

# Grad School Guide



## Is Graduate School Right for You?

- Consider whether graduate school would help you achieve your professional goals.
  - ➔ How would a particular graduate degree help me achieve my goals? Refer to [mynextmove.org](http://mynextmove.org) for education requirements.
  - ➔ Do I have the interest, ability, and resources to be successful in a graduate program?
  - ➔ Are there other variables I need to consider? For example, family, geographic location, or current debt.

## Make Sure You Are Going for the Right Reasons

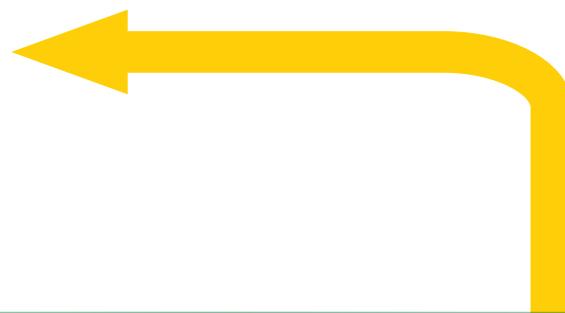
### Some of the WRONG REASONS:

- ▶ You don't think you can get a job or don't want to start looking.
- ▶ You have yet to find your true calling, so you'll stay in school until you do.
- ▶ Everyone else is doing it, so you think you should too.
- ▶ You can't figure out what to do with your undergraduate major.

### Some of the RIGHT REASONS:

- ▶ You need an advanced degree in order to practice your chosen profession (e.g., teaching, clinical psychology, law, medicine, etc.).
- ▶ You absolutely love what you're studying and want to explore it further.
- ▶ You want to make a contribution to the body of knowledge in your field through research.
- ▶ You need an advanced degree to advance your professional career.

In other words, **don't go just for the sake of going** to graduate school, or because you can't think of anything else to do. **Go because you are passionate** about something, and you have a topic of research or a set of skills that you want to develop further.



# Selecting Graduate Schools

- As a start, refer to [petersons.com](https://www.petersons.com) to begin exploring options.
- Things to consider when choosing a program/school:
  - ▶ Reputation of the program and institution and whether or not it is accredited in the field you're entering
  - ▶ Size, geographic location, type and availability of housing, community environment
  - ▶ Whether standardized tests like the GRE, MCAT, LSAT or GMAT are required
  - ▶ Financial aid opportunities, cost and residency requirements
  - ▶ Specialties and interests of the faculty (read their books and publications)
  - ▶ Departmental courses and offerings, flexibility of curriculum, and length of the program
- Talk with individuals who have knowledge of the field – faculty, deans, advisors, friends, alumni or counselors – to determine if and what type of advanced degree is needed.
- Visit institutions and interview, if possible.
- Attend graduate school open houses.

## Questions to ask any graduate program:

Can you tell me how most students fund their studies here?

Will I get to develop my own topics, or will I be expected to work on a professor's ongoing research?

What is the typical program duration?

What kind of student thrives in your program?

What is your attrition rate? Of those who don't finish, what are their reasons?

How can I be a strong candidate for a program like this?

# Applying

- **Plan ahead and manage your time well in the application process.**
- **Consider ahead of time what admission committees expect from an applicant.**
  - ▶ Familiarize yourself with the institutions' application processes.
  - ▶ What are common application components needed to qualify? ie: tests, essays, letters of recommendation, coursework, experience/hours in the field, resume/cv.
- **Letters of Recommendation:**
  - ▶ When requesting letters of recommendation, be sure to be clear about your goals and purpose. Provide a copy of your resume to references so they are better able to get an idea of your background and skills.
  - ▶ Allow the recommender ample time to complete the letter, and always follow up to ensure completion. Be sure to thank those who have written letters for you – a formal thank you note wouldn't go amiss.
- **Application Process:**
  - ▶ Follow the instructions carefully to ensure you are completing the application fully – heed word counts and questions asked.
  - ▶ Tailor your content to the specific aspects of the program, point out your affinity with their programming.
  - ▶ Complete the forms online whenever possible to ensure a neat and professional appearance.
  - ▶ Make sure to include all requested materials: resume, fees, personal statements, etc.
  - ▶ Always print or retain copies of the application for your records before sending.
- **Be aware of deadlines! It is imperative you research specific time requirements for **each** school. Financial aid deadlines are usually before academic application material. It is also important to check with each school to ensure all materials have arrived before deadlines.**

