



CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE GRADUATE SCHOOL GUIDE

Questions? Contact Career Collaborative at 802.860.2720, careercollabrative@champlain.edu

Is Graduate School For You?

Pursuing an advanced degree is an extensive commitment in terms of time, money, and hard work. It's critical to begin with where you want to be in the long run, both professionally and personally. It's important not to pursue an advanced degree to avoid getting a job or simply because you do well in school. It's not just an extension of the undergraduate experience. It's much more competitive and intensive.

- What are my long-term and short-term professional goals?
- Is graduate school necessary for me to achieve these goals?
- Do I have the interest and ability to succeed in a graduate program?
- By going to graduate school am I simply delaying my career planning and decision-making?
- Will my ultimate career potential outweigh the loss in earning potential and debt I will incur while in grad school?
- Will the time and money spent on a program translate into greater career mobility and financial possibilities?
- Am I willing to meet the extensive research, course work and major paper demands of another academic program?
- Would continuing education alternatives (certificates, vocational school, professional seminars, workshops) assist in achieving my goals?

Now Or Later?

If you are interested in graduate school, plan early in your college career to assure that you take appropriate prerequisite courses and that you are well prepared for admissions examinations. Work closely with academic and Career Advisors to insure applications, essays, and recommendations are appropriate and as well presented as possible. Talk with faculty, staff, prospective employers, and students currently pursuing programs of interest in order to hear their perspectives on the advantages of immediate vs. delayed entry into graduate school.

Ask Yourself:

- Are you reasonably sure of your career goals, or is there a strong possibility you could change your mind after a taste of the working world?
- Would related work experience help to clarify ambiguous career goals?
- Is an advanced degree a pre-requisite for your chosen career?
- How much will your job and salary be enhanced by a graduate degree? A master's degree almost always commands a higher yearly rate of pay.
- Do you have a strong GPA? Would work experience enhance your application credentials by offsetting mediocre grades or test scores? Some schools are just as interested in your work background as in your "numbers".
- What are the direct and indirect costs of graduate school? Include the cost of the program and books, living expenses, and loss of income.
- Is there a possibility that a future employer might pay for you to attend graduate school?



Types of Degrees:

Master's Programs

- Two Types of Master's Programs:
 - Academic track focusing on classical research and scholarship culminating with a thesis.
 - Practical track which is a professional training program that commonly incorporates practical, experiential components into the curricula and prepares students to practice in particular professions (i.e., law, education, social work).
- Generally will take two years to complete.
- Generally limited financial aid.
- Often master's students work part-time and attend classes either part or full-time.

Doctorate Programs (pursuit of knowledge):

- Designed to create scholars capable of independent research that will add new and significant knowledge in their fields.
- First year or two is generally spent on coursework followed by "field" or "qualifying" exams.
- Once the qualifying exam is passed, you will be permitted to move on to independent research in form of a doctoral dissertation.
- Financial aid available in form of teaching or research assistantships.
- Talking with professionals in the field, faculty, and current students enrolled in the program in which you are interested is the best way to learn about the different types of degrees offered and their advantage and disadvantages.

How to Identify Programs:

- Visit [Peterson's Education Center](#) to identify universities that offer programs in your area of interest.
- Ask several faculty members in the discipline about programs they would recommend.
- Ask professionals in the field you hope to enter where they did their graduate work, what degrees they hold, and what programs/ institutions they would recommend.
- Contact professional associations, using the *Encyclopedia of Associations*, to determine which programs they approve.
- Read related professional journals to determine where leaders in your field of interest are teaching/engaging in research.
- Send for graduate catalogs or review home pages for institutions that interest you; analyze and compare the programs you are considering.
- Visit the graduate department and interview faculty and enrolled students. Determine whether students are satisfied with the quality of instruction, advising and with the library and research facilities.
- Keep a file/journal of all materials you've accumulated and conversations you've had to determine which graduate schools and programs best fit your needs . . . then apply.

Combining Work and Education:

Numerous corporations provide assistance for tuition. Some companies combine the tuition assistance benefit with a "front-pay" option that allows direct billing from college to the corporation, eliminating the need for out-of-pocket expenses. Other companies allow employees to apply for upfront advances on 50% of tuition costs. Usually classes have to be taken during evening or weekends to qualify for assistance.



