

A graduate in a teal gown and cap is walking away from the camera on a paved path. The path is lined with trees, and the scene is bathed in a soft, teal-colored light. The graduate's long hair is visible, and the gown is flowing behind them.

GUIDE TO APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

THE CCD IS HERE TO EDUCATE,
CONNECT, AND EMPOWER YOU IN
YOUR NEXT STEPS.

Your career journey is unique. Here are some tools to help you decide whether graduate school is right for you, and if so, how to prepare to apply.



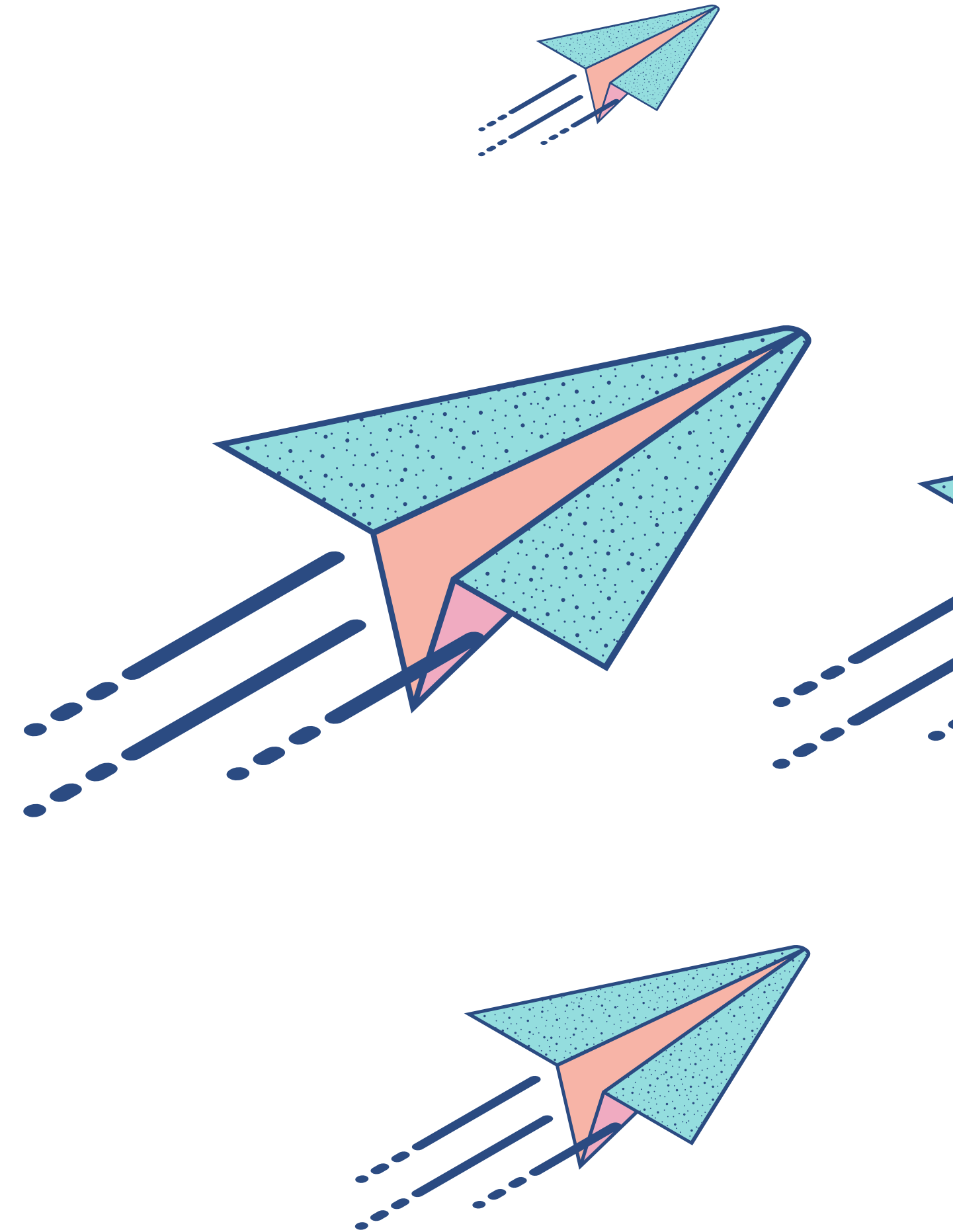
RICE UNIVERSITY
Center for Career Development

SHOULD I APPLY TO GRAD SCHOOL?