## 4 Great Ways to Stand Out in the Application Process

- ➔ **Contact the professors.**

Good ways to strike up conversation and draw attention to yourself are to ask for a clarification of the program offerings, comment on a recent publication, or propose an area for further study.
- ➔ **Visit the department.**

Make your own appointments with the professors, and make sure to confirm the appointment a day ahead of time. Send a thank you note afterward; this is sure to make a good impression.
- ➔ **Submit an outstanding work sample.**

Send in your best paper, lab, article or writing sample. Just make sure the sample is directly related to the program to which you're applying, and have a professor review the work sample first.
- ➔ **Submit a personal statement** that answers the questions asked, clearly shows your educational goals and successes, and reveals your "fit" with the institution's program.

# Sample Personal Statement Essays

## Sample **HUMANITITES** Graduate School Personal Statement

Two years ago, I was able to study abroad at the Sorbonne in Paris, France. Ironically enough, it was a French Literature class and an *explication de texte* which solidified my understanding of why English literature is so important to me and something I am compelled to explore further in graduate school. I found my approach is to stay close to the text and look for the structures holding the piece together. In this way, I have found my adherence to formalism blends with theoretical application to form my connection to exploring and analyzing the body of work exploding from English literature.

This approach has worked well since my time abroad, and I am working on two major projects tied to my senior thesis. One of the projects involves research on Samuel Clemmons (Mark Twain) and the writing he completed while living here in New York State. In the other project, I am working with a professor to explore mid-century American literature and its impact on social movement. Both projects have allowed me to look closely at texts, comb through historical documents connected with the texts, and seek out ancillary content to support potential theories on impact. In my time working on both endeavors, I have found common themes – war, and its effect on perspective, the dichotomy of men and women in the workplace, and the encroachment of technology on daily life, even in the early 20th century.

I have known for several years I want my graduate work to be in the field of English, but my double major in English and Sociology has enriched my approach. Additionally, my minor in Anthropology has connected me with alternative bodies of knowledge and theory. Twice my interest in anthropology has led me to study literature outside the European/American arena, both time with great personal satisfaction. As an example, I wrote a paper for *Introduction to Hebrew Scriptures*, which was an exegesis of Isaiah 65:17-25. I worked from the original Hebrew text since I had taken a course in biblical Hebrew and have a moderate level of reading comprehension of the language. I so appreciated the work I put into this project, and see myself applying my energies in similar manners with future work.

My two major projects this year – my thesis and my senior project – are related, as I explained above. I feel fortunate to have found the ties between the projects and I plan to continue studying late 19th and early 20th century literature in graduate school. However, I am also anticipating the widening of my base, stretching in new directions. Time and again, I have found the expansion of my studies only bolsters that which I have already explored. The continuum of the human experience, as reflected in the literature produced throughout various eras, is one which never becomes dull or overly predictable. Taking an academic approach to the literature provides the structure necessary to analyze, critique and draw conclusions from what is created.

My interest in your institution has grown out of conversations I have had with numerous people, including Dr. Alex Hikemian, who was part of your faculty before taking a position here at Le Moyne College. Dr. Hikemian noted your programs and how they would dovetail with my educational goals and philosophies. I also have read several papers given by your faculty, and I am excited by the potential to work with them on other explorations should I be admitted to your program. I have contacted these professors; they are aware of my application and interest. They encouraged me to apply and connect with them if I am accepted.

Your program offers a combination of coursework and faculty expertise which will only propel me further. This combination will provide the strong background I desire to shape my future research interests. I know I have the tools and the determination to excel in such a stimulating and challenging environment.

# Sample Personal Statement Essays

## Sample **LAW SCHOOL** Personal Statement

Growing up, I always knew I was different. Maybe the first time I noticed it was in kindergarten, when the other girls asked to touch my hair. Or perhaps it was in fourth grade, when my friends laughed because the school photographer had to keep retaking my picture because he thought I was blinking. Maybe the first time was in sixth grade, when a classmate asked our teacher if I would be considered her slave while we studied the Civil War. Recognizing how beautiful my differences are was a long process, but one that made me realize why I want to practice environmental law. I am not a Muslim. I am a Catholic. I am not an immigrant. I am a third generation Asian American woman. I am the daughter of a single mother. I am a political science and communications student. These factors of my identity inspire me to pursue environmental law, because I know I can utilize them to create change on a level that will affect many issues I am passionate about.