Applications and Admissions:

Before you apply to a graduate program, ask yourself any last minute questions that might affect your decision.

- Does the program allow for part-time study?
- Is work experience required to get into the program?
- Does the program allow flexibility such as dual majors, interdepartmental or interdisciplinary study, individualized majors, and combined degree programs? These often lead to the most interesting jobs.

Procedures:

- Check graduate catalogs for admissions requirements and deadlines.
- Identify what type of entrance exam is required and when it is offered (i.e., **GRE, GMAT, LSAT, and MCAT**).
- Graduate schools will also require official transcripts from each college attended, which must be obtained from the Registrar's Office of the colleges you attended.
- Obtain letters of reference from faculty and others who know about the quality of your academic and professionally related work will be requested.
- You may expect other requirements such as essays, general interviews or situational interviewing.

Graduate School Application Timeline

Fall - Junior Year

- Attend a graduate or law school workshop (see Champlain College web calendar for dates/times/locations) and schedule a preliminary meeting with an Advisor in Career Services by calling (802) 860-2720.
- Identify which standardized tests are required for admission and sign up for a free testing event with [Kaplan](#) in the fall to evaluate how close you are to score requirements.

Spring - Junior Year

- Figure out what you want to do and begin researching programs in your field.
- Investigate preparation needed for the exam or subject test and prepare.
- Schedule a test date to take the exam or any required subject test.

Summer before Your Senior Year

- Continue researching programs and preparing for admissions exams.
- If you have not done a practice test, contact Kaplan.com to take GRE, GMAT, or MCAT practice test. It'll help you focus your studying.
- Think about whom you will ask to write letters of recommendation for you. Choose at least three people (professors, past supervisors, etc.) who can speak to your academic abilities.
- Research financial aid, fellowships, and assistantships as those deadlines are early. Begin filling out financial aid forms.
- If you haven't started working on your resume, start working on it now. Contact Career Collaborative at 802.860.2720 to have a Career Coach critique your resume.
- Confirm where you want to go and contact those schools for application materials.



Fall - Senior Year

- Start writing your personal statement: Your internship or research project could be an inspiration. Start with a story and develop your essay from there. Depth is better than breadth so focus on one event/person and expand on it. Essay Edge (<http://www.essayedge.com/>) is a great resource for samples.
- Formally request letters of recommendation. Provide your recommenders with your resume and ask early. Send thank you letters to your recommendation writers.
- Hopefully you've already taken the GRE/GMAT/MCAT. You may be able to take them again in the fall if you aren't happy with your scores.

Winter – Senior Year

- Write away: Your transcripts provide a quantitative evaluation of your strengths. Your personal statement fills in the blanks. Start writing early and edit as much as possible.
- Get to work: Most graduate applications are due between November and March. From transcripts and essays to test scores, you'll need to have everything together by then. Get your applications early because most graduate schools admit students as they apply
- Fill out the FAFSA (<fafsa.ed.gov>): To qualify for federal aid you fill out the same form for graduate school as you did for college. Get the FAFSA in ASAP after January 1. Grad students are considered independent for federal aid calculations
- Send your scores: Ensure your prospective schools receive your transcripts, test scores, and recommendation letters.

Spring – Senior Year

- Compare offers: Keep your eye on your mailbox. Around May, you should start to receive admission offers.
- Look into alternatives: If your financial aid doesn't quite cut it, look into alternative loan programs. Remember that each sets its own terms, so compare borrower terms carefully.
- Get ready to go: You're about to start an exciting new part of your educational career. Enjoy it!

Law School Application Timeline

Fall - Junior Year

- Try to gain experience in the field; discuss internship possibilities with your career advisor (We have opportunities with the State's Attorney and Public Defender's Offices).
- Attend a law school workshop (see Champlain College web calendar for dates/times/locations) and schedule a preliminary meeting with and Advisor in Career Services by calling (802) 860-2720.
- Begin researching schools using the [Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools](#).
- Sign up for free testing event with Kaplan for the LSAT. Check out [LSAC](#) for a free law school practice test.

