

## **Department of Political Science Guide to Graduate Study**

For some students, a successful and rewarding undergraduate experience studying Political Science can lead to thoughts of pursuing a graduate degree. What follows is a short guide to help you weigh whether graduate studies in Political Science might be for you. It illustrates the basics of what is involved in applying to graduate programs by covering the following:

- Opportunities open to those who earn graduate Political Science degrees;
- Personal issues to consider when deciding whether to pursue a graduate degree;
- Qualifications needed to be a strong applicant;
- Tips on deciding where to apply and how to identify prospective programs;
- Do's and Don'ts of the application process;
- Deciding where to attend once you have been accepted;
- Frequently asked questions by students applying for graduate school;
- Additional resources to support your application.

We strongly encourage you to discuss your plans with the Department's Graduate School Advisor, your own advisor, and with other members of the Political Science faculty who can provide you with more specific advice and guidance. Make use of the additional resources noted within and at the end of this guide.

### **Why graduate school?**

There are many reasons to consider pursuing graduate education in Political Science. In past times, those who sought a Master's or Ph.D. in Political Science had designs on a career as a political scientist -- a scholar engaged in research, writing and teaching about politics at the university or secondary level. Many still seek more schooling for that reason. Such a career can lead you to contribute substantive and theoretical insights in your particular field of interest (e.g. American politics, international relations, public administration/public policy, comparative politics) and lend important service to the communities you reside in as a teacher, advisor, and decision-maker. Faculty in the Political Science Department have chosen this path for themselves and you should feel free to explore this option with them if you are interested.

Today, however, not all graduate students in Political Science aspire to be scholars or to teach. Many seek work in

- Government agencies (local, state, federal)
- National or international organizations
- Think tanks or political organizations

any of which may be addressing questions of domestic public policy or foreign affairs, conducting survey research, managing campaigns, administering aid or helping to establish democratic processes overseas. Many who are working on executive or congressional staffs, in professional or international agencies, or in the upper echelons of a research institute (e.g. the Brookings Institution) have previously earned a Master's or Ph.D. degree.

Increasingly too,

- Private businesses
- Consulting firms
- Banks
- Community and non-profit agencies
- The media

value job applicants with graduate degrees in Political Science, Public Administration, International Studies, or another complimentary field. Applicants with graduate degrees can sometimes attain higher or more prestigious levels of employment in these settings or may be uniquely qualified for new jobs emerging.

Just as there are many kinds of careers that value applicants with graduate degrees, so too there are different kinds of graduate degrees offered by Political Science departments. These include:

Master of Political Science	Ph.D. in Political Science
Master of International Studies	Ph.D. in International Studies
Master of Public Administration (MPA)	Ph.D. in Public Administration (DPA)
Master of Public Policy	Ph.D. in Public Policy Analysis
Master of International Management (MIM)	Master of Planning
Master of Public Management (MPM)	Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT)
Master of Urban Policy or Planning (MUP)	

Joint Degrees in Political Science/International Affairs and Law or Political Science and Business or Political Science and Public Health (others also exist)

Not all schools offer all degrees and different kinds of degrees are appropriate for different kinds of career goals. These are issues to consider as you think about whether to pursue graduate school.

There are lots of reasons to consider going to graduate school and many opportunities afforded by earning a Political Science graduate degree. One of the most important first steps in the process of applying is determining whether and what kind of graduate education is most appropriate for your interests.

### **What to think about when considering graduate studies**

It is a myth to think that students need to know exactly what they want to do before they consider attending graduate school – most who earn graduate degrees change their minds about their futures sometime during the process of study. That being said, graduate school is not for everyone and it is particularly not the place to begin developing a sense of your future direction. You should have a clear understanding of what you want to do with your career and how earning a graduate degree will help you reach your goal before you apply.

There are at least two reasons to possess some concrete idea of why you want to continue your studies and how a graduate degree might further your future plans. First,

- Graduate school is a significant investment of time and potentially money on your part.

