

ADM J 240W: Professional Development Unit

Applying to graduate and/or law school

How can I get information about graduate schools?

- Explore the web-sites of various schools; start with <http://www.gradschools.com>
- Discuss your plans with faculty members and graduate students
- Check the ACJS and ASA Guide to Graduate Programs
- Stop by the CDC to look at university catalogs

What kinds of graduate programs are there?

If you are interested specifically in criminal justice/criminology, there are about 35 such programs in the country. However, Crime, Law, and Justice is a multi-disciplinary field, and you might also want to consider related areas for advanced study.

Examples of related programs:

Arizona University, *Public Policy*
Washington State, *Political Science*
Bowling Green, *Sociology*

University of Texas, *Urban Affairs*
University of Pittsburgh, *Social Work*
Tufts University, *Law and Diplomacy*

What do I need to know about getting in to graduate school?

The minimum criteria vary from school to school; check the individual admissions information via the web, school catalogs, or by contacting the individual graduate admissions offices directly. You'll want to ask about desirable scores on admissions tests, about typical grade point averages, and about the required number of recommendation letters.

How can I afford graduate school?

- Most competitive programs offer assistantships and other kinds of tuition waivers; check with each department

What if I'm interested in a professional degree---like law, business, or social work?

Law School:

- Before you make an appointment to meet with the Liberal Arts Law School Resource Coordinator individually, plan to attend a group advising session this semester. Register in 138 Sparks or by phone at 865-2545. Seminar dates are posted on the Coordinator's website: <http://laus.la.psu.edu/law/>
- The Law School Resource Coordinator will also offer three Personal Statement Workshops this fall. *Pre-registration is required.* Call 865-2545 to register. Check the Coordinator's website for the dates.

Social Work: your letters of recommendation will be important and you should consider gaining some experience (paid or volunteer) in a social service setting.

Business: you might want to start by checking with Penn State's MBA program (863-0474).

ADMISSIONS TESTS

Fact: Applying for any kind of advanced degree typically involves taking an admissions test.

Myth: It is best to take these tests "cold;" you either know the information or you don't.

What this means: You'll need to prepare! Invest in a study guide; take any free sample tests offered by Kaplan's

When should I take the required test? In general, most applicants take these tests a year before their estimated matriculation date; so, if you plan to start graduate school/ law school in Fall '04, consider taking your test in Fall '03.

Where can I get more information about these admissions tests?

GRE: 1-800-GRE-CALL or <http://www.gre.org>; year-round computer-based testing at over 600 testing centers around the world

LSAT: <http://www.lsac.org> and attend a Liberal Arts Law School Preparation seminar

GMAT: Career Services (111 MBNA Career Services Bldg); Business Administration Building (863-0474)

MCAT: Pre-medical Office in 224 Pond

What else is required in most applications?

- Official transcripts—you must get them from Shields; you'll need to provide the addresses of the schools to which you're having your transcript sent; expect fee; send at the end of junior year, middle of senior year
- Letters of recommendation---approach faculty early; provide stamped, addressed envelopes.
- Application fee---generally \$50-\$75 per school.
- Essay---view it as an opportunity to demonstrate your writing skills; explain your interests, address weaknesses, ask faculty to review your work.

When should I send in my application materials?

Many schools require completed applications by February or early March for a start the following September. However, for many schools, it is best to apply EARLY (November or December of your senior year) to "maximize" your chances of acceptance.

Some additional items/questions to consider....

1. What resources will you use to find out more about schools that are of interest to you?
2. What appeals to you about certain programs?
3. Identify a faculty member or instructor with whom you can discuss your plans. Also identify individuals from whom you can request letters of recommendation.
4. Identify at least two or three schools to which you might apply and find out the minimum entrance requirements
5. When will you take the necessary admissions test? (GRE, LSAT, etc.) How will you prepare for these tests?
6. Prepare a time line describing when you will engage in these application activities.

Etiquette about asking for letters of recommendation

- Ask faculty members if they know you well enough to write a strong letter on your behalf; in other words, phrase your request so that faculty members can decline gracefully rather than write a weak recommendation.
- Be organized; give faculty all the necessary forms at one time in a folder with your name on it.
- Provide **stamped** envelopes.
- Include a copy of your transcript, résumé, your application essay, a sample of your written work---anything, that is, that can help them write a better, more detailed letter for you.
- Send a thank you note; although faculty members regard writing such letters as part of their usual responsibilities, your courtesy will be appreciated.
- Don't forget to follow up with your letter writers; even the most conscientious people get busy with other commitments. Take the time to check in with the people who have agreed to write on your behalf. Gently remind them of application deadline dates.

How many letters of recommendation will I need to request? *Generally, three letters.*

But I don't have three faculty members who know me well! *Don't despair! One very strong letter can be supplemented with two letters from others who know you less well.*

I don't plan to go to graduate/professional school right away.... *Consider asking faculty members to put a draft letter of recommendation in your student file NOW while they remember you and your strengths. When you actually start the application process and need to request recommendations, this draft will be helpful to your letter writers.*

An Alternative Post-Graduation Plan

Maybe your post-graduate plans don't include immediate job-searching or applying to graduate schools. So, what are your plans? Joining the Peace Corps? Traveling around Europe? Working for your Uncle Fred? Forming a band with your friends? Teaching English in Japan?

An alternative plan could be a fantastic opportunity---with "plan" being the key word! Give your plan the attention it deserves, and think about how to bring it to fruition. Consider the following:

1. What steps do you need to take? Where can you find out more about these opportunities?
2. What paperwork will you need to attend to?
3. With whom might you need to meet? Are there people you can confer with and from whom you can seek advice?
4. What kind of timeline will you follow? Are there any particular deadlines you will need to meet?
5. What do you hope to gain from this experience in terms of your professional development?

A few websites to check out:

<http://www.teachforamerica.org/tfa/> (Teach for America)

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/indexnf.cfm> (Peace Corps)

<http://www.ipsl.org/> (International Partnership for Service Learning)

<http://www.americorps.org> (AmeriCorps)