Spring - Junior Year

- Register for the LSAT.
- Obtain a copy of your credit report for one of three national credit bureaus for nominal charge.
- Start a file for letters of recommendation.

Summer before Your Senior Year

- Take the LSAT or register for the LSAT if you haven't done so yet.



- If you haven't started working on your resume, start working on it now. Set up an appointment with your Career Advisor to get feedback on your resume
- Start writing your personal statement: Start with a story and develop your essay from there. Depth is better than breadth so focus on one event/person and expand on it. Essay Edge (<http://www.essayedge.com/>) is a great resource for samples.
- Make a list of schools you'll be applying to Use the [Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools](#).
- Register with the Law School Data Assembly Service: (<http://www.lsac.org/applying/lstdas-general-information.asp>). This is where you will house all your applications to be sent out to the different law schools. Send your transcripts to LSDAS.
- Contact any creditors to establish mutually agreed upon monthly payments.

Fall – Senior Year

- Line up recommendations: Talk to your professors and past supervisors (someone who can speak to your academic abilities) and choose three. Provide your recommenders with your resume and ask early. Write them thank you letters.
- Attend a Law School workshop.
- Revise personal statement and tailor it to specific essay topics on individual applications and have them reviewed.
- Finalize your resume and personal statement and have them reviewed by your Career Advisor.
- Complete your LSDAS report.
- Make sure your credit card payments are on track and avoid encumbering debt.
- Put finishing touches on web-based applications.
- Remind recommenders to send recommendations to schools or LSAC.
- Request, review, and submit financial aid application materials to the schools early.

Winter –Senior Year

- Fill out the FAFSA (<fafsa.ed.gov>): To qualify for federal aid, you'll fill out the same form for graduate school as you did for college. Get the FAFSA in ASAP after January 1.
- Make sure to connect with each school to see if they have received your completed application.
- Send new transcripts to the schools and to LSDAS after they are complete.

Spring – Senior Year

- Compare offers: Keep your eye on your mailbox. Around May, you should start to receive admission offers.
- Look into alternatives: If your financial aid doesn't quite cut it, look into alternative loan programs. Remember that each sets its own terms, so compare borrower terms carefully.
- Get ready to go: You're about to start an exciting new part of your educational career. ENJOY!

Financing Your Degree

- Complete the required *Free Application for Federal Student Aid*. A paper copy is available from the Student Financial Office or you can complete the application [online](#).
- Apply for teaching and research assistantships.
- Research and apply for foundation/association fellowships and for grants for special purposes.
- Inquire about programs that waive out-of-state fees.
- Check to see if your employer will pay for all or part of your graduate education. Local organizations and



families may provide scholarships.

- Perkins Loans and college work-study may be available through your graduate school; Stafford Loans may be available through your bank.
- Consider special living arrangements that may cover housing, utilities, food, tuition remission, and/or a stipend. These would include working in university residence halls, private schools, group homes or for private families.
- Check the deferment policies for your undergraduate loans and investigate employment with loan forgiveness policies.

Scholarship Databases:

- [FastWeb](#): The Largest and fastest free scholarship search service of more than 1.3 million private sector scholarships, fellowships, grants, and loans. Used by colleges across the United States.
- [FinAid](#): The Smart Guide to Financial Aid (Mark Kantrowitz, Carnegie Mellon Univ.). The author of a book on scholarships, Kantrowitz collects a wide range of information on aid, scholarships, university financial aid offices, and related documents.
- [College Board's Scholarship Search](#): A scholarship database lists scholarships and other types of financial aid programs from 2,300 national, state, public, and private sources.
- [CollegeNetMach25](#): A Database list contains more than 600,000 awards.

Options For Financing:

www.gradview.com

www.college-scholarships.com

www.gradschooltips.com/financing.htm

The Financial Aid Application Process:

- [Federal Student Aid](#): Review the U.S. Department of Education's site for free information on preparing for and funding education beyond high school.
- [Federal Student Aid Application](#): Allows you to fill out and submit your FAFSA online (data is encrypted for protection).
- Call 1-800-4FED-AID or visit www.nsls.ed.gov if you have questions about applying for aid.

