

APPLYING TO GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

If you are thinking of applying to graduate school or professional school and asking a professor or instructor to write you a letter of recommendation, please familiarize yourself with the entirety of this page. Getting into graduate school is only half the battle. Your decision should be well informed, and you should be well prepared.

WHAT DO I NEED TO HAVE READY FOR MY PROFESSOR?

When you submit your materials for your professor, she will need all of the following in the checklist. Are your deadlines at least one month, preferably two months away? If you're not ready, perhaps think of applying next year. If your portfolio is incomplete, she cannot complete a letter for you.

- ✓ Your statement of purpose (see below), including stated areas of research interest.
- ✓ A CV or resume of your education, employment, activities, and skills
- ✓ A transcript of your academic grades.
- ✓ The writing sample you plan to use with your application.
- ✓ A table of some kind noting when your applications are due and whether they are to be submitted electronically or via hard copy.
- ✓ If you require hard copies of letters of recommendation, supply a stamped addressed envelope.
- ✓ Any cover sheets with waivers signed.
- ✓ Deadlines for each application
- ✓ Is there a particular reason why you want to go to this school? Someone with whom you wish to study? A strength of the school's program?
- ✓ A list of three things you wish to highlight about your accomplishments or circumstances and anything else you wish her to know.

All materials should be sent to the professor's attention. Generally, you should compile a folder of all supporting information in a way that facilitates the letter writing process for your professor. Remember, the more organized you are, the better the letter will be and the smoother the process all around.

HOW DO I WRITE THE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE?

In composing your statement of purpose for graduate school, you should avoid vague, general language and instead focus on the specific reasons that you have chosen your course of study, what in your background and training especially fits you for that academic program, and why you have chosen the particular program and school that you have. The more concrete and detailed your essay is, the more thoughtful it seems, the more likely you are to be admitted to the school of your choice. American Studies faculty members are happy to offer guidance to help you compose effective statements of purpose.

I'M THINKING ABOUT UNIVERSITY TEACHING? WHAT DO I NEED TO CONSIDER?

Graduate school is a huge financial, personal and emotional undertaking. Employment opportunities in academia are scarce and salaries modest in college and university teaching, publishing, and museum work. Because this is a huge undertaking, not to be taken lightly, please read the following article and ask yourself whether you still want to go to academic graduate school. Be sure that you know why you are pursuing this professional path and that you're aware of the challenges. Talk this over with your family if you think that is useful. Also feel free to come and talk this over with us. Remember, we are here to help you achieve your goals wisely.

<http://chronicle.com/article/Graduate-School-in-the/44846>

First, ask yourself these questions and be prepared to answer them fully. This is not about assessing whether or not you are qualified, but these questions are worth considering before you dive in:

1. Why are you applying to graduate school? Do you expect or wish to get an academic job? If so:
 - a. Are you willing to accept the possibility that after 7 plus years of school you may be unemployed, regardless of how intelligent you are?
 - b. Are you willing to move anywhere in the country to be an academic? Can you be happy living away from your family?
 - c. Are you willing to teach 4 plus courses a semester?
 - d. Are you willing to accept a starting salary of about \$45,000 depending on the type of job?
2. Are there other career options you might explore? Many of those currently trained to be university professors have been compelled to accept other jobs.

If you have thought all this through and still want to apply, your professor will be happy to write for you. But you must also supply her with the materials in the checklist above.

WHEN SHOULD I START PREPARING?

It is never too early to prepare for graduate and professional schools. Academic choices you make in planning your undergraduate career may determine whether or not you will be admitted to the school of your choice.

All American Studies majors, and particularly those interested in graduate programs, should take the American literature and American history surveys as early as possible. These courses provide important background material for topics covered in more advanced courses. Students benefit from a sequence of courses that begins with American Studies 050:101: Introduction to American Studies. If you plan to apply to a school of some distinction, it is essential that you present a coherent, well-balanced, rigorous course of study, which should include courses that require term papers that you can present as writing samples in your application.

Students who plan to apply to graduate programs also should take courses with senior professors, those who hold the rank of Associate Professor, full professor, Professor II, or named chairs. Ambitious students will seek out professors who have national or international reputations. Such students will participate in class and consult professors during office hours. The better graduate and professional schools pay more attention to letters of recommendation from those whose work is well known. All students interested in graduate programs should consult early and regularly with faculty in American Studies.

Last updated, 2/2012