Planning for Graduate School Checklist

☐ GATHER INFORMATION

Learning about graduate programs is the most time consuming part of the process. You will not find everything you need to know in one place. As you begin to speak with people and read about programs, try to clarify some important questions:

- How will graduate school help me move ahead in my career?
- What type of degree should I pursue?
- When should I apply to graduate school?

Sometimes there is a clear answer to these questions. Often you will find there are choices that you will need to sort through and select depending on your personal motivations and situation. The critical resources for sorting through these questions are:

- Faculty in your field of interest  Specialists in the discipline are in the best position to help you assess the strength of your application, give you an overview of graduate training in their field, and assist you with identifying programs. They may play a vital role in supporting your application; therefore, including them in the process is very important.

- People working in your field of interest  Talking to people off campus is important as well. Informational interviews can give you an idea of whether a graduate degree is necessary to reach your goals and, if so, what type of degree. Recent post-graduates can share insights about their experiences in graduate school and finding employment afterwards.

- Graduate program websites  Individual websites offer important and detailed information regarding curriculum, the application process, current students in the program and, frequently, career outcomes for their alumni. Learning about particular programs is critical as the most ‘highly ranked’ are not always the best fit.

- Professional associations  The websites of professional associations often have an online directory of graduate programs and information about graduate training in the field

☐ DECIDE WHERE TO APPLY

Depending on your field, you might apply to a small number of programs (2-3) or more (10-12). Some people are very selective about where they apply, others less so. This depends on the type of degree you are pursuing and the role it plays in your career development.

☐ DETERMINE YOUR TIMELINE

Many graduate programs have deadlines in December and January, but not all. Plan ahead so you have ample time to take any tests or prerequisite courses.
☐ TAKE ANY REQUIRED TESTS
If you need to take the GRE or GMAT, or another test, be sure to allow enough time to study, take the exam, and have your score sent to schools.

Remember, not every program is looking for a “top score” on the GRE. If you are applying to PhD programs in English, your quantitative score will not carry much weight. However, if you are applying to PhD programs in Economics, it will. Your preparation, ‘fit’ for a program, and recommendations matter at least as much as your standardized test scores.

GRE: www.ets.org/gre
GMAT: www.mba.com

☐ REQUEST LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION
Allow at least 4 weeks for people to complete a letter of recommendation for you. Frequently, letters of recommendation are submitted through a program’s electronic platform and the writers will attach them to an email request for the letter. Another option is to store your letters of recommendation through an online collection service such as Interfolio (www.interfolio.com).

☐ WRITE APPLICATION ESSAYS/STATEMENTS
Your application will require at least one essay or statement of purpose. These are tailored to each specific program and it is important to read the given prompts carefully before deciding what to write. Career Services and your faculty/professional mentors can assist you with the drafting and revision of your essays.

☐ SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION MATERIALS
This will include sending academic transcripts to programs. Transcripts from Penn are sent from the Registrar’s Office (www.upenn.edu/registrar/student-services/transcripts.html) following your request.