Apply for All Types of Funding:

- **Graduate/Teaching/Research Assistantships**: By working 20 hours a week for a professor or your program, you could finance your whole tuition! Some assistantships are not listed on web sites, so it's important to call your program directly to ask about these opportunities.
- **Stafford Loans**: As long as you are enrolled in 6 credits per semester, you can qualify for Stafford loans. Subsidized means that the government would cover the interest payments while you are in school. Unsubsidized means that you would be responsible for paying any of the interest that accrued in graduate school after you finish. In order to receive this assistance, you would have to fill out your [FAFSA](#) so that your information can be sent to the schools you are applying to.
- **Federal Work-Study Program**: Provides financial aid by funding student salaries for selected jobs. You're automatically considered for FWS when you apply for financial aid.



- **Private Loans:** Many colleges provide listings of preferred loan vendors. Make sure to compare interest rates at various lending institutions.
- **Scholarships/Fellowships:** Although there are fewer scholarships available for graduate students, there are some options. Check out our [fellowships](#) page to learn more.
- **Residential Life:** While living in a dorm might not be the ideal situation, becoming a residential advisor could provide you with free housing and a stipend. Check with the residential life office at your institution to find out more.
- **Employer Assistance:** Sometimes employers offer tuition reimbursement as part of a total compensation benefit package for employees. Check with your human resources department to find out more if you intend to work while going to graduate school.
- **Loan Forgiveness:** There are a number of loan forgiveness programs for those who pursue work in specialized fields such as law, education, and nursing. Visit [Finaid's](#) web site to learn more about these programs. In addition, there are a number of service positions that we have listed with these benefits!

Personal Statement and Portfolio Development

Be Creative, Be Informed, Be Simple.

Your personal statement deserves extra time and attention. Although transcripts determine if you make the first cut, it is your personal statement that distinguishes you from other candidates. Before you begin writing, research the school you are applying to on-line and talk to alumni and faculty. It is important to understand your audience and to express your attributes and talents within the framework of the question(s) asked. Make sure that each of your personal statements is written to address the specific questions on each application. Most schools will provide information about what they expect. Conducting research will help you decide on your purpose in writing your statement, what it will contain, and the style you will use to write it. While your essays are personal in nature, the school is not looking for your life story, but rather your specific interests and goals related to academics. A graduate admissions committee generally consists of professors and students in the specific program. The personal statement is your opportunity to set yourself apart from your fellow applicants.

Brainstorm fully and narrow down topics gradually, and select a meaningful topic that will paint a picture of you and help you stand out. Be sure to ground what you have to say with concrete details. Your goal is to inform a school about **who you are** and **why you should be accepted** to their program by telling an **interesting story** that draws the reader in. Organize your thoughts, create an outline, and decide the format of your essay.

Select your topic demonstrating that you have thoroughly researched the school and incorporate such factors as:

1. Unique experiences, influences, and abilities including short and long-term goals, characteristics that describe you, transferable skills, and personal and academic accomplishments.
2. Early exposure to your field and what particular events and more recent experiences encouraged your interest and led you to the goal of pursuing graduate school in a particular field.
3. Demonstrated achievements, areas of growth, and specific qualities that distinguish you as a student and will help you in your graduate work (i.e., undergraduate work, development of special skills, specific research



experience, project for a professor, field or work experience, community service, study abroad, and extra-curricular activities). Focus on specifics of how you met challenges, skills and the perspectives you gained from your experiences.

4. How you've developed your academic goal and how being part of this graduate program will help you.
5. How the graduate program matches your educational goals and why you will be a good fit and a valuable addition to the school and the graduate program.
6. What is different, unique, or note-worthy about your life story.
7. Plan and specifics of what you would like to accomplish with your education .
8. Statement of purpose describing your specific research interests instead of, or in addition to, your personal essay. You can assume that a faculty member will be reading your statement, but be careful to make it accessible to non-specialists as well. Write in such a way to clearly communicate your enthusiasm for the subject!
9. How your unique background will allow you to contribute to the academic community (i.e., ethnic or religious experiences that have contributed to your academic goals, particular hardships you have overcome and given you unique perspective and positive goals, extensive experience in a field different from the graduate studies that gives you a unique perspective and possibly a specialization, or a detailed account of a personal experience or story).
10. Positive explanation of any inconsistencies that may exist in your record (i.e., dropped out of school for a year to earn money to finance your education or worked full-time during your undergraduate education to put your achievements in perspective).

