Graduate School Application Timeline

Two years prior to application year: (starting early can only help)

- Explore graduate school – talk to GECD counselors and faculty advisors, attend workshops, do some self-assessment to discover your interests and to help you think about the process and confirm that graduate school is the right choice for your career goals.
- Begin researching all of the graduate programs in the field you would like to pursue. Get information from a lot of schools, even the ones to which you may not be initially drawn.
- Start thinking of professors you could ask for letters of recommendation. These will play an important role in your completed application packet.
- Start to plan for costs of applying (standardized tests and application fees).
- Take practice standardized tests so you can gauge how much prep you will need.

Summer prior to application year:

This is the time most students start getting serious about graduate school. You will be very busy once you begin your fall semester courses, so try to get as much research done during the summer as possible so you can concentrate on the programs that interest you most when your time is more limited.

- Begin or continue your research into programs. You will want to receive up-to-date catalogues or view the information online. Talk to students and faculty from programs you are interested in and look up potential advisors in those programs. As you start to compare programs, begin to weed out the schools that don't interest you.
- Send for applications from the schools you are looking at. Some schools no longer have paper applications--they are done strictly on-line.
- Begin researching scholarships and fellowships to help you pay for school. Get federal and institutional financial aid information.
- Sign up for and begin reviewing for the standardized test you will be taking (unless you are applying to medical school, then you will want to take this test earlier). Make sure to find out if GRE subject tests are required.

Fall of application year:

September:

- Develop your personal timeline for applying, based on the requirements of specific programs. KNOW THE DEADLINES!
- Put together a packet of information to give the people who you will ask to write your letters of recommendation. This may include a copy of your unofficial transcript, a very rough draft of your statement of purpose (to give your recommenders a better idea of what you are interested in studying and why), and a list of schools to which you are applying. Request letters of recommendation far in advance of the deadline.
- Prepare your resume. Have it reviewed by a GECD counselor.
- Begin or continue to collect information about national and school-based fellowship programs, and their required application materials.
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Fall of application year (con’t):

October:

- Take the standardized test required for your program if you haven't already.
- Write your statement of purpose and have it reviewed at the Writing Center or the GECD. Make sure to customize each statement to meet the requirements of the particular school.
- Request official transcripts. You want to make sure they are mailed from MIT to meet due dates.
- Complete financial aid and scholarship forms.
- Think about alternatives to graduate school.

November/December:

- Finalize all application packets.
- Contact your recommenders and remind them of the deadlines for your application (if they have not already completed and mailed them).
- Mail your application packets (even if deadlines are later). (Spending the extra money on return receipt is a good idea so that you are guaranteed the school received your application.)
- Follow-up and make sure that each school has received your application packet and that it is complete. You want to do this at least 1 ½ weeks prior to the deadline so that you can resend anything that didn't make it to the school.

Spring of application year:

January/February/March:

- Prepare for any interviews you may have. (Arrange a GECO Mock Interview for practice.)
- Complete and mail your financial aid forms (both federal and institutional).
- Arrange to visit each department you have been admitted to. Most major departments invite admitted students to visit their school in March and early April (sometimes for specific dates or weekends).

April/May:

- Figure out your financial situation. This will help you decide where you will go to school.
- Accept and decline offers in writing and/or by phone as soon as you have made a decision. You don’t want to lose your spot because you didn’t accept and you don’t want to hold a spot from somebody else if you have no intention of going to school there.
- Write a note to your recommenders letting them know where you will be next year!

*Timeline adapted from Council of Graduate Schools. http://www.cgsnet.org/