Applying to Graduate School
Student Support Services
Southern Nazarene University

All of your communications should be typed. You should be certain that your letters are grammatically correct and that they contain no misspelled words and no colloquialisms. Have someone else read your letters if necessary.

If you visit the program (see below) look presentable. Don't flirt with members of the opposite sex. Don't talk much about unrelated leisure time activities. Don't gossip. Don't assume you are not being evaluated just because the setting is informal.

First Questions

So you want to go to graduate school. How do you choose a school to attend? Where can you go for more information?

Why Graduate School?

The first question is "Why do I want to go to graduate school?" You need a clear idea of what you intend to accomplish to guide your search. (You'll also be asked to explain your reasons as part of the application process.)

People have various reasons for pursuing graduate study, but the two most common reasons are as follows:

- Intellectual curiosity...when people find a field of study that interests them greatly.
- Professional advancement/development...when additional study in a field is necessary to advance, or for a career change.

Whatever your reason, it takes a great deal of self-discipline to pursue a graduate degree.

What Is Graduate School Like?

Graduate study is radically different from undergraduate study. It's more focused, more intense, more expensive, and in many fields more highly individualized than undergraduate studies are. Admission is much more selective, and standards are higher than for undergraduate admissions.
What Kind of Graduate School Am I Looking for?

There are many possible criteria for selecting a graduate school. Here (in no particular order) is a list of some of them:

- fields (and subfields) of study offered,
- teaching philosophy,
- reputation of the school and/or the participating faculty,
- job placement (or placement in doctoral programs for masters programs),
- geographic location,
- tuition and availability of financial support,
- availability of support services and infrastructure (libraries, lab space, etc.)
- time required to complete degree,
- environment (the size of the institution, cultural/recreational opportunities, work and/or internship opportunities, weather, etc.),
- your personal circumstances (job and family considerations, etc.).

Finding a Graduate Program...Some Hints (also see page 16)

Hint #1: Start Looking Early

Hint #2: Use Many Sources

Hint #3: Follow Your Interests

Hint #4: Collect Recommendations

Hint #5: Consult Other Sources as Necessary

What Goes Into an Application File?

An application file usually consists of the following items:

- An application form.
- A Statement of "Reasons for Graduate Study" (also known as a "statement of intent" or "statement of purpose"),
- Official transcripts of your academic work.
- Additional items, such as:
  1. Courses-in-progress/Projected Coursework (if you are working on a degree at the time you apply).
  2. Samples of your written work or research, or
  3. a portfolio of work (commonly required for Art, Architecture and creative writing applicants).
In addition, you may be asked to submit letters of recommendation and/or scores from standardized tests such as the GRE, GMAT or MAT.

There is usually an application fee.

Check the instructions that come with the application form carefully. You may be asked to send different required items to different offices at different times.

**What Counts Most in an Admissions Decision?**

1. **Gradepoint average (GPA)** is the most commonly used criterion for admission.
2. **Test scores** are often important as well.
3. Professional or research experience in the field also carries weight.

You should ask at the schools you are considering what their criteria are, and what weight each criterion carries in their evaluation.

**How Long Will All This Take?**

**The Applicant's Responsibilities**

How soon you submit **all** required materials plays a big role in how long the process takes. In applying for graduate study, you take on a great deal of responsibility for getting the application and supporting materials where they need to go. For one thing, unless you are applying to do your graduate studies at the same institution at which you did your undergraduate degree, the institutions to which you apply have no legal authority to obtain your transcripts; you must take specific action to authorize their release to your prospective graduate institutions.

You are also responsible for the supporting materials like letters of recommendation, writing samples, et cetera. In most cases, the lack of required supporting documents will hold up the decision. Staying in regular touch with the relevant offices is a good way to make sure that your application moves through the process in a timely fashion.

Some graduate programs use a self-managed application package, in which the applicant gathers all required materials and submits the entire file as a package. The file arrives complete, which should shorten the time between filing the application and receiving a decision.