One current issue I am intellectually and personally fascinated by is immigration; this is why I chose to write about Executive Order 13769, titled Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States, or more commonly known as the Muslim Travel Ban, for my senior Integral Honors thesis. The Integral Honors Program at Le Moyne offers members the opportunity to earn the highest academic distinction that Le Moyne College confers upon its graduates. Select classes are required, in addition to the regular curriculum of the college and students' respective majors. Students are required to create their own interdisciplinary honors thesis project under the guidance of a professor-mentor, which after a yearlong process will culminate in my final defense and a public presentation of the thesis project at Le Moyne's Scholars Day at the end of the spring semester.

When I first brainstormed for my thesis, I knew I wanted to draw from my experience of having so many contradictory – and non-stereotypical – elements that make up my identity. Researching and writing about the Muslim Ban would offer the perfect opportunity for me to explore my past, my identity, and my future intentions. This summer, I confirmed the legitimacy of my concept when I had the privilege of meeting Verna Eggleston of Bloomberg Philanthropy, and her words will continue to ring true as I pursue my research: "We need a new word for 'empower.' Empowerment implies you have power to give, and that you will give your power to another, making you both powerfully equal." When I watched clips of those affected by the Muslim Ban being stopped at New York City's JFK airport, and how lawyers whom they had never met before fought to help them, I saw empowerment as Eggleston defines it; I saw those lawyers devote their time and energy to immigrants who never asked, but were given power.

I want to be able to create change in the numerous areas that interest and affect me, including women's reproductive rights, immigration, climate change, and international poverty. Environmental law affects all of these respective areas, even if it be as intricate as ensuring primates in the Congo are kept free of diseases that could infect the water of pregnant women, or as basic as protecting rare breeds of animals. I know none of this can be done with just one job, so I aspire to work with nonprofits, firms, corporations, and the government. It was while attending Le Moyne that I recognized my responsibility to society. The first value Jesuit students are taught is the importance of becoming men and women for others, as we are all meant to serve one another to promote a just society. We are all meant to empower others, but in order to do this, we must participate in another Jesuit value: *cura personalis* – the care and development of the whole person, mind, body, and soul. Allowing ourselves to grow is the best way to help others. It is with this philosophy that we invoke a third Jesuit ideal: *magis* – constantly developing more. We are called to ask more of others and ourselves.

As students of a Jesuit education, we are called to integrate contemplation and action in order to cultivate our ethical values and adequately be able to serve others. Studying environmental law will allow me not only to exercise these Jesuit values extensively, but will challenge me to use them within contexts I have never experienced before. With my Jesuit background, I am therefore responsible for driving the power of the law to make a just and sustainable world through environmental law, while empowering others to do the same. I have educated myself with approximately 24 credits a semester, and loudly lobbied for the missions of Population Connection and The Borgen Project. I have validated my leadership skills at the New Leadership New York Conference by meeting with women to discuss how to move effectively forward as future lawyers and politicians. The joint degree program for a Juris Doctorate and Masters in Environmental Law and Policy at your institution – especially the legislative clinic, environmental law and natural resources clinic, and U.S.-Asia Partnerships for Environmental Law – creates a comprehensive curriculum which would allow me to apply my allocated skills as well as my Jesuit education, ensuring your institution's mission of law for the community and the world is fulfilled.

# Sample Personal Statement Essays

## Sample **MEDICAL SCHOOL** Personal Statement

Rushing past a patient slumped in her wheelchair, exhausted after her daily chemotherapy, I am brought to a halt when our eyes meet. All I see in her eyes is the unwavering will to live. In this moment, the affirmation of my work in cancer research became stronger. My daily walks from the research lab to the main hospital of Roswell Park cemented the justification for doing research: providing for the patient. During my time there, I began to understand the translation of research from lab to clinic results in more focused patient care. I could only provide for them indirectly, but I could go home every day with the satisfaction that my efforts may ultimately help people in need. The extraordinary insight that I gained at Roswell Park only furthers my aspirations: I will become a physician in order to offer primary care to those in need – for those slumped in wheelchairs. I will work with those determined to live another day.

