

Applying to Graduate School

CHOOSING THE SCHOOL

Do you know what you'd like your MA work to focus on?

YES? Then ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the school's reputation in my field or generally?
- Who is on faculty there and are they available the year I want to be there?
- What is the department's theoretical bent?
- What are the library holdings like?
- Are there other MA and PhD students working in my field?

NO? Then ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the school's reputation generally?
- What is the department's theoretical bent?
- What are other MA and PhD students working on?

Are you independently wealthy?

NO? Then consider the following:

- A school's funding options:
 - SSHRC MA fellowships
 - University Scholarships
 - Teaching Assistantships
 - What duties do these entail?
 - What's the average class size?
 - How much does a TA pay?
 - When will I be notified that I have one or not?
- A school's location:
 - cost of living and renting in a given city or town (Toronto/Vancouver versus Montreal/Calgary versus Guelph/Wolfville)
 - other local resources (such as theatres, public archives)
 - transit systems
 - other universities in the area
 - Joint programs or resources

Are you interested in going abroad?

YES? Where?

The USA? Then be sure to look into

- International fees
- The Graduate Record Examination (see <http://www.collegedegreeguide.com/articles-fr/gre.htm>. The Exam is administered by the Faculty of Grad Studies at Dalhousie):
 - Does the school require it?
 - When can I write it? Will my marks be sent on time?
 - How much does it cost?
- Timetable dates for course work (as they differ from those in Canada)
- Degrees in process versus terminal degrees. (In other words, can I get an MA here or not? Is it right onto PhD land for me?)

GREAT BRITAIN or elsewhere in the COMMONWEALTH? Then be sure to look into

- International fees
- Timetable dates
- Possible scholarships available:
 - Attend the MSVU Scholars' Society meeting on Wednesday 24 November, 12-2 pm., Seton Faculty Lounge, and learn about Rhodes Scholarships, Millennium and SSHRC Scholarships. Confirm attendance at x6324 or by email, advising@msvu.ca

Is this program one year, one and a half-years, or longer?

- **If I stay on, will they fund me for the whole program or just for one year?**

Does the program require a thesis or is it a non-thesis program? Do I have a choice?

- **If this is a thesis program, does the thesis require an oral defense and do I care about that?**

What are the language requirements for this program? Do I have the prerequisites now to take what I will need then?

What sort of course coverage does this school want its applicants to show? Theory? Historical period? Geographical span? Science courses mixed in with arts courses?

Is this school a good place to stay on for a PhD if I want? Is it a good "springboard" school for getting into a larger or better-recognized program elsewhere?

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

1. Check websites and calendars (available through the mail or in university libraries.
 - a. Be sure to read carefully the material on your department of study *and* the Faculty of Graduate Studies.
2. Identify the procedures for
 - a. Application forms
 - b. Application fees
 - c. Undergraduate transcripts
 - d. Letters of recommendation
 - i. How many are required?
 - ii. Do you collect them and mail them with your application or does the referee mail them directly?
 - e. Identifying your referees. (Be sure to ask a professor before including her name as a referee.)
3. What are the deadlines
 - a. for you
 - b. for your referees?

Please note that these deadlines are final. In graduate school application land, there are no extensions and no one cares why your assignment is late. You're simply dead in the water.

Forms:

- They must be typed and formal
- They may require you to identify your MA project.
- If so,
 - talk to faculty here at MSVU about what makes a reasonable MA project.
 - look on your desired university departmental website to see if there are grad projects listed there. Get a feel for them. What does one look like?
 - write your project in clear, forceful language, strictly observing length stipulations. “It is better to be wrong than vague.” And, tempting as it is to pull out all the critical and theoretical terminology you know, remember that you might be writing for antediluvian old boys who hate that sort of thing.

Transcripts (<http://www.msvu.ca/Registrar-Services/forms.asp>)

Referees and Letters of Recommendation

- Line up your referees early.
- If you are applying to a lot of places, try to share the burden among your professors, but also choose professors
 - with whom you have worked and done well, and
 - who have a good reputation in their field.
 - Keep in mind, though, that letters from senior scholars often carry more weight (for better or worse) than those of junior faculty.
- Provide your referees with *everything* they will need:
 - forms, properly filled out and signed by you (as they are confidential and you will not get to see them again)
 - addressed, stamped envelopes
 - clear instructions on what is required, noting differences among various forms you are giving them
 - a summary of your MA project if such a thing exists
 - lots of time to complete the task, but also a clear indication of your deadline. Be sure to specify whether a document needs to be **received or postmarked** by a certain date.
- Check with the referee a week before everything is due to make sure she hasn't forgotten about you. This may piss her off, but that's too bad. This is your life. Besides, the fact that she may be temporarily nettled will have nothing to do with the kind of recommendation she gives you.

The First Principles of Graduate School Application:

- **You are now a fish in a much larger pond.**
- **The people who are reading your application are reading many many others as well.**
- **All of those applications will make the applicant sound fabulous.**
- **There is a strategy for reducing the field by making a first cut:**
 - **Applications that are late or improperly filled out are always the first to go.**