Creating your Personal Statement:

A personal statement lets the admissions representative know, in 1-2 pages, what inspires you, how you write, and why you want to attend the school. When writing your personal statement, it is important to not focus only on the past. Tie everything into the future clearly communicating your goals as a participant in the program and what you hope to do with your education after graduate school. Writing your personal statement provides you with an opportunity to introduce yourself and show the school why you belong there!

Once you are ready, write an introduction or teaser that grabs the reader's attention and is well written and structured (three sentences but no more than six). If you want to be more creative, your introduction can tell a story, and the later paragraphs can demonstrate how the story has impacted your life and why you want to go to graduate school. Coming up with an emotional, suspenseful, or comical quote could be an effective way to start, but make sure it is meaningful and avoids being gimmicky. Don't tell the reader everything in the introduction.

Sample Format:

1. **Start with a creative story:** one story, not two...one. Think about a person, a book, an article, or an event that inspired you to pursue the degree you are going for. For example, I worked with a student who was applying to Vermont Law School's environmental program; he wrote about Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax*. In one paragraph, he related the children's book to the current environment crisis and the need for more environmental stewards and protectors. He was accepted!
2. **Follow your story with your education journey up to this point:** What have you done to pave the way to graduate or law school? Have you joined a club or professional association? Have you pursued a relevant major or internship? Have you volunteered in the field you are going into? Have you taken specific courses to increase your skill level? Discuss your experience in 1-2 paragraphs, and try to provide concrete examples of



your relevant experience.

3. **Why them? Why you?:** The final paragraph shows the recruiter that you've done your research. You want to highlight why, exactly, you are interested in their specific program. Is it the coursework they offer? Is it the internship experience they offer second semester? Is it a particular faculty member? Let them know why they are the perfect choice, and follow it up with a final statement that highlights why you would be the perfect fit for them.

Editing your Personal Statement:

Make sure you have asked yourself the following questions about the content, structure and style of your essay to ensure that it is of optimal quality:

1. Have I been specific providing concrete details?
2. Does the essay say something meaningful about me and is it memorable?
3. Is it personal and does it sound like it is written in my voice?
4. Does the essay have a logical, organized, and easy to follow structure that gets across what I am trying to say?
5. Does each paragraph discuss and support the topic and not get off on tangents?
6. Have I varied my sentence structure and length keeping my essay interesting and enjoyable to read? (i.e., simple and straightforward, avoid passive voice, conversational without being too casual or too formal, strong verbs, avoid fancy rhetoric or vocabulary, eliminate clichés, delete redundancies, don't overuse adjectives and adverbs, and convey my passion for learning).
7. Have I thoroughly proofread/checked mechanics? (i.e., grammar, capitalization, punctuation, use of active voice, subject-verb agreement, contractions to a minimum, spelling, and typos).
8. Have I checked and rechecked my essay. Read it aloud and have it edited by others. A flawless document can go a long way toward enhancing your credibility and communicating your seriousness and commitment to hard work.

Make sure your essay is true and don't include anything that is unsubstantiated or regurgitates facts listed elsewhere in the application. Your final paragraph should tie everything together and make a last stab to sell you to the graduate program. For more information on essay editing, please visit Info.GradSchools.com.

Creating your Portfolio:

If you are applying for a Master's degree in a fine arts/computer arts/design field, it is likely that you'll have to submit a portfolio. Here are some general pointers for developing and preparing a portfolio for submission:

1. **20 pieces:** You will likely have to submit twenty original works of art.
2. **Submit your best and most recent work:** Admissions folks are going to want to see your talent, not necessarily your development as an artist, so be picky with your choices.
3. **Design-specific:** Try to include slides or documentation of slides, web sites, video installations, interactive media projects.
4. **Provide accurate labels:** Include the title, date, medium, and dimensions (if it's an installation piece).
5. **Great Sample Portfolios:**
 - [David Damico's MFA Portfolio](#)
 - [Steven Gutierrez MFA Portfolio](#)



