**Graduate or Professional School Application Checklist**

**Choosing the right program**

A decision about a graduate or professional program should take into consideration personal values and goals as well as career and academic considerations. Information about the strength and reputation of programs can be easily found by talking with professors and looking at ranking sources for various professional associations, but you must also consider the impact of a program on the next few years of your life and its impact on your professional development in the future. When you are evaluating your decision, ask:

* What is most important to me about a graduate program? Academics, prestige, location, cost, proximity to family, etc.?
* What is the emphasis of this program (theory, application, hands-on learning, etc.)?
* When I finish this program, how will it change my employment options? Will it open or close certain types of opportunities?
* How will my potential future salary and future debt compare? Is there an alternative to achieve my career goals?

**Application Timelines**

Application cycles, and therefore timelines, vary depending on the type of program to which you are applying. It is your responsibility to track all deadlines so that you can pursue your goals.

* Is the program on a one-year application cycle or admits more frequently throughout the year?
* When must you complete certain prerequisites to be eligible to apply?
* What entrance exam do you need to complete for each program or school?
* When are the entrance exams offered? What are the registration deadlines and costs of the entrance exams?
* Is the application deadline is a “postmarked by” or “received by” date?

**Personal Statements**

The personal statement is your opportunity to present your qualifications and reasons for choosing a particular graduate or professional program. Your statement should persuade the selection committee that you will be successful and have the potential to contribute to the profession. It should illustrate that you have thought about the career, profession and your life experiences.

* Describe what makes you right for this school or program.
* Show evidence (through examples/stories) of qualities and skills you possess that would be valuable to the program?
* Catch attention without sounding “gimmicky” (i.e. quotes, poems, etc.)
* Follow word count requirements and end with what you most want the reader to remember about you
* Identify future goals, ideals, or objectives within the profession and/or within the graduate or professional program

**References/Recommendation Letters**

When considering asking for references or recommendation letters, consider the type of program to which you are applying. An academic recommendation from a professor will be very different from a reference by your former internship supervisor or other employer. However, you may want multiple perspectives on who you are (i.e. academically, community service, employment)

* Send a request to a potential reference with an explanation of what the reference is for. Do not provide a name on your application before contacting the person (email or phone call)
* Include your current resume/CV, career aspirations, and info. about the program you applying to that way the person may write an informed letter
* Provide clear instructions for the process of sending the letter and a clear deadline to respond back to you or the program

**Stay Organized**

Following is an example tracker for deadlines and information for applications.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **School** | **Website** | **Deadline** | **Application Fee** | **Application Via** | **Entrance Exams** | **Exam Registration Deadline** | **Exam Fee** | **Required with Application** |
| UNTHSC– Med School | web.unthsc.edu | Oct. 1, 2017 | TMDSAS $140 flat fee for all applications | TMDSAS *and* TCOM | MCAT | Offered all year, but need to take before Sept. 2017 for application deadline | $275 | Official transcripts from ALL institutions, letters of evaluation (HPAC), MCAT score, TCOM secondary app, personal statement (2500 words), 4 rec letters |
| SMU – Law School | law.smu.edu | Nov. 1, 2017 | LSAC $170  SMU $75 | LSAC and SMU | LSAT and CAS | June 2017, September 2017, December 2017 | $170 $165 | LSAC application, resume, personal statement, CAS report, 4 rec letters |