**When Is A Good Time to Apply?**

Generally, the sooner the better. The process is complex and in many cases takes a while, and once you get admitted you need some lead time to arrange your life for graduate study.

**Program Admissions Standards**

The standards used by a particular program in evaluating applicants for admission will vary from program to program, and may vary from the general graduate school standards. A professional training program may have different standards than will a research-oriented program.
Applying to graduate school...

Begin in the summer before your senior year of college or at least a year before you plan to start graduate school. Study deadlines for specific programs carefully since they may vary significantly depending on the institution to which you apply. All times indicated below are approximate.

**Summer**
- Write a draft statement of purpose (why you want to be admitted to the program to which you are applying). Start browsing through directories of graduate programs and college catalogs.

**September**
- Meet with current faculty members to discuss your statement and possible programs. Ask for letters of recommendation. Sign up for required standardized tests.

**October**
- Take standardized tests. Request application materials from programs in which you are interested. The PETERSON’S GUIDE (available in Career Services, Collier Library and online) is a good source of information and addresses of graduate school programs.

**November**
- Order transcripts. Ask if the Registrar’s Office can send a transcript with your fall term grades in time to meet the deadlines of programs to which you are applying.

**December**
- Complete application forms (do a draft on a photocopy of the forms first). Give your recommenders the forms to fill out or the addresses to which they should send their letters and copies of your statement of purpose or your response to specific questions asked by the program.

**January**
- Mail applications. Even if deadlines are later, it is good to get the applications in early. If you are applying for need based financial aid programs, you must also file an application for Financial Aid. You must have Financial Aid transcripts sent to the institution to which you are applying.

**February**
- Contact programs about the possibility of visiting. Make trips if possible. (Be sure to brush up on your Interviewing Skills.)

**April**
- When applying for need based financial aid programs, you may have to file a copy of your federal income tax return.

http://www2.una.edu/career/jobsearch/gradschool.htm
ASSEMBLING A COMPETITIVE APPLICATION

Admission into graduate programs can be quite competitive. High quality programs are, of course, more competitive than lower quality programs in general doctoral programs are more difficult to get in than master's programs.

The primary determinant of success in applying for graduate school is the quality of your background and abilities

Graduate Record Exams and Other Admission Tests

Most graduate admissions committees require the GRE. These scores will often be interpreted as a measure of the student's general intellectual ability and likelihood of success in graduate school. Thus, it is wise to obtain the best scores you possibly can.

Some believe that it is impossible to study for these exams, but it is not true:

- If you haven't taken a mathematics course in some time, review of this material can be quite helpful. If you are unsure how to take tests of this type, examination of one of the many books on the market about the GREs may help. Students have been known to pull up their scores greatly through careful preparation.
- The GREs can be taken more than once, so it is wise to take the test earlier rather than later. The best time to take the test is in October of your senior year.

There is another reason to take the test early: to be sure that your scores are available by the admission deadline. Incomplete applications are not usually considered, and when they are, the fact that they are incomplete reflects poorly on the candidate. If you can, take the GREs in October.

This rule on timeliness applies to all parts of the application. If the candidate couldn't manage to get their admission materials together on time, will they be late with class assignment as well?

Grades

Your grades reflect your standing among your peers. Obviously, grades are important and no good student needs to be reminded of that. As it applies to admission into graduate school, what students sometimes do need to be told is that it is wrong to assume that good grades are enough. You will need other qualifications to distinguish yourself.
Kinds of Standardized Test

Standardized tests are widely accepted in the admissions process as an additional source of information on an applicant's capabilities, but there is a lot of variation. There are many highly reputable schools which do not use test scores in admissions. And at some schools, some programs may require test scores and others may not.