For many Rice students, when evaluating what to do after high school, attending college or completing some type of post-high school education was a given. The decision to attend graduate school is much more nuanced. One of the biggest mistakes students make is going to graduate school just because they feel like they should or because they don't know what else to do. Graduate school should not be viewed as a destination, but rather as a necessary step in your journey to achieve a particular career goal.

Another common mistake is enrolling in a graduate program without properly weighing the cost of the degree against the benefits provided. The significant investment of time, energy, and money should pay off in the end.

The first step to evaluating whether graduate school is necessary or helpful requires you to be able to articulate your career goals.





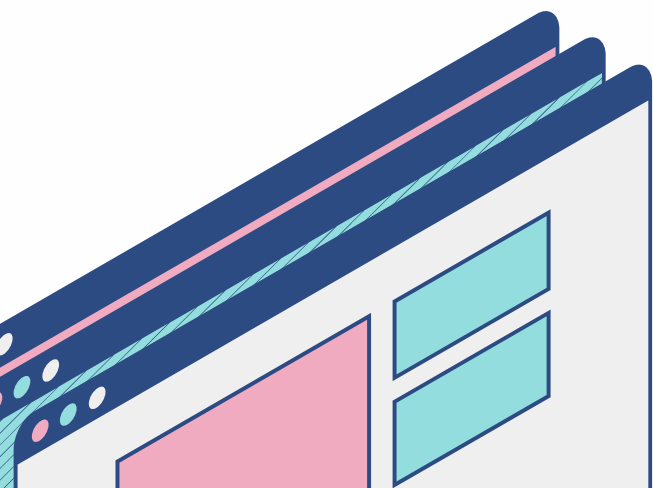
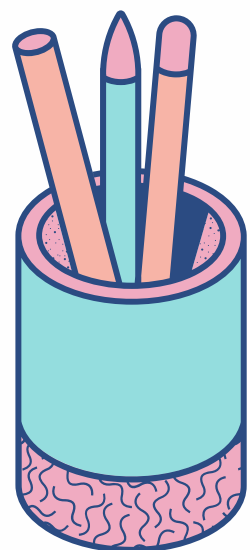
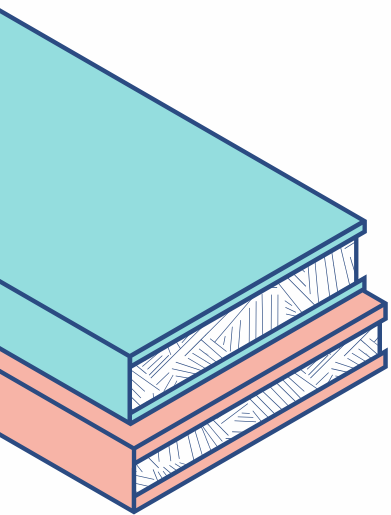
MY CAREER GOALS

Describe your ideal career path in the space below.

RESOURCES:

Whether graduate school will help you achieve those goals varies significantly by industry. You will want to spend some time researching your industry to learn about job requirements and career paths. There are many online resources available to help you with this research, including:

- First Hand (*formerly Vault*)
- O*Net
- What Can I Do With This Major
- CCD Website: Career Cluster pages



INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING:

One of the best ways to learn about a particular career is to speak with someone who is currently engaged in that career path. We encourage you to conduct informational interviews with individuals employed at different organizations at different stages of their career. It might also be helpful to seek out career switchers so you can explore the career path from multiple angles.

ACTION:

Identify & Conduct Informational Interviews with 5 people (refer to the [CCD's Guide to Informational Interviewing](#) to help you prepare):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



THINK ABOUT WHY: *WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU?*

Using the information obtained through your research and informational interviews, summarize how graduate school will help you achieve your goals:

BAD REASONS FOR GOING TO GRAD SCHOOL:

- I always thought I would go to grad school after college.
- I don't really know what I want to do, but maybe grad school will help me figure it out.
- I like being a student.
- Applying to grad school seems easier than applying for jobs.

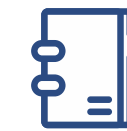
GOOD REASON TO APPLY TO GRAD SCHOOL:

- I've decided which career path is right for me and it requires an advanced degree.