Graduate School Preparation

Learn About Graduate School Entrance Exams:

The GRE® revised General Test: <http://www.ets.org/gre>

Miller Analogies Test : <http://psychcorp.pearsonassessments.com/haiweb/Cultures/en-US/site/Community/PostSecondary/Products/MAT/mathome.htm>

Law School Admissions Test: <http://www.lsac.org/jd/lsat/about-the-lsat/>

Medical College Admission Test: <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/>

GRE: General Graduate School Entrance Exam:

- Suggested prep time: 3 months, ideally taken spring or early summer of junior year.
- Cost: \$160.00 (http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/fees/).
- Administered On-line at Prometric Testing Center in Williston.
- Scoring: Verbal (200-800), Quantitative (200-800), and Writing (0-6) score. The test is offered year round.
- Measure verbal, quantitative and analytical abilities; subject tests measure content knowledge.
- GRE Subject Exams (offered three times a year, October, November, April).
- Why Take the GRE? Merit-based scholarships and assistantships may be based on this test score, so prepare. Financial aid deadline is usually earlier than application deadline.
- Some programs accept MAT scores in lieu of GRE scores. The 100 analogies on the MAT test fluency in vocabulary, literature, the arts, history, social sciences, mathematics, and science. Helpful web site: [Miller Analogies Test](#)
- Scores good for 5 years.
- Prep books: Kaplan, Princeton Review, Barron's.
- Helpful web site: [GRE Online](#)

GMAT: Graduate Business School Entrance Exam:

- Suggested prep time: 2 months.
- Cost: ~\$250.00 (<http://www.mba.com/the-gmat/schedule-a-gmat-appointment/pay-for-the-test.aspx>).
- Administered on-line at Pearson's Testing Center on Dorset Street in So. Burlington.
- ACT is the test-maker.
- Scores good for 5 years.
- Can be taken year-round.
- Current format: Verbal, Math, 2 Essays.
- Scoring: 200-800 (aim for over 500), 2/3 receive score between 400-600.
- Helpful web sites: www.mba.com and [Graduate Management Admission Test](#)

LSAT: Law School Entrance Exam:

- Suggested prep time: 3 months (14 sessions if in course).
- Cost: \$132 (LSDAS-\$121).
- Average Score: 151/152.
- Excellent Score: 165 or above.
- Online testing resources: www.lsattestquestions.com
- Helpful web site: www.lsac.org



MCAT: Medical School Entrance Exam:

- Suggested prep time: 3 months.
- Cost: \$ 230.
- Score is not graded on a curve.
- Multiple-choice examination designed to assess the examinee's problem solving, critical thinking, writing skills, and knowledge of science concepts and principles.
- Administered: 25 times a year.
- Best time to take it: Spring/early summer is highly recommended.
- Scores generally good for 3 years.
- Helpful web site: [Official Guide to the MCAT Exam](#)

Test Preparation Services:

- **Kaplan Test Preparers:** Details on Kaplan services, plus info on education programs, admissions, financial aid, and more. Kaplan offers free practice testing. Kaplan also offers courses on GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT and more! Contact (802) 651-4088.
- **VSAC's Learning Express Advantage:** Go to www.vsaac.org, Click on Learning Express in the Quick Reference box under "Tools." Click on New User. Enter Account ID 10254. Create a password for yourself and click to continue. Now you can access a number of great practice tests.
- Free prep materials are available at www.ets.org/gre. Go to **Test Takers > GRE General Test > Test Preparation**
- Princeton Review: <http://www.princetonreview.com/>
- Study Guide Zone's Free Practice Tests: http://www.studyguidezone.com/resource_tips.htm
- Official Test Registration Sites: http://www.studyguidezone.com/resource_tips.htm

Champlain College Online Master's Degree Programs

- <http://www.champlain.edu/Graduate-Studies.html>

Champlain College Partner Programs

<https://www.champlain.edu/career-success/graduate-school-admission-agreements>

Champlain provides its students with select graduate school advantages through admission agreements with programs at New York Law School, New York University, and Vermont Law School. Champlain established these agreements to give students another opportunity to achieve their goals their own way.