Preparing for Graduate School - Getting Started

Finding a Program:

1. Think about your interests and possible careers you would like to pursue. If you are unsure what career you are interested in, you can visit career.arizona.edu and utilize search engines that match your interests/abilities to possible careers. (DISCOVER is a popular engine on the career services website). Another helpful website is “What can I do with this degree?” *Tip: Schedule an appointment to speak with a career counselor in the UA Career Services Center: 520-621-2746.

2. Once you know what career(s) you are interested in, you can research the career to find out what type of education and work experience is required or preferred. *Tip: Go beyond your internet search and perform an informational interview with an actual professional in the field. Detailed information about informational interviews can be found here.

3. Decide where you want to study. Ask yourself:
   - Is your search limited to a certain region, state, or city?
   - Look at stats for programs in your location of interest: visit career.arizona.edu for resources.
   - Narrow your search and pick your top 5 programs. Plan a visit and/or speak with a faculty member in the programs to gain as many details as possible.

Preparing your Application:

Letter of Recommendation:

1. Build good relationships with your current professors, go to office hours, engage in class and make an impression. Know which professors you will ask for letters of recommendation.
2. Give your professors plenty of time to prepare a letter for you. Do not wait until a few days before an application deadline to try to scramble and get a letter. Be respectful of your professor’s busy schedule. Provide them with a resume and/or description of your goals, work and educational experience. Be specific.

Personal Statement:

The personal statement is extremely important for many reasons. For one, it is the one piece of your application packet that you have complete control over. It is your chance to show your writing abilities, explain your educational and professional experience, and your unique background.

1. Start early. Begin with an outline and include specific information you want to include:
   - Motivations and influences in your life that have led you to this specific program/path
- Academic Experience: include your degrees, majors, knowledge that demonstrates your foundation in the academic field, any research/academic experience, conference presentations, journal publications, etc.
- Experience: jobs, internships, research, teaching, related projects
- Skills and interests related to the academic field: computer, language, research, writing, teaching, analytical skills, etc.
- Strengths, weaknesses, personal accomplishments
- Educational/career goals
- Challenges you have faced—you can use this opportunity to explain any special circumstances (for example, if you were in a car accident one semester and your grades were poor, you can explain what happened)
- Compelling reasons why you should be chosen: how are you different, unique, qualified and diverse?

2. Do your research. Carefully review the specific programs instructions. Ask questions if things are unclear or vague.
3. Write and re-write. Draft your statement early. Ask others to read it and make suggestions.
4. Proof read everything carefully, and more than once. Typos and misspellings can make all the difference!

Admission Tests: GRE, etc.:

1. Begin studying early—Junior year is a good time to begin.
2. Consider a prep course. There are many courses offered to help you prepare for the GRE. Kaplan and Think Tank offer courses.
   *Tip: Visit sgpp.arizona.edu—“undergraduate information”—“Funding/Scholarships” to see if financial assistance is available.
3. Utilize practice tests. Take several practice tests. Time yourself and make the environment as similar to the real test environment as possible.

Admissions Interviews:

1. Practice! Career Services offers mock interviewing in-person and online.
2. Dress professional.
3. Prepare questions of your own. Show that you have done your research.

Information was obtained from career.arizona.edu to create this checklist.