IF GRAD SCHOOL ISN'T RIGHT FOR YOU....

Perhaps after going through this exercise, you've realized that attending graduate school is not the best next step for you. This might feel unnerving if you've always planned on going straight to graduate school, but better to realize that now, than midway through. Consider scheduling an appointment with a CCD counselor to explore your next steps.

If you have decided that graduate school is right for you, continue with this guide to review information about the timeline and application process.



APPLICATION TIMELINE

If you're at this stage, you have probably decided that graduate school is right for you! Now you need to plan! Below is a helpful guide of standard steps to take to apply. *If applying to medical school or another health profession, be sure to review resources from the [Office of Academic Advising \(OAA\)](#).*

JUNIOR YEAR

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Continue opportunities related to your academic and career interests | <input type="checkbox"/> Refine your resume or CV with the CCD |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Begin studying for admission tests if required. (Financial challenges - Access and Opportunity Portal) | <input type="checkbox"/> Reach out to faculty, supervisors, or mentors for recommendation letters. Typically three letters are required for admission |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Explore funding options for graduate school (assistantships, scholarships, or fellowships) | <input type="checkbox"/> Brainstorm ideas/topics for graduate admission essays based on the graduate admission prompts |

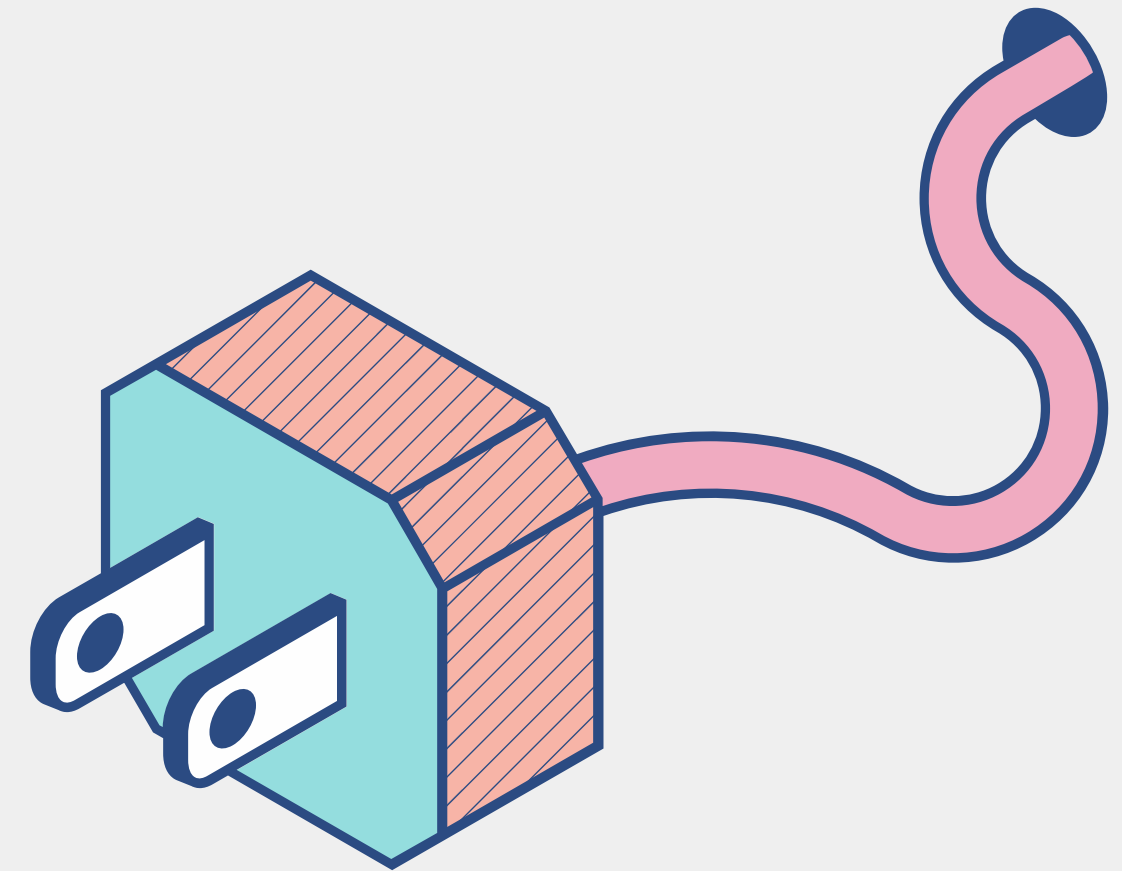
SENIOR YEAR