Once you enroll, you are typically committing yourself to anywhere from two to five or more years of schooling (depending on whether you seek a Master's or a Ph.D. degree) and spending many thousands of dollars in the process. Given your own goals, there may be less time consuming and less expensive ways to chart a course for your future than earning a graduate degree.

Beyond that, a good graduate program is not an extension of an undergraduate experience, especially a liberal arts experience.

- Graduate education is specialized training and it is intense.

Your first years (both for Master's and Ph.D.) will entail thorough reading and study (typically 500 pages or more a week), attending weekly small seminar classes, and a great deal of writing. Your graduate education is based on self-motivation and the emphasis is on pursuing independent original research; you are not passively attending lecture classes and completing occasional assignments as in many undergraduate classes. In addition to acquiring substantive and theoretical knowledge in fields of political science, you will likely be obtaining discreet skills in language and statistical analysis as part of your program of study. As you matriculate, you will take comprehensive written and oral exams based in different fields you have studied; passing these exams is often part of qualifying you to begin writing a Master's thesis (if a program requires one) or doctoral dissertation, which themselves can take a year or more to research and write. Graduate students often have the opportunity to work closely with faculty and support them in teaching or research by serving as teaching assistants (TAs) or research assistants (RAs). It is also typically expected that graduate students begin presenting their scholarly research at professional meetings and start

publishing articles.

Thus, the level of work a reputable graduate program demands will test your commitment to the endeavor quickly. If you do not know why you are pursuing graduate education, you are not going to want to do what a good program requires, even if you possess the skills necessary to do the work.

**Have a clear idea of how graduate education fits into your future plans, one you can clearly articulate to others, before you consider applying.** Consider whether now is the time to pursue a graduate education or whether there are advantages to waiting (more on this below). You will know, in a sense, when it is time for you to seriously pursue graduate school. It may be that the moment emerges as you are completing your undergraduate years; for others, it may not come until a year or even five years after graduating from college. Graduate schools will be there when you are ready. There are lots of reasons to take whatever time you need to decide whether or not it is the path for you.

### **What qualifications are necessary?**

First and foremost, graduate political science programs are looking for students with strong skills and impressive academic undergraduate records. Your final two years of full-time study and your record in your major course work are especially important (typically you should have a B or better average in these areas to merit serious consideration). Poor performance in your early years as an undergraduate or in the occasional class does not disqualify you from consideration but it does not help your chances. The stronger your overall academic record, the better your chances for admission.

A second important element in any application is your score on the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) or any other standardized test a program may require for admission. Although schools recognize that such tests are not perfect instruments for measuring one's abilities, they are the one common experience that all applicants share and the scores are evaluated seriously. Programs generally advertise the range of scores they expect an applicant to have (usually somewhere above the 80<sup>th</sup> or 90<sup>th</sup> percentile, depending on the program). You can learn more about such tests below.

There are additional factors that can lend support to your application. Being active in student organizations (especially those of a political nature), foreign language skills, internships or overseas educational experiences, student honors are among the extras that can augment your candidacy for graduate school. For many programs, including those offering more professional or applied degrees, internship and job experience can be a significant plus. These will not make up for a weak academic record or poor test scores but sometimes such intangibles can give your application a valuable boost.

In addition, do not underestimate the importance of your ability to clearly articulate why you want to attend graduate school and your own enthusiasm for graduate study. Your personal statement on the application may be a place to express that.

### **Deciding where to apply**

One of the most helpful tools in identifying graduate programs that might be right for you is the *American Political Science Association Guide to Graduate Faculty and Programs in Political Science*. This publication lists over 300 Ph.D. and M.A. programs in Political Science based in the U.S. and Canada and contains information on program specializations, tuition and financial aid, admissions and degree requirements, and roster faculty and their areas of specialization. It is revised every few years and is available for purchase from the American Political Science Association ([www.apsanet.org](http://www.apsanet.org)). A current copy is available in the department office. There are other guides available that list Political Science graduate programs among many others (ex. Peterson's Guide) and there are guides that detail graduate programs in fields related to Political Science (ex. *The Guide to Graduate Education in Urban and Regional Planning*, *The Guide to Graduate Environmental Programs*). Other such resources are identified below. Search out or ask about guides that might highlight the kinds of programs that most interest you.