I seek to become a physician, though I cannot ignore the relevance of research nor can I restrict my interest in it. For this reason, I intend to practice at a university hospital before settling into a rural area, allowing me to pursue my interests as both an MD and beyond as an inquisitive mind searching for answers in a lab. To understand research is to gain deeper understanding of why the medical field is as it is – to not engage or at least understand the intricacies of the process is a limitation to a physician. Research allows discovery; medical practice allows the application of knowledge discovered. Comprehensive medical care originates from a provider who can truly see the whole person from the microscopic to the macroscopic.

Curiosity is an essential trait for any professional, but in a field so volatile that cutting-edge techniques can be obsolete after five years, an innate drive to learn is a crucial characteristic for a physician. Whether it was late nights reading the Encyclopedia Britannica or a fascination with astronomy since elementary school, I have always sought to expand my mind. I have had the opportunity to travel the world to 25 different countries, which has resulted in a continual remodeling of my perspective. In one instance, while standing in Jerusalem amidst the holy sites of three major religions, I was moved by the spiritual power it held for all of its visitors. However, I was bothered when I recognized how uninformed I was about religions other than my own. As a result, I registered for a course on the Arabic language and culture for the next semester. Travel taught me at a young age there is so much that I am ignorant to. Instead of being content with this ignorance, I seek to learn as much as I can about the world around me. This primal hunger for knowledge is what gets me out of bed in the morning – my curiosity drives me to learn more every day.

A physician will encounter difficult questions, but the curious individuals are the ones who admit, “I don’t know,” and pursue the topic rather than projecting feigned expertise to the patient. I tend to have more questions than answers; I hope to continue to pursue answers through my own research and others as I serve patients. As a scientific field, medicine contains academic uncertainty, often resorting to “best option” or “low chance of risk” treatment options – neither of which have clear-lined outcomes. The more we immerse ourselves in the search for answers, the closer we come to finding them.

I have come to understand you can learn something from everybody. It is a humbling experience to provide for another person, but more so when you are a student of each individual. My formal medical education will just be starting, though I know it will never truly stop. From the flickering flames of vigor in the eyes of the patient I encountered last summer, I became a student of hers and, in the future, others. A will to live drives us all; I seek to provide for that drive in a respectful manner.

# Sample Personal Statement Essays

## Sample **SCIENCES** Graduate School Personal Statement

Realizing my undergraduate career will be ending, I find myself craving more. Rewind to the beginning of my undergraduate years, I selected biology as my major after a rash decision at my second visit to Le Moyne College. Knowing I loved science and wanted to engage both intellectually and physically in pushing the boundaries of the discipline, I decided to give biology a test that first semester with the idea of re-evaluating in December. It is safe to say my love of and connection to science has only grown since that first semester. Biology, chemistry, and environmental science have all created an engaged, enthusiastic learner in me. My biggest struggle has been narrowing my scientific passions, for fear of ruling out any one of my interests. Then, I took Anatomy and Physiology. From reading my textbook and searching pathologies from my own interest, to becoming fascinated with the complexity of our human bodies, I knew that biomedical science and all it offers as a field of research is the culmination of what I imagined for myself when all this began.

I am interested in graduate work because I still have an immense curiosity and intellectual investment in how our bodies work. I find the complex mechanisms through which our bodies function fascinating. I do not get energy from the idea of being a medical doctor; I feel research is my future. I have been engaged in two different biomedical research opportunities, and both have only further solidified my interests. I enjoy the scientific process, the idea I could be the first one to discover something new, and, ultimately, that my work may help heal someone.

To this end, I am interested in working in industry, possibly in the government for the National Institute of Health or Center for Disease Control, and after having an industry career I would enjoy teaching at a college or university. I have some teaching experience in Organic Chemistry and Anatomy and Physiology at Le Moyne. However, I would be interested in exploring other applications of my knowledge base in other science careers.

Throughout my undergraduate experience, I have gotten to know myself better as an academic. I found my strengths include time management and dedication to my studies. My weaknesses include my perfectionism and, at times, excessive dedication to my studies. Knowing this, I have worked these four years to achieve a balance between work, academics, and personal life.

I am in Le Moyne's Integral Honors Program and it has truly pushed me to become a stronger scholar. My integral honors thesis centers on the biomedical research project I am conducting at Le Moyne. The research explores the integration of exercise and muscle memory and how prolonged active periods affect muscular structure in mice. I am also in the biological honor society, Alpha Sigma Nu. I received the Vice President's Academic Scholarship all four years, and a McDevitt Student Research Fellowship in the Natural Sciences for the 2017-2018 academic year.