What Kinds of Tests Are Used in Admissions?
Depending upon your chosen course of study, one of the following required tests may need to be taken which demonstrates ability or skills related to your discipline. These include:

- Graduate Record Examination – General test and subject specific including:
  (Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Literature in English, Mathematics, Physics, and Psychology)
  http://www.gre.org

- Graduate Management Admission Test (Business)  http://www.mba.com/mba

- Law School Admission Test (Law)     http://www.lsat.org

- Medical College Admission Test (Medicine) http://www.aamc.org

- Miller Analogies Test (Law/graduate) http://www.tpcweb.com/mat/

### Test Preparation Courses

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<td>GRE, LSAT</td>
<td>202-362-7386</td>
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<td>Certified Learning Centers</td>
<td>Praxis, LSAT, GMAT</td>
<td>301-774-3700</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.certified-learning-centers.com">www.certified-learning-centers.com</a></td>
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<td>LSAT</td>
<td>1-800-325-5728 x12</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.prepmaster.com">www.prepmaster.com</a></td>
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<td>PowerScore</td>
<td>GRE, LSAT, GMAT</td>
<td>1-800-545-1750</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.powerscore.com">www.powerscore.com</a></td>
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<td>The Princeton Review</td>
<td>GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT</td>
<td>202-797-1410 or 1-800-273-8439</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.review.com">www.review.com</a></td>
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<td>Kaplan Test Prep and Admissions</td>
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<td>202-835-9745 or 1-800-KAP-TEST (1-800-527-8378)</td>
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<td>Merlin Test Prep</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.testmasters180.com">www.testmasters180.com</a></td>
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<td>U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Graduate School</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.grad.usda.gov">www.grad.usda.gov</a></td>
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**Letter of Intent/Statement of Interest/Autobiographical Statement**

Most applications ask for a statement of interest. This is sometimes called an "autobiographical statement." The request for an autobiographical statement is often misunderstood by student applicants. Students who take the request literally harm their application by appearing to be unsophisticated and naive. It is sadly not uncommon to see such statement begin with "I was born in a small town in the midwest...."

What is being requested is: 1) a statement of your interests in how you came to have those interests, 2) what your goals and ambitions in your field, and 3) how the program to which you are applying can help you to achieve those goals.

With respect to your interests and how you came to have those interests, some words of advice: While it may seem to you that the reason you are interested in a specific field is that you want to help people, this reason has become a terrible cliche and should be avoided. The problem is that it adds little information. Particularly in applied fields, of course, helping people is an obvious motivation, but it would be better to be specific.

**In describing your interests and how you came to have them, try to focus on particular educational and occupational experiences you have had that could account for your interests, rather than personal experiences.** It helps to think of your audience. Who will read this statement? It will be read by academic professors who have dedicated their career to scholarly endeavors. Scholars rightly distrust too much personal motivation entering into science because it can lead to a distortion of the scientific process. They are looking for the kind of motivation they themselves either have or wish they would have--an intrinsic and serious interest in the substance of the issues dealt with. Try to share experiences that reflect on that part of your reasons for seeking graduate level training.

As for your goals and ambitions, you should try to be as specific as possible. You should try to be more specific, while at the same time showing an openness to learning new things.

It is wise to apply to schools that have faculty with interests that fit with your own. Do your homework. Go to the library and look up the publications of the faculty. Decide whether this kind of work is what you want to do.

Many schools admit students into specific labs. That is, each faculty member will admit x number of students. In this case, the goodness of fit between your interests and your mentor-to-be is crucial. You should know that person's research program. If it fits what you want, say so, but do so after you have carefully researched the matter or you will inevitable appear unsophisticated or even manipulative.

Other things that may go in your statement of interests are research, applied and professional experiences and relevant skills such as computing skills.
Preparing a Personal Statement

Most graduate schools require a personal statement as a part of the application. This statement is often centered around your interests and your personal background, the reasons you are applying to a particular graduate program, and your career and personal objectives. Although a well-written personal statement will not overcome poor grades or a low score on the Graduate Record Examination, a poor one will surely hurt your chances of acceptance.

Plan and produce your personal statement as carefully as you would a crucial term paper. The following tips will help you produce an effective personal statement.

1. Before you begin your statement for each school, read as much as possible about their program so that you can tailor your statement to the program and convince the admissions committee that you will fit well there.