Whether you use these guides or other tools (such as recommendations from faculty, peers), it is important to carefully research the graduate programs you are considering. You want to look particularly at specializations highlighted, courses offered, and who is present to teach these courses. You also want to look for particular faculty you might be interested in working with as a graduate student. Remember that no program does everything well; different programs have different strengths and weaknesses. You want to apply to programs that possess the kinds of opportunities you are most interested in and that have faculty present who teach and do research in the substantive areas you wish to pursue. For example, if you want to focus on international organizations or American electoral behavior, you want to apply to programs where these fields are considered strengths in their curriculum and where good, engaged people are teaching and mentoring graduate students in your area of interest. Asking your professors about these programs, as well as looking on your own at the scholarly work of those teaching in a program, investigating placement rates for graduates and learning where they are working, can give you some initial insights into these issues.

Once you have started to compile a preliminary list of schools to consider, deepen your research. Contact programs and ask them for information and application materials (either in writing or via the web). Contact programs as early as possible (ideally for a fall admission, you should be contacting schools one full year ahead of time). Look over this information carefully and think about it not only in terms of whether the program offers what you desire but also whether you can imagine yourself attending this school. Consider not only the strength and quality of a program but also its location. You will be living wherever you attend school and quality of life issues matter when considering graduate school. Do not be reticent to call graduate directors of programs you develop an interest in and ask them questions when they arise. An expression of interest can often be helpful later in the process. In addition, the schools's helpfulness and its willingness to meet with you and tell you about their program is one indicator of the degree of effort they will make on your behalf as a student and as a graduate of their program. If you are in the area of a program you are interested in, arrange a visit (more on visiting below). Another valuable step in trying to decide which schools may have what you want is to look up and read the scholarly work of faculty teaching in your areas of interest. If you are captivated by what you read and can imagine taking classes with these people on some of these topics (or even perhaps serving as a research assistant for their work), this may help identify a potential program to consider seriously.

With a stronger list of schools developed, prioritize your choices along at least two criteria:

- Which programs you most want to attend; and
- Which programs you feel your chances of admission are best.

Typically, one's final lists of schools range from five to eight possibilities (but applying to graduate school can be expensive since each application will charge you a processing fee -- often \$50.00 or more -- so do what is economically prudent for you as well). Hopefully, there is significant overlap between your lists; but even if that is not the case, you should now be ready to embark on the application process.

### **Application procedures – Do's and Don'ts of applying**

Every graduate school application is a little different in terms of what you must provide. There are some staples of the process, however.

- You will need to request official undergraduate transcripts of your grades from all the institutions you attended (xerox copies won't do);
- You will need letters of recommendations from faculty (and depending on the program, maybe others) who know your work well;
- You will need to have taken the GRE or some other required standardized test and have your scores sent to your prospective schools;
- You will need to identify a writing sample to send to schools which ask for one;

- You will need to put some thoughtful effort into preparing the application itself, including any personal statements or essays you might be required to write.

Give yourself plenty of time to prepare collect and materials; applying can be a time consuming process. In addition:

- Respect all deadlines attached to applications and plan ahead so that you are sure your materials will arrive comfortably before any deadline. Many programs set deadlines of February 1 for all materials to be submitted but this can vary from program to program (some can be as early as December and deadlines for fellowship/assistantship consideration can be earlier than overall deadlines). Being late is an easy way for a program to immediately disqualify you from consideration, especially if they are looking for ways to shrink their applicant pools;
- Try to visit schools you are serious about potentially attending. Talk with graduate directors, sit in on a class, talk with current or recently graduated students (away from the earshot of faculty) and get as clear an impression of the place as you can so you know what it is you are asking to be a part of. You can visit a program before, during, or after you have applied;
- Choose professors who know you and your work well to be the ones writing your letters of recommendation. Usually this will mean people you have had more than one course with but you may have established a close connection with a professor in one class and worked extensively in their presence, which would make them an appropriate choice to write a letter on your behalf. Do not choose your letter writers on the sole basis of what grade you earned in their class; those who know you best (and can write the most effective letters for you) may not always be the ones who gave you the highest grades. Ask professors in person if they will write you letters. Only include letters written by people from work or internship experiences if applications specifically call for them -- often these letters are not appropriate for graduate school consideration;
- Give your recommendation letter writers plenty of notice that you will need letters (a month or more) and be clear about deadlines you are working under. Writing such letters can be very time consuming and these often come at very busy times of the year; you will get more thoughtful letters if you are considerate of writer's time constraints. Provide your letter writers with information on your school accomplishments and your future plans so they can incorporate this into their letters;
- Letter writers often appreciate it if you have acknowledged their work with a thank you note and a follow-up letting them know where you have been admitted and where you are going to attend school;
- Take any standardized tests in plenty of time for scores to come through and for you to retake a test if you need to raise your performance level. Although you are permitted to retake many of these standardized tests to improve your scores, it is always better for your application prospects to get your necessary scores the first time (it is also cheaper to take these exams only once);
- PREPARE for standardized tests, either on your own or through an organized class setting (like those offered by the College's Center for Student Learning or a Kaplan course). Much of what is entailed in succeeding on such tests involves being comfortable with the exam format and anticipating the kinds of questions, processes you are going to face (this is especially true if the test is on-line and you are not accustomed to such an experience);
- Treat any essay assignment or personal statement on the application as you would an important college paper assignment (that is, write drafts and prepare your work carefully). Committees typically look for essays that have a focus and evident message; they are more impressed by a clear, concise and carefully written essay that responds directly to their questions than one that recounts your life story or is filled with many aspects of your disparate philosophy. Have others proofread or critique your work to be sure that it is as strong as it can be. DO NOT have anyone write your work for you;

- Disclose any relevant issues you are asked about in your application (academic offenses, arrests, convictions). Schools will often discover these issues on their own; the failure to disclose is very often more serious than the offense itself. Err on the side of full disclosure. If you are in doubt, you can always say something to the effect that “Although I believe that disclosure of this incident is not required by your application, in the spirit of full disclosure ....”
- Proofread all communications with the program (letters, essays, email messages) yourself. Spelling or grammatical errors cast doubt on your seriousness and skills even before your application is comprehensively evaluated;
- Try to apply to at least three programs and be strategic in where you apply. Pick from programs you want to attend and where your prospects for admission are strong. Select at least one program where you feel your chances of admission are excellent so you know you will have at least one option at the end of the process. At the same time, do not be afraid to aim high. If there are programs you really want to attend but they are a stretch, consider applying anyway. Remember, the worst anyone can tell you in this process is “NO”;
- Apply for any and all assistantship or fellowship opportunities that you might remotely qualify for. Fellowships and assistantships often offer tuition credits and living stipends to defer some of the costs of study. In addition, these awards typically entitle you to work closely with graduate faculty in the classroom or in support of their own research and carry a measure of prestige to the recipient. Thus, they are valuable both in monetary terms and as an enhanced educational opportunity. Apply for everything; remember, the worst anyone can tell you in this process is “NO”;
- Remember, the worst anyone can tell you in this process is “NO” and “NO” is never the end of the world. You should also not regard “NO” as a negative judgment of you and who you are. Graduate admissions processes are complicated on the acceptance end and any rejections may have more to say about the state of a program than about you. For example, every graduate program limits the number of students it accepts each year. Depending on what has occurred in past years at a particular program, the size of any year’s acceptance pool can be very limited and many strong candidates are rejected. Always feel free to ask a program why you have been rejected.