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Finalize personal statement/statement of purpose/or letter of intent | <input type="checkbox"/> Touchbase with recommenders for letters ~6 weeks prior to deadline |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Request official transcripts from the Office of the Registrar | <input type="checkbox"/> Submit your application before the deadline! |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apply for funding available through the program | <input type="checkbox"/> Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid if seeking graduate student loans |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Verify receipt of application materials (if applicable) | <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare for graduate school interviews (if applicable) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Write thank you letters to everyone who assisted you | <input type="checkbox"/> Notify the program of your decision to accept or decline. |

TAKING TIME OFF BEFORE GRAD SCHOOL

It has become increasingly common for individuals to take time off before applying to graduate school. For some, taking a year or two off increases their confidence in their decision to go back to school and finish studies in their field. Of course, some find other interests and decide not to go back to school for what they originally intended, or even at all. Others may feel like they need some time to recharge their batteries.

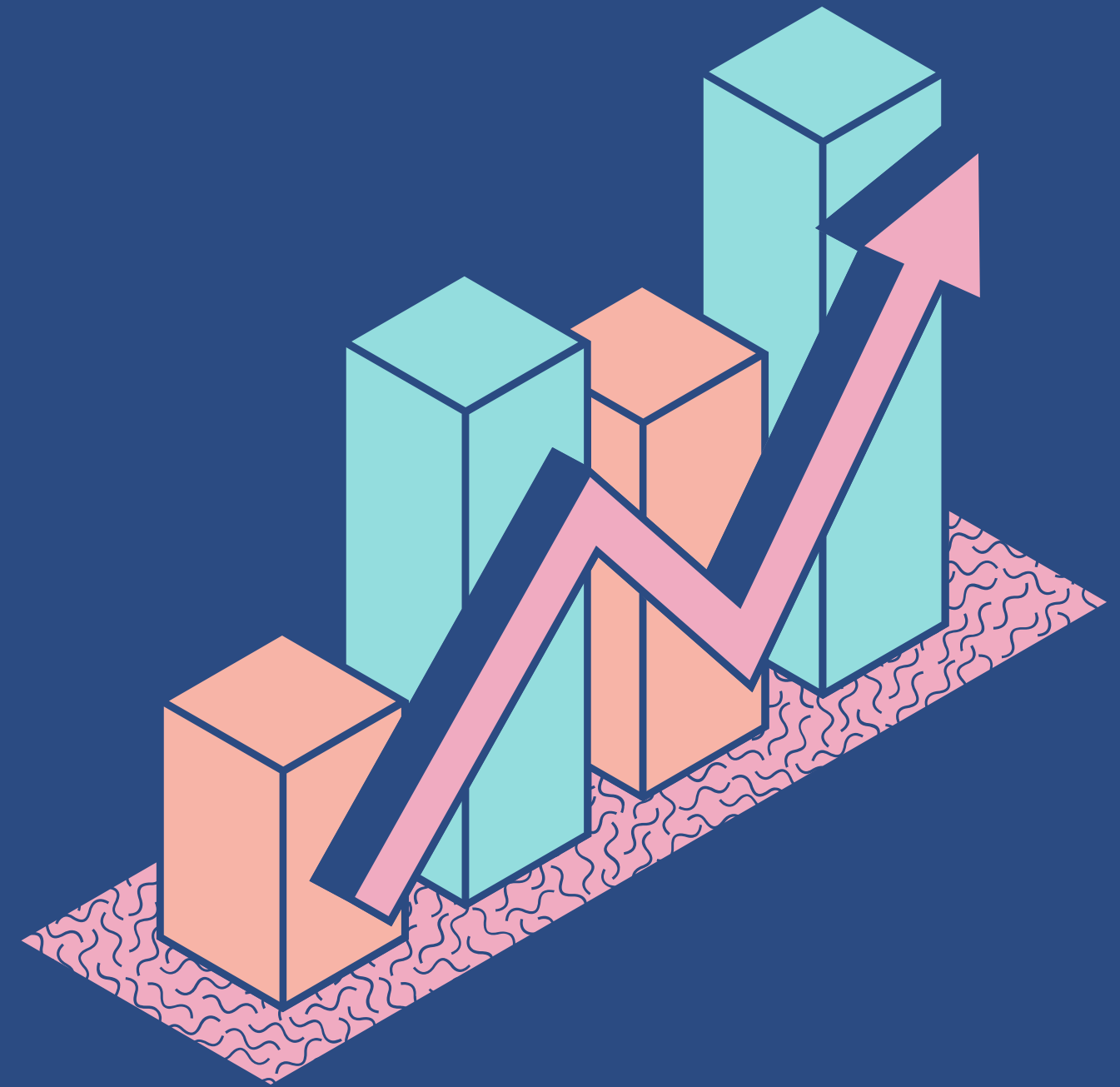
In any case, there is no reason to fear that taking time off will hurt your chances of admission. The work experience you gain in your time off can actually make you a more competitive candidate.

