Graduate study in the Arts

Graduate study in the arts is generally undertaken in one of two major discipline areas - art/fine arts and art history, or applied arts and design. Study in art/fine arts includes training in painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, film, video, craftmaking, theater, music, dance, creative writing, and art history and criticism. Study in applied arts and design includes training in graphic and computer art, illustration, architecture and landscape architecture, art advertising, environmental, interior, fashion, ceramic, industrial and product design, art and music therapy, and in music or arts education.

Although Ph.D. degrees are awarded in such areas as art history and criticism, theatre, environmental design, musicology and photography, most art and design program graduates are awarded a Master of Arts (M.A.) or Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.). The M.F.A. is a "professional" degree for students seeking advanced education prior to becoming practicing artists, creative writers or designers. Considered the terminal graduate degree in many arts fields, the M.F.A. typically requires two or three years of study. The M.A., on the other hand, is usually a "liberal arts" degree with less emphasis on practice and requires one to two years of study. The Masters of Music (M.M.), the Doctor of Music (D.M.), and the M.S. are some other degrees awarded in the arts.

Masters and doctoral program graduates are prepared to make significant contributions to the world of fine and performing arts. However, their professional success depends almost entirely on their drive, talent and creativity. For this reason masters programs often require the completion of an original piece or body of work (e.g., a play, a collection of fine or applied art, a film or video, a musical composition). Therefore, a very important criterion for admission to most graduate programs in the arts (excluding art history, other non-studio and performing fields) is a sampling or portfolio of the best of an applicant's own original work. Applicants for performing arts are typically required to audition.

WHERE TO GET INFORMATION ABOUT GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Directories in Print and Online
Consult Peterson's Guides to Graduate Study, the Directory of MFA Programs in the Visual Arts. Individuals interested in writing may use The AWP Official Guide to Writing Programs. Those interested in architecture should review the Guide to Architecture Schools (and pick up the handout on architecture in the Career Services Center). These directories are available for reference in Career Services Center (CSC). Information can be accessed online at www.petersons.com, www.gradschools.com and via the CSC website at http://career.ucsd.edu/

Find Information on Department Websites
Departments provide program descriptions, applications, admissions information and requirements, and financial aid information as well as details on the background and creative and research interests of the faculty.

Speak with Knowledgeable People
Speak with UCSD faculty and graduate students knowledgeable in your area of interest. If you need help finding a person to consult, see your departmental advisor or a graduate school advisor in the Career Services Center.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A GRADUATE PROGRAM

- Quality of the graduate department, not just the institution. Prestigious universities may have some weak departments, just as some lesser-known universities may have distinguished faculty in your discipline. In most arts disciplines, UCSD faculty can help you choose programs.
- Reputation of the **faculty in your area** of interest. Faculty members are most frequently judged by the quality of their creative projects or research with which they have been associated. Work that you do as a graduate student will be supervised by a faculty member. If your interest has focused on a subfield that is not broadly represented in the department, make sure that there is more than one faculty member who is interested in your special area. If you are not sure yet which subfield you are interested in, another strategy is to select a large department with a diversity of subfields represented. The age of faculty members may come into play should any of them leave before you complete your degree.

- **Philosophy and instructional methods** of department faculty. Quality of experiential opportunities.

- **Attrition** rate of students in the program.

- **Institutional resources** such as libraries, museums, musical instruments and recording studios, art studios, performance spaces, recital halls, video and film equipment and studios, and computing and research facilities.

- **Size** of the graduate program. Large universities may have larger classes and less accessible faculty. Small universities may have greater access to faculty, yet restricted offerings, limited facilities, scarce resources.

- **The type and amount of financial aid** available and the percentage of students supported.

- Additional considerations may include: the cost of tuition, availability and cost of housing, student support services, placement record of graduates, geographic location, diversity of students, cultural opportunities in the community, student organizations and the availability of child care.

### Understanding Degree Requirements

It is important to understand the graduation requirements of each program.

- Programs vary in their **unit requirements**. Also, some programs require specific courses, while others allow the student more freedom of choice.

- Time spent at the institution in study or research is referred to as **residency**. The "in residence" time requirement could extend the overall length of your degree program. Some universities also impose **limits** on the number of years a student can be enrolled. Some Ph.D. programs have **language requirements** that can extend the length of graduate study.

- Most graduate programs in the arts require that some type of comprehensive original work or product be completed before the degree is awarded. Such works include the writing, production or direction of a play or musical composition, or the completion of a body of work in the applied or fine arts (e.g., a building design, set decorations, collection of paintings, etc.). Some masters and all doctoral programs require a thesis/research project, and some require a comprehensive exam.

- Ph.D. programs may differ in the number, type and timing of the **examinations** (e.g., departmental exams, comprehensive exams, qualifying exams) which they require of graduate students. You should understand what examinations you will face.

### Requirements for Admission

Most graduate admission committees look for students with exceptional talent in the field, excellent critical thinking, writing abilities, strong motivation, perseverance, and a zest for knowledge. To assess each candidate committees typically use some combination of or all of the following:

1. **Academic preparation requirements** vary. Generally, a bachelor's degree in the same or related field, with some **undergraduate course work** in the same field as your proposed area of graduate study.