2. Prepare an outline of the topics you want to cover (e.g., professional objectives and personal background) and list supporting material under each main topic.

3. Check your grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization carefully. Avoid slang words that make you sound uneducated, and overly elaborate words or stilted language that will make you appear pompous or pretentious.

4. Ask two of your instructors to read your first rough draft and make suggestions. Incorporate these suggestions into your second draft.

5. Your final statement should be as brief as possible--two double-spaced pages are sufficient. Stick to the points requested by each program, and avoid lengthy personal or philosophical discussions.

6. Be honest, sincere, and objective--that is the only way to impress the evaluators that you are a person who is already taking a mature approach to life.
Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are extremely important. They can help you and they can hurt you. The most helpful letters come from teachers who have had considerable contact with you, especially in non-classroom setting such as research labs.

The best kind of letter is from someone who has been involved with you professionally - who has supervised research on your part, who has co-authored a paper with you, who has served as an adviser to you in your role as an officer in Psi Chi, and so on.

A letter from an employer can be useful if the job was in the field of study, and the letter comments on your accomplishments of specific duties, your aptitude for this type of work and so on. Otherwise, such letters are usually not helpful. This will probably be offensive to most academics.

What Kind of Information Is Included?

The content of a recommendation depends on the type of program to which you are applying, and the format used. The type of degree program to which you are applying will make a difference in what your reference is asked to say about you. Your references may be asked to comment generally on your academic ability or specifically on your performance in coursework in a particular field. They may be asked to comment on your participation in class as well as your performance on exams or papers.

Who Should I Ask to Write for Me?

This will depend somewhat on what information your references need to provide. If you are applying to a traditional academic program, it is good to have people who have been your instructors write for you. A professional program may ask you to have a supervisor or co-worker comment on your work.

In any case, it is best to choose as references people who know you well enough to make specific comments about your ability. Another consideration is the reputation of your references. If you can get a favorable reputation from a professor who is well respected in your field, that will certainly strengthen your application.

How Should I Approach Someone About Writing A Recommendation?

Many professors are happy to write recommendations for their students. However, there are three important things to remember:

1. Professors are often very busy people, so it is best to ask early, and to get any materials (e.g. a recommendation form) to your reference as soon as possible.
2. You need positive recommendations, so don't be afraid to ask if a reference feels s/he can write you a favorable recommendation.
3. Generally speaking, you should waive your right to view the recommendation. Most institutions will not value it if you refuse to do so.
Include a Vita or Resume

It is a good idea to include a carefully assembled vita even if some of the material is redundant with the application itself.

Differences between a Resume and Vita

- A **Vita** is a comprehensive biographical statement. It is generally three or more pages in length and emphasizes an individual’s qualifications and activities. Unless a **Vita** is requested, you should send a resume.
- A **Vita** is most often used in the field of higher education and concentrates on academic pursuits, omitting material not directly related to educational background and achievement. It is appropriate for Ph.D.’s, M.F.A.’s and M.S.’s seeking teaching or research positions.
- A **resume** is usually one or two pages. It is a summary of the highlights of an individual’s personal, educational and work related experiences that demonstrate why this person is qualified for a particular position. An individual’s strengths and qualifications are the focus of a resume. Basically, it summarizes the educational preparation and any experience relevant to one’s career objective.

Purposes of a Vita

A **Vita** has many purposes:

- Locate or change positions
- Update personnel records
- Re-enter the labor market
- Provide information for professional activities

Besides serving as a job search tool, your **Vita** is useful in other ways:

- A supporting document with a grant or contract funding proposal
- Requirement for annual review by your employer
- Requirement during application process for membership in a professional organization
- Background statement for an introduction to an important convention presentation
- May accompany a portfolio.

Getting Started:

Begin your Vita preparation by brainstorming. List everything that you can imagine could be included—both your educational and professional history—being careful not to overlook anything. Once you feel you have covered everything, you will decide what to include and what to exclude. Write a draft and experiment with format and relevant information.