Your Biomedical Engineering program offers me an opportunity to extend my learning, delve further into my interests, and offer my insights and determination to expanding discoveries in the laboratory. Attending your university and being an integral part of your program will let me realize a life goal and, more importantly, be a springboard into my future. I am ready for this next step, the uncertainty I faced four years ago is gone. I approach graduate school with focus, energy to discover, and the flexibility to adapt.

# Financing Graduate School



**There are various ways to finance your graduate program.**

- **Fellowships and Grants:**

- ▶ These consist of outright awards usually requiring no service to the institution in return. Awarded on a competitive basis, grants vary in terms of monetary amount and length of funding.
- ▶ Explore institutional, private, and governmental fellowship opportunities. Do not limit your application to one type of grant – it may take several combined awards to completely fund your graduate education.

- **Graduate Assistantships:**

- ▶ Individual departments award general graduate, teaching and/or research assistantships. These awards usually carry full or partial tuition remuneration plus a stipend.
- ▶ The commitment normally involves a 10-20 hour per week workload comprised of teaching, tutoring, proctoring exams, developing lesson plans, and/or performing a variety of research activities.
- ▶ Competition for these awards is strong. Apply early and always submit a resume with your inquiry. If possible, visit the department and arrange a personal interview. Be aware of deadlines.
- ▶ Be sure to request assistantship information specifically at the time you request application materials.

- **Resident Assistantship:**

- ▶ These are a type of financial assistance in the form of residence assignments involving room, board and a stipend by working as managers in undergraduate residence halls.
- ▶ These opportunities may be the most financially supportive because some schools will also include tuition remuneration with the assignment.
- ▶ Inquire about these opportunities at the institution's residence life or student affairs office.

- **Loans:**

- ▶ Remember, most undergraduate loans can be deferred while you are a full-time graduate student.
- ▶ Most institutions have loan programs for graduate students including private, state and federally sponsored Guaranteed Student Loan opportunities.
- ▶ Explore GAPSFAS (Graduate and Professional School Financial Aid Service), offering low-interest loans and financial assistance to graduate students.

- **Employer Contributions:**

- ▶ If you are working, your employer may have supports in place to assist you in paying for graduate programs that might be required to gain tenure, certifications, etc.

- **Scholarships:**

- ▶ Be sure to inquire about special offerings at your institutions of choice.

# Timeline

**Please note: This is a general timeline and will not be appropriate for all graduate and professional schools. Please consult individual program sites for deadlines.**

- **First-, Second- and Third-Year Undergraduate**

- ▶ Many graduate schools examine applicants' grades from the last two years of undergraduate study. If your GPA isn't where you'd like it to be, now is the time to pull it up. They are also looking for campus and community engagement. Build your resume to make your application stronger.

- **Junior Year**

- ▶ Decide which areas interest you and start looking for programs that match your interests.
- ▶ Determine standardized test requirements and schedule your necessary entrance exams. You may want to take these tests as early as the spring semester of your junior year to get them out of the way, so you can spend your fall semester senior year filling out applications and working on writing samples without having to worry about test preparation. Practice for the exams.
- ▶ Make note of **all** deadlines; organize them into a calendar so you don't forget.

- **Senior Year (Fall)**

- ▶ Write a draft of your personal statement early so you have time to give yourself distance from it before you revise. Finalize your personal statement by the fall semester, and have it critiqued by a faculty member and/or someone from the Office of Career Advising and Development.
- ▶ Obtain transcripts from all of your post-secondary education, including an up-to-date transcript for your current institution, as well as transcripts from any study-abroad programs or other institutions that transferred credits.
- ▶ Request reference letters from faculty and supervisors; give them all the information and computer links they need to provide a complete reference.
- ▶ Fill out your applications. Take your time, read directions carefully, and check your applications multiple times to make sure they are complete and error-free. Have someone proofread them as well; an extra set of eyes can catch mistakes you missed.

- **Senior Year (Spring)**

- ▶ Fill out GAPS FAS if you plan to apply for financial aid. (You'll need your prior year's income tax return to complete this form.)
- ▶ Once you make a decision, notify the school of your acceptance. As a courtesy, inform the other schools that you are declining their offers.
- ▶ If you will be relocating for graduate school, start researching housing options in your new location. Find out if your school offers assistance with housing or pairing graduate students with roommates.