### **Deciding where to attend**

Once you have been informed that you have been admitted to a program, you will generally receive notification of the deadline by which you must communicate your acceptance of their offer. Typically, you should hear from schools by April 15 and you are not expected to have made a decision until this date, so do not feel pressure to let a school know of your choice until you are sure. In the best of all worlds, if you have applied to several programs, you may be admitted to many or all and have some choices to make. The most important truism to keep in mind at this juncture is that nobody can tell you where to attend; that decision is yours and is a very personal choice. The optimal place for one person may well not be the best place for someone else. There are some considerations you should weigh carefully as you choose, however. These can include:

- *Whether you have received an assistantship or fellowship offer from one or more programs.* Such offers generally include a break on tuition and the chance to work closely in some capacity with faculty in the program. As such, you are part of the elite in the pool of accepted students and these opportunities can really enrich your graduate experience. The more money you receive, the more important you are to the program. If you have received money offers from one or more schools, you can negotiate with other programs -- often these awards can be increased if a program is really interested in you;
- *If you visited a school, the kind of impression you had of the program and of the people who are a part of it.* The observations you make in a site visit and the lasting sense it leaves you with are important barometers;
- *Whether cost of a program is an issue for you.* You want to be mindful of how much debt you might incur

while in graduate school because debt can follow you for some time depending on how much you owe and what kind of job you work after earning your graduate degrees;

- *What kind of job placement record a program has.* Some programs do a better job of placing their graduates in positions than others and that should weigh in a decision. Do not be afraid to ask what they do and where their graduates are working. If programs can produce statistics of where their graduates have gone, that is a sign they are concerned but do not be reticent to probe what their numbers mean;

Once you make a decision, it is standard practice to consider this choice binding for the coming school year. You should not accept offers from multiple schools or take an offer of aid from a second institution after accepting another admission. Remember, however, that long term you can revisit your decision to attend a particular program. Many students attend one school to earn a Master's degree and another for a Ph.D. should they decide to take their education that far. Do not blow the choice you make out of proportion. Often, it is possible to defer acceptance to the program you want to attend for a year's time if, in the interim between applying and accepting, other opportunities have emerged or life circumstances have changed.

If, on the other hand, you are rejected by a program you really want to attend, consider contacting the graduate director and asking about whether it is worth reapplying and what you can do to make any future application more attractive. If you have been accepted by a program but offered no assistantship or fellowship money, do not be hesitant to ask about future prospects here too. No offer now does not necessarily mean no offer ever.

## Frequently asked questions

- **What can I do with a graduate degree in Political Science that I cannot do with my undergraduate degree?**

The short answer is, it depends. You should look before you leap into a graduate program. There are many job opportunities in the public, private and non-profit sectors that students with undergraduate Political Science degrees are well qualified to attain without more schooling, so your impulse should not be to pursue graduate studies just because you think you will need another degree to get a job. However, many positions in these different sectors can require more than a B.A. in Political Science and, in other cases, advanced salary increases and promotions may be tied in part to more schooling. Certainly, if you want to teach Political Science at the college level, an advanced degree is typically required (but teaching politics at the secondary level often does not require such a degree, only a teaching certification). Do not assume that getting started on your chosen career requires a Master's degree -- know why you want to pursue graduate studies before you begin the process of applying.

- **How do I determine whether I need a graduate degree to do what I want to do?**

The best way to identify whether you need a graduate degree in order to pursue your career goals is to talk with people in your chosen field. Ask them how they came to do what they do and what role earning a graduate degree played in their plan. If graduate study is vital, be sure to ask whether it is better to start school quickly or attain some practical experience first. Many times firms or agencies will hire you and then help put you through school. Explore whether such possibilities exist in your field.