Depending on your reader, your vita will change somewhat. It is important to keep up-to-date information on hand so you may adapt your Vita to new situations. It is suggested that you update your information at least once a year, preferably monthly.
The following are essential when putting together a resume or Vita:

Consistency: do not mix categories and dates
Clarity: make your presentation clear and concise
Conciseness: summarize and highlights.

Tips:

A Vita should not include: sex, age, height, weight, marital status, dependents, race, ethnic background or religion.

Form and Style:
Although there are no set rules or prescribed formats for a vita, below are some simple suggestions to follow when putting together a Vita.

Outside Readers/Critics:
Have people proof your Vita. Reviewers form impressions quickly. Several suggestions for selecting proofreaders include:

A professional person who knows you well enough to spot any significant information you may have left out
A professional person who does not know you well and will read critically
A hiring personnel officer you know

Other things to Include in your Vita:

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<td>Works in Progress</td>
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</table>
STEVEN L. SAMPLE  
384 Elkton Rd.  
Newark, DE 19711  
Home Phone: (302)555-9393  
Work Phone: (302)-5555-3838  
Sls@udel.edu

**Education**

May, 2003  Ph.D. in Biological Science, University of Delaware, Newark, DE  
Dissertation: Impact of Blood Transfusion Therapies on Renal Activity  
Thesis Advisor: Jane Telford, PhD.  

May, 1995  Bachelor of Science in Microbiology, Boston College, Boston, MA  
Cum Laude.

**Research Experience**

2002  Research Fellow, Renal Research Laboratory  
National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive Kidney diseases  
Identified mutations in proteins as definers of potential mutation to phenotype processes  

June, 1999-  Research Associate, Kidney Transplant Unit  
April 2002  National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD  
Studied halogenated hydrocarbons and their role in post-transplantation

July, 1998-1999  Research Assistant, Pediatric Nephrology Unit  
University of Pennsylvania Hospital, Philadelphia, PA  
Assessed pulmonary flow as a predictor of renal function.

**Teaching Experience**

September, 2001-  Biology Instructor, Biology 119, 203  
May, 2002  University of Delaware, Newark, DE  
Taught four sections of introductory and intermediate biology  

January-May  Teaching Assistant, Chemistry 120 Boston College, Boston, MA

**Honors and Awards**

2002  Summer Research Fellow, National Institute of Health  
2000-present  Jefferson Dissertation Fellowship, University of Delaware  
1999  Outstanding Young Researcher, National Nephrology Institute  
1997  Glen D. Anderson Award for Research on Pediatric Nephrology
Publications

“These are Your Kidneys,” Journal of Nephrology, Volume I, May, 2001

Skills

Microsoft Office (Word, PowerPoint, Access, Excel), HTML, SAS, Adobe PrintShop, Lotus I, II, III.

Fluent in German and Hunga

International Experience

2002 Travel to Greece, Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia and Indonesia
2000 Travel in France, Germany, and Italy
1999 Travel to South Africa, Egypt and Ethiopia
1994 Junior Year Abroad- Australia

Memberships

American Nephrology Association
Toastmasters
Cosmopolitan Club

Hobbies

Raising and showing award winning Golden Retrievers
Hydroponics

Community Service

2000-present Volunteer in Faith Church Soup Kitchen during winter months
1995-present Fundraiser for American Diabetes Association

References

Professor Arnold Conklin,
Biology Department
Wolf Hall
University of Delaware
Newark, DE 19716
(302) 555-0999
Conk@udel.edu

CV Sample taken from the University of Delaware Website
Interviewing for Graduate School
Questions to Ask at the Interview

Professional and graduate schools, like individuals, are very different -- in their philosophies, faculties, curricula, and type of students they attract. Consequently, selecting the "best" school for you can be very challenging. The following set of questions was compiled to help you in evaluating schools you will visit. This list is by no means complete; it was designed to serve as a basis for your own questions. Keep in mind that the interview represents an opportunity for you to learn.

