

# ART OF APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

COLLEGE FOR CREATIVE STUDIES  
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## *How do I decide if I should go to graduate school?*

Deciding to pursue a graduate degree is an important decision that should be carefully considered. It will affect your financial, artistic and personal life for at least two years and have a lasting effect on your career.

- Explore your career direction. Is graduate school necessary to attain your career goals?
- Think carefully about the utility of the degree. Will graduate school broaden your skills in ways that other certification, employment, residencies and workshops would not?
- Research and plan your financial support. Does the institution offer scholarships, grants, fellowships and/or graduate assistantships? Take your current financial standing into consideration before making a decision. Are the cost benefits worth the financial investment?
- Research the most appropriate schools and programs. Many CCS students go on to pursue a Master of Fine Arts degree but there are other options, depending on your career goals.
- Location and timing are important factors to consider. Are you prepared to undertake two years of intensive work? Where do you want to live after graduate school? Consider the development of your work and think about your ability to establish yourself in a new community.

Graduate school may **not** be a good idea if:

- You are trying to postpone a career decision or avoid employment.
- You are responding to outside pressures from peers, family or faculty.
- You are expecting to make more money or be assured job security from a graduate degree.

## *Types of Programs...*

### **Master of Fine Arts (MFA)**

Master of Fine Arts is typically a two year degree emphasizing studio art. Most programs encourage the production of a body of work that you can show in galleries or museums. The academic component of the degree varies between schools. The MFA is considered a terminal degree, meaning, unlike an MA, there is no other degree (Ph.D.) that might follow. The MFA qualifies you to teach at the university or college level. However, having an MFA does not guarantee a college teaching job. Since teaching jobs are very competitive, the best reason to pursue an MFA is for your own development as an artist.

There are other types of graduate programs that can pertain to CCS graduates. Some of these are: Master of Science in Education, Master of Arts in Teaching, Master of Arts in Theory/Criticism/Curatorial Studies, Master in Art Therapy, Master of Science in Art Conservation and Certification, Master of Business Administration, Master of Arts Administration and graduate degrees in Art History and Museum Studies. Research each type of degree carefully. Required courses, standardized tests and application procedures vary between institutions and programs.

**CAREER SERVICES**  
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Remember to research the types of experience and career opportunities each can provide. Make an appointment with Career Services to help you explore your options.

### ***Where do I find information about standardized tests?***

GRE (Graduate Record Examination): [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org)

GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test): [www.mba.com](http://www.mba.com)

The GRE and/or GMAT are **NOT** required when applying to MFA programs. They may be required for admission into other types of programs such as: Art Conservation, Art Therapy, Education, Art History, Business Administration, Arts Administration, etc.

### ***How do I evaluate graduate programs?***

Research graduate programs carefully to select the one that fits best with your individual goals and needs. Selected items to consider when evaluating graduate programs include:

- Length of program (MFA programs can take between two to three years)
- Your interests, abilities and values
- Reputation of the institution, program and faculty, as well as faculty and student work
- Location (Consider the cost of living, safety, local and surrounding arts community etc.)
- Cost and available funding (scholarships and financial aid)
- Size of institution/program, as well as the facilities and studio space

One of the best ways to evaluate a graduate program is to **visit the institution** and talk with faculty, staff and current graduate students.

The following Web sites may also be helpful in your research:

[www.graduateguide.com](http://www.graduateguide.com)

[www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com)

[www.grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/grad/finearts.html](http://www.grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/grad/finearts.html)

[www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)

### ***When should I apply?***

Many graduates choose to wait and gain some work and life experience before considering graduate school. If you intend to enter graduate school immediately after completing your BFA, consider the decision carefully and evaluate each program. You need to have a clear understanding of what you want to do with your career and how earning a graduate degree will help you reach that goal. Admission requirements vary greatly among institutions, so make sure you read all application materials carefully and meet all stated deadlines.

### ***Getting Started...***

- Research your areas of interest and graduate programs in your field. Create a list of the schools you are interested in.
- Familiarize yourself with faculty work. Make sure there is someone whose work you admire and make sure they are accessible as a professor. Review faculty CVs and consider how active they are in the local, national and international art and design communities.
- Discuss the programs you are considering with professors, mentors, alumni, students and advisors.
- Make sure you are taking any required classes and that your coursework is appropriate. Some programs may require coursework outside the CCS curriculum such as a MA in Art Conservation and Certification which requires post-secondary chemistry courses and may require additional art history classes. Sign up for required standardized tests and do practice exams. If no tests are required, look at the application requirements and see what the portfolio requirements are.
- Continue to build up your resume/CV with exhibitions, internships, artist residencies, apprenticeships and other experiences.

### ***Next Steps...***

- Visit the institutions you are considering. Meet with faculty, staff and current graduate students in your program of interest.
- If you are considering a MFA program, you should inquire about the conceptual background of the school. Figure out how theoretical you want a school to be or how hands on and don't be afraid to ask questions of the faculty and current students.
- Students hoping to pursue an MFA should also consider the artistic community in the school. How competitive is it? How diverse? The best way to do this is to talk with current students at different levels of their graduate school career. You should also consider the city/area outside of the school, including opportunities to exhibit and connect with the local, national and international art community.
- Take any required standardized tests to allow time for a retake, if necessary.
- Check application deadlines for admission, scholarships and financial aid.
- Research financial aid sources, fellowships and assistantships. Contact the graduate school as well as the department you are applying to see what type of scholarships are available.
- Create a draft of your statement of intent/artist statement to submit with your applications.
- Document your artwork and keep any application documents (such as portfolio, image list, artist statements, CV etc.) current and organized.
- Get feedback from professors, career services, mentors and alumni on your application materials.
- Create a calendar of all deadlines and make sure you stick to it. Deadlines will vary for each school and type of program and usually range from fall to spring and application fees usually range from \$50-\$100.

***Final Steps...***

- Finalize your application materials.
- Request letters of recommendation from faculty members and provide addressed envelopes and any required forms.
- Finish and mail applications; confirm that your letters of recommendation have been completed.
- Make campus visits to schools where you have been admitted, if possible.
- Make your decision.