University/Program	All forms and fees sent

Mar.-May	Follow-up

Send a handwritten thank-you note to everyone who helped/supported you during the application process and inform them of your success.

Things to note:

- You may want to include a small gift as a token of your appreciation, such as a Starbucks or Amazon gift card.

☐	*Send thank you notes.*

		☐ Yes ☐ No
	Name	Address	Sent
			☐ Yes ☐ No

Mar.-May	Follow-up		
	Name	**Address**	**Sent**
			☐ Yes ☐ No
	Name	**Address**	**Sent**
			☐ Yes ☐ No
	Name	**Address**	**Sent**