- **When should I consider obtaining a graduate degree – right after undergraduate school or later?**

This is largely a matter of personal preference that should be guided in large part by your career goals. However, there are factors to consider on both sides of the equation. Going to school earlier rather than later can be an advantage in that you are accustomed to being a student (and presumably have momentum – take any ideas of burnout seriously, however), your study skills are sharp, you may have fewer obligations in life, and your desired job may require an advanced degree even for “entry-level” positions. However, there are important reasons to wait a few years before going to graduate school. You can often know your career goals better by working in the field for a while first, you can gain some financial footing before going back to school, you can bring broader world experiences to your study, and you may find that an employer will pay for some or all of your graduate school expenses. In addition, if you did not have as strong an academic career as an undergraduate, working a few years in a field related to your desired graduate degree can enhance your application. Some degrees even require a few years of work experience before they will accept students.

- **What is the difference between pursuing a Master's degree and a Ph.D.? Which should I pursue?**

Both degrees are pursuits in specialized study of a subject. Typically, a Master's degree can be completed in two years time, whereas a Ph.D. is usually four or more years, so the depth of study between the degrees obviously varies. Generally, students pursuing a Ph.D. in Political Science have in mind a career as an academic or some other professional position that they know requires a doctoral degree. While some Master's degree programs are designed to start students on the road to a Ph.D., others have more practical application orientations and are designed as much for professionals (or aspiring professionals) in government, the private sector or the non-profit world who need or desire more training for their careers as they are for aspiring doctoral candidates. Thus, selecting a Master's degree program appropriate for your goals can be an important decision – not all programs emphasize the same directions. It is also often good advice to think first in terms of earning a Master's degree (whatever your goals) before you seriously consider committing yourself to a Ph.D.

- **If I want them both, do I have to earn a Master's Degree and a Ph.D. from the same institution?**

No, in fact many people earn their Master's degree at one institution and move to another to complete their Ph.D. Others choose to earn both their Master's and Ph.D. degrees from the same institution. It is a matter of personal choice. For example, you will want to consider whether your interests have changed during your Master's curriculum in ways that make a separate Ph.D. program more attractive. Sometimes (but not always), switching schools can require additional time to complete a degree. There are number of factors to consider. On the whole, however, it is not a good idea to earn all your degrees (undergraduate and graduate) from the same institution.

- **What advantages and disadvantages accompany starting a graduate program in the spring rather than the fall?**

Many graduate programs only admit students once a year and expect all to officially start their studies in the fall term, so this question often does not apply. However, there are programs which do admit a small pool of students to begin class work in the spring. For some, such an opportunity fits well with their personal timetables (for example, starting graduate school immediately following a December graduation) and accepting a spring admission is a point of personal preference. However, at least two questions should be carefully explored before starting a graduate program in the spring. First, does the program require some courses to be taken sequentially? If it does, starting in the spring may well put you "off-sequence" and require you to spend half a year or more getting "in sync". Second, how large is an incoming spring class and does the program orient incoming spring students as extensively as it does its students in the fall? Much of what is most valuable about graduate study is working with and learning from other students in the program, especially those who enter a program with you. If you are among the only students starting in a spring term and there is no extensive orientation, your capacity to bond with students who begin in the fall can be limited. Those who started the previous fall have already started establishing ties and you will be seen as a "senior" student like all others by the next incoming class. Treat any notions of a possible spring admission with great care.

- **Where have recent College of Charleston Political Science majors done graduate work and what have they done when they have finished?**

Department graduates have recently been admitted to a variety of institutions, including Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, George Washington University, University of Florida, University of Maryland, Northern Illinois University, Florida State, University of Tennessee, Duke University, the University of South Carolina, and the University of North Carolina. Some who have earned graduate degrees have gone on to careers teaching Political Science, while others are working in government agencies and international organizations like Doctors Without Borders.

- **What does a typical Political Science graduate seminar entail?**

Graduate seminars in Political Science typically meet once a week (often in the late afternoon or evening) for three hours. They consist of directed and often wide ranging, substantive discussions of readings, writing completed outside of class or discussions of research that students in the class are conducting. There is rarely any lecture in a class session. As a student, you are expected to have completed all the assigned work ahead of time (it will be painfully obvious if you are not prepared) and to participate actively in the dynamics of all class sessions. You are held responsible for understanding material on your own and making substantive contributions to class discussions. Faculty are present to guide and often provoke discussion.