- Are there opportunities for students to design, conduct, and publish their own research?
- Is there flexibility in the coursework (the number of electives) and the timing of the courses (accelerating, decelerating, and time off)?
- How do students from this school perform on licensing exams?
- What is the faculty-to-student ratio?
- Are there minors available or required?
- What's the retention rate?
- What is the average number of years that most Ph.D. candidates stay in the program?
- What kind of practicum/internship opportunities would I have? When would these begin?
- How are students evaluated academically?
- Is there a mentor/advisor system? Who are the advisors -- faculty members, other students, or both?
- How diverse is the student body?
- Tell me about the library, laboratory and extracurricular facilities (i.e., housing and athletic/recreational).
- Are there computer facilities available to students? Are they integrated into the curriculum?
- How successful are the graduates of this program in getting jobs? What kinds of jobs?
Money for Graduate School

Graduate students fund their education in a variety of ways. Grants and assistantships are based on financial need and do not need to be repaid. These awards may come in the form of stipends, salary or tuition remission. Find out more information by researching grants, assistantships, and resident assistantships at the institutions where you are applying.

http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/grad.phtml
http://www.fafsaonline.com/
http://www.arisnet.com/

If you choose to use a federal or private loan to help finance your education, both types of loans must be paid back once you graduate. Remember to keep in mind tuition costs and living expenses. Investigate both federal and private loans and review payment terms (interest rate, length of loan payments, etc.)

http://www.gradloans.com

Scholarships and fellowships are based on academic merit and do not need to be repaid. Research and apply for relevant scholarships and fellowships.

http://scholarships.kachinatech.com/scholars.html
http://www.nafadvisors.org/scholarships.htm
Grad School Info ONLINE

**Law School Information**
Tips from UNA’s Career Services Office. [http://www2.una.edu/career/JobSearch/LawSchool.html](http://www2.una.edu/career/JobSearch/LawSchool.html)
Skills, knowledge, and classes that law schools look for as well as tips on writing your personal statement and a calendar timeline.

**General Information**
Petersons: Education and Career Center. [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)
Contains comprehensive information on graduate school programs. Details application process. Specific programs or colleges can be researched through a keyword search. Online discussion and instant inquiries are available.

**Deciding and Applying**
Advice for Undergrads Considering Grad School. [http://www.jobweb.com/Resources/Library/Grad_School/default.htm](http://www.jobweb.com/Resources/Library/Grad_School/default.htm)
One professor’s detailed advice on deciding to attend graduate school. Focuses on personal qualities, goals, and what to expect.

Movin’ On: Tips About Graduate School. [http://staff.wm.edu/career/02/Student/Grad/Movin1.cfm](http://staff.wm.edu/career/02/Student/Grad/Movin1.cfm)
Provides advice about researching, evaluating, and choosing a school. Details important aspects of the application process. Addresses common concerns and questions. Suggests an application timetable.

Guide designed to stimulate creative thinking to increase possibilities of success in the graduate school admissions process.

Writing Central for Law, Medical, Business, Grad School Applicants. [http://accepted.com/default.aspx](http://accepted.com/default.aspx)
Specifies do’s and don’ts for writing application essays for Business, Law, Medical, or Graduate School.

**Admissions Tests**
AAMC: Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT)..... [www.aamc.org/](http://www.aamc.org/)
American Dental Association (DAT)..... [www.ada.org/](http://www.ada.org/)
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (VCAT)..... [http://aavmc.org/](http://aavmc.org/)
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (OAT)..... [www.opted.org/](http://www.opted.org/)
Graduate Management Admissions Council (GMAT)..... [www.gmat.org/](http://www.gmat.org/)
Graduate Record Examination (GRE)..... [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org)
Law School Admission Council (LSAT)..... [http://www.lsac.org/](http://www.lsac.org/)
Kaplan Grad Line..... [www.kaptest.com/](http://www.kaptest.com/)
GRE info including the Computer Adaptive Test

Test.com Inc..... [http://www.test.com](http://www.test.com)
online testing center

[http://www2.una.edu/career/jobsearch/gradschool.htm](http://www2.una.edu/career/jobsearch/gradschool.htm)