2. Typically, a minimum overall **GPA** of 3.0 is specified, although upper division major GPA is very often more critical. Certain master's degree programs, particularly at state or private colleges & universities, may
have a lower minimum required GPA (2.5 or 2.75) than Ph.D. programs (3.0) at major research universities. In the arts, however, evidence of creative talent may take precedence over GPA.

3. **Letters of reference** (usually three) from faculty who can comment on your undergraduate academic preparation, potential for graduate study and creative work, and commitment to your field. These letters should be from persons who know you and your work fairly well. A handout on obtaining letters of reference is available in the Career Services Center.

4. Competitive scores on the *Graduate Record Examination* (GRE), *IF* the GRE is required. The GRE measures certain developed verbal, quantitative and analytical abilities important for academic achievement. Registration for these is online at [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org). Registration bulletins are available in Career Services. The GRE (a computer-based test) is conveniently available throughout the year. To schedule the GRE, phone 1-800-GRE-CALL.

5. Neat and thorough applications, including a well-written *statement of purpose*. (A handout on writing a statement of purpose is available in the Career Services Center, which also offers a statement critique service.)

6. *Application fees* are generally $25 to $75 per institution.

7. Most departments in music, theatre, fine and applied arts, design and film require a *portfolio*, live audition or tape of your work. Some departments, such as art history, or creative writing, can require a sample of your written work. Carefully read and follow program instructions about how to select, prepare and package your work samples for mailing to graduate institutions. Consult with your department and faculty for assistance in this regard.

**Financing Graduate Study**

Most graduate financial aid awards are based upon a combination of academic achievement, scholarly promise and financial need. Most Ph.D. students receive support directly from their graduate institutions. The *office that handles financial aid at the university where you matriculate will serve as your primary source for information and help with obtaining financial aid*. Not only will the in-house experts be able to apprise you of loan and fellowship information but also they can direct you to other sources of funding. Sources of support generally include one or a combination of the following types of awards:

- **Loans** by the institution or outside sources such as foundations and the federal government. Such loans must be repaid upon the completion of a degree program or course of study.

- University-sponsored assistantships requiring the performance of *teaching* or *research* for a fixed number of hours per week in exchange for financial support, or departmental fellowships which provide support for a student's own research endeavor.

- **Extramural fellowships** or **scholarships** based on academic merit and/or artistic promise requiring no work or service performed by the student. Repayment is generally not required.

- **Grants** based on financial need, requiring no work, service or repayment.

UCSD’s Research Affairs has compiled a list of grants and fellowships through their SURF database which is accessible online at [http://research.ucsd.edu/surf/](http://research.ucsd.edu/surf/). A comprehensive financial aid resource site online is [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org). The Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship in Humanistic Studies offers fellowships for Ph.D. study in art history, ethnomusicology, and music history and theory. For more information, visit [http://www.mellon.org/](http://www.mellon.org/).

**TIMELINE FOR APPLICATION TO GRADUATE SCHOOL**

Most deadlines fall between January and March for matriculation the following Fall, but deadlines can be as early as December 15. Applicants for programs with rolling admissions are advised to apply early.
A year and a half before desired matriculation

* Begin discussions with faculty of your intentions to pursue a graduate degree.

* Try to become involved in research or special projects. Check with your department advisors for information on independent study and honors programs. Explore internship opportunities in the Academic Internship Program (3255 Literature Bldg.). Listed with the Career Services Center are paid job and internship opportunities. U.S. Grants (office on third floor of the Price Center) has funding for student projects.

* Review the specific program’s admissions information. If the programs that interest you require the GRE, plan your course schedule to ensure adequate preparation.

A year before matriculation

- Define your interests well enough so that you can identify graduate faculties that will match them.

- Contact graduate programs for applications. Also request a listing of the faculty in the department and their artistic and research interests and ask any pertinent questions, such as, applicant/admit ratio, attrition rate, median test scores and GPAs of those admitted, required auditions, work samples, or portfolios and typical aid given to admitted students.

- Begin to prepare your portfolio, if one is required.

- Register for the GRE, if the test is required. A handout on test preparation is available in Career Services Center.

- Take the GRE anytime but not later than three weeks before deadlines for application or fellowships that require GRE scores.

* Take note of application deadlines and connect with faculty who may write letters of reference for you. Request letters of reference from your faculty members well in advance of the application deadline. Give them at least one month, more is better, to write those letters for you.

To meet application deadlines

* Write your statement of purpose, fill out application forms and any necessary financial aid materials. GRE scores, letters of reference and transcripts may be sent to graduate admissions offices before you send your application forms, portfolios, tapes or work samples, but all must be received by the application deadline.

Spring before Fall matriculation

* You will likely be notified about your admission status and any offer of financial assistance generally by mid- April and will have a few weeks to make your decision about attending that institution. Visit the institutions that accept you. Meet with faculty and graduate students to help you make your final choice.

* Send in the deposit to the institution of your choice and decline other acceptances.

* Send thank-you notes to people who wrote reference letters for you and tell them of your success.