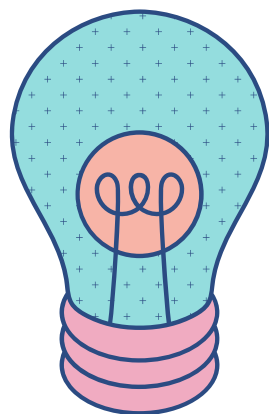


SELECTING A SCHOOL

There are many factors that come into play when deciding which school to attend. There is no one size fits all answer, even for two applicants in the same field. Everyone has unique circumstances that might make a particular institution the best fit for them.

The best ways to learn about different programs are: visiting the school if money/time permits, reaching out to faculty, speaking with current students and alumni (put your informational interviewing skills to use!) and conducting online research.





SELECTING A SCHOOL

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

1

Class profile / Culture

Is the grad program a stand-alone school, or part of a larger institution? What are the demographics (age, gender, diversity) What is the class size? Is there a sense of community?

Cost

Does the school offer scholarships? What sort of financial aid packages or assistantships are available? What is the cost of living in the city where the school is located?

Reputation / Ranking

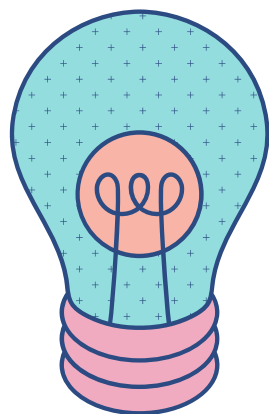
Depending on your field of study and goals for after graduate school, the reputation and ranking of your program can matter a lot or not matter at all.

Resources

Is the program/department well funded? Does it have up-to-date facilities/equipment? Is there funding available for travel to conferences, internships, etc.?

Curriculum / Content

Does the curriculum appeal to you? What is the workload? Perhaps there is a particular area within your field that you are interested in. Does the school have professors with expertise, course offerings, extracurricular opportunities, etc.?



SELECTING A SCHOOL

FACTORS TO CONSIDER (CONTINUED)

Employment Statistics

Not all graduate programs are created equal. Consider whether the return on investment is worth the cost. Ask every school you are considering for the employment statistics for their graduating students. What percentage of students are employed within six months of graduation? What percentage of students are employed in roles related to the degree? Who are the most common employers?

If a school is unable to provide this information or a low number of graduates successfully obtain employment, tread carefully.

Geographic Location

This is important in a number of different ways. Graduate school can be challenging, so some might prioritize a school close to home where they have a support system in place, while others might use this time to test out a new city. In some fields, employers are more likely to recruit students from local schools, so attending school in the location where you hope to end up can be beneficial.

If you are interested in pursuing a school year internship (or if it is required by your program), your geographic location may impact the available opportunities.

We are here to help!



RICE UNIVERSITY

Center for Career
Development

Career Counseling

CCD advisors are available to help you with the next step of your career, whether that's graduate school or not! Schedule an appointment in Handshake.

Career Development Workshops

The CCD hosts a variety of workshops during the spring and fall semesters on resume and CV writing, interviewing, and more. Check out Handshake for a full listing of events, or watch them 24/7 on our YouTube.

Contact

Reach out to us via email ccd@rice.edu or on any social media channel [@riceccd](#).