- **What kinds of questions should I consider asking if I visit graduate programs?**

Here are just a few sample issues you might consider asking questions about:

On **Funding and Support** for graduate students: Do students compete for funding? Do I serve as a teaching or research assistant during all the years I receive funding? Does the program provide students with summer support? Does the program provide support for graduate students to attend professional

conferences? In what other ways can graduate students earn money?

On the **Curriculum**: Are there a lot of required courses? Do students take courses in other departments? Do students take courses during all their years in graduate school? Will you offer courses in my main fields of interest every semester? Will the roster faculty be the instructors for these courses? What is the range of summer course offerings? How do comprehensive exams work in the program?

On **Teaching** (if applicable to the programs you are considering): Are students able to teach their own courses? Is there a required course in the program designed to help graduate students learn how to teach? At what point in their program of study do students typically teach? What percentage of graduate students in your program go out on the job market with teaching experience?

On **the Program Generally and Finding a Job**: How long does it typically take students in the program to earn a Master's, Ph.D.? How have your students fared on the job market? What kinds of jobs have your graduates gotten recently? How strong is your graduate student alumni network? What are the future plans for growing, shrinking the program? Do you intend to hire new faculty in the time I will be in graduate school? What is the department's status in the Political Science community?

- **What timetable should I plan to follow when applying for schools?**

For a fall admission, consider the following calendar as a suggestive guide:

- Twelve to fifteen months before you plan on starting graduate school (**May-July of year before entry**), begin looking into programs and writing away for information. Begin preparing for the GRE if you have not already taken it;
- **September** – talk with professors about graduate school possibilities and what specific programs might be best for you based on your search. Find out when the GRE is being offered and whether programs you are considering require you to take any other standardized test for admission;
- **October** – identify the graduate programs you intend to apply to and begin collecting admission forms. Decide who you want to have write letters on your behalf and contact them in person if you have not already. Take the GRE if you have not already;
- **November-December** – apply to the graduate programs you have selected.
- **March-April** – You will begin to hear from graduate programs by this time. Remember that typically, you should wait to hear from all before making a decision and that decisions do not really need to be made before April 15. It is your right to wait until that date and weigh any offers you may have.

- **Beyond this guide and the resources mentioned in it, what else is out there that might help me?**

For resources at the College of Charleston, consider: the **Center for Student Learning** ([www.cofc.edu/~csl](http://www.cofc.edu/~csl)) includes information on standardized tests and many other resources helpful to graduate school applicants. These resources are typically free to students attending the College of Charleston.

Information on graduate programs at the College of Charleston can be found at <http://univchas.cofc.edu>. The College's Master of Public Administration (MPA) and Master of Environmental Studies (MES) Programs also have their own web sites accessible through this page or by going to <http://www.cofc.edu/~puba> (MPA), <http://www.cofc.edu/~environ> (MES)

For information on the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), including test dates, test centers, consult

<http://www.gre.org> The Prometric Testing Center administers the GRE (and other post graduate exams locally) and offers some test preparation. It can be accessed through <http://www.sylvanprometric.com>

The federal government offers a free application for federal student aid accessible through <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>

In addition to the guides to graduate programs mentioned above, an on-line listing of public policy and political science departments can be found at <http://www.epn.org/links/pollinks.html> A guide to graduate schools on-line can be found at [www.graduateguide.com](http://www.graduateguide.com)

More general advice on searching for graduate schools can be found at <http://www.wooster.edu/career/gradschoolhandout.html> Another guide to graduate education in print is by Lingua Franca, The Real Guide to Graduate School (Contentville Press); information is accessible through [www.linguafranca.com/realguide](http://www.linguafranca.com/realguide)

For those considering graduate school in order to pursue a career in academia, The Chicago Guide to Your Academic Career: A Portable Mentor For Scholars From Graduate School through Tenure by John Goldsmith, John Komlos and Penny Shine Gold (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) may be of interest.