

Guide to Graduate School for Music Students

Thinking about Graduate School?

There are many reasons to go to graduate school. Whatever they are, make sure your choice is an educated one.

Typical reasons to consider graduate study include; studying with a specific teacher, further development as a musician, teacher certification for public schools, specific repertoire/ technology/ techniques exploration, or to study an area different from your undergraduate experience.

You must also assess whether getting an advanced degree in music is really what you need.

Types of Degree Programs

There are many types of advanced degrees for students interested in performance, conducting, composition, jazz, etc. It is a matter of deciding which program is right for you, how much longer you want to pursue music studies, as well as determining your overall professional goals.

Master of Music

A Master of Music is usually a two-year program consisting of approximately 36 credit hours. You must first complete a bachelor's degree to go on to this program.

Programs for performers will include large ensemble, lessons, master class/repertoire class, chamber music, language requirements for singers, and at least one "academic" course per year in history or theory. Generally, there is more time to practice and freelance while working on a master's program.

Doctor of Musical Arts

These programs are generally for composition or performance. They vary greatly, but the prerequisite to enter a

DMA program is the completion of a master's degree. It usually takes a minimum of two years to complete the residency and course components. The other requirement for this program is the thesis or doctoral research paper and/or lecture recital. Other degree requirements may include language, course work in theory and history, accompanying, orchestral, and/or chamber music credit hours.

PhD Degree

These programs are usually for doctorates in music education, musicology, music theory, and composition. The master's degree is likely incorporated in this degree program. General exams take place after the first two years of coursework, and then dissertation work is required. For some programs, options for completing studies after the first two years will result in the award of the master's degree.

Other certificate or diploma programs

Various music schools offer programs such as an Artist Diploma or Performance Diplomas with few or no academic requirements. They are designed for a specific performance concentration and are often less expensive than other graduate degree programs. Research these programs carefully since the requirements and competitive levels will vary significantly. It is also important to understand what the diploma or certificate programs offer and what you will be able to do with them when you have completed the program.

Take Time to Plan

You should start the process of selecting and applying to graduate programs approximately 18 months before you wish to begin. This means that if you

hope to attend graduate school in the fall after graduation in May you should begin the process around the last semester of your junior year.

Researching Programs

Explore several possibilities; applying to between four and seven schools is common. This gives you several viable options, because once you have visited and auditioned, your first choice might change.

There are over 400 music programs in the United States alone and choosing one can prove difficult. Talk to your principle teacher, friends/alumni, and others in the Conservatory. This is a good way to get an idea of where you might like to attend. Ask where they attended and what they know about various programs.

Other Resources:

Visit The Office of Career Services, located in Robertson 129 for information on individual graduate schools, including booklets and applications. We also have information about various graduate assistantships offered annually.

The College Music Society: www.music.org has an online searchable directory of music programs. The hard copy edition is available in Robertson 129 and is indexed by graduate degree for easier location of a specific program.

The *Peterson's Guide to Professional Degree Programs in the Visual and Performing Arts* contains profiles of every school in the U.S., and contains information including tuition, degree program descriptions, application information etc. This guide is available online at www.petersons.com.

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The Office of Career Services ♦ www.oberlin.edu/career ♦ 440-775-8140 ♦ career.services@oberlin.edu

Deciding on Schools

Teacher, size, location, and prestige are all things to consider when selecting a graduate school. Of course your main consideration is whether or not you are accepted to the institution!

Have an idea of what you are looking for in a degree program and make a list of general characteristics. Learn as much as you can about the institution and faculty. You may find an institution may be ranked high on the list because of name/prestige alone, and not characteristic that are important to you and your success.

Your professional goals and who you are as a person should match the environment of the institution, learning approaches, and artistic approaches.

Other things to consider in choosing a school include; degree programs offered, faculty, tuition, financial aid, housing, opportunities for work (private teaching, freelancing), and location (rural, urban).

Selecting your Next Teacher

Just like selecting specific schools, it is important that you discuss with your principle teacher and your advisor possible teachers you may want to study with after Oberlin. They will likely have some suggestions for you. You should also listen to recordings, go to summer festivals and attend master classes to meet and work with faculty from other conservatories.

Make a list of the teachers who sound interesting to you. Email each of them and request a lesson before you visit the school for your formal audition. Be sure to call the admissions office of the school first as some teachers do not make a habit of these lessons/auditions. The travel and pay for the lessons can get costly, but it is well worth the expense.

Your musical development needs should match the person you study with in a graduate program. If musicianship and technique are areas you need to focus on, then it would be useless to study with someone who is focused on coaching interpretation.

Letters of Recommendation

Contact faculty members and professionals with the most knowledge about your recent work as well as your personal strengths and abilities. Then meet with

them to talk about your future plans and goals. If the person is not a faculty member you are currently studying with, provide them with an updated copy of your resume, coursework, special projects, etc. If the graduate school you are applying to provided you with a reference form, be sure to give it to the person writing the letter of recommendation.

If you are applying to multiple programs or plan to postpone graduate school you may want to set up a Reference File. The Office of Career Services has implemented a partnership with Interfolio to maintain reference and credential files electronically for current students and alumni. For more information visit www.oberlin.edu/career and choose "Reference Services" from the Quicklinks menu.

Preparing for Graduate School Auditions

Each school and each graduate program has specific audition requirements. To allow enough time to prepare the necessary repertoire carefully check the programs auditions requirements. Sometimes there is a list of works to choose from or required etudes and pieces. The works you prepare should demonstrate your performance strengths, interpretive and technical abilities and should include ranges of periods and styles and types of playing. Preparing for the audition is important and you should perform the works in advanced in "mock auditions," recitals, or for friends and family.

Live auditions are best, since committees prefer seeing and hearing each performer in person. If you are unable to do a live audition try your hardest to produce a high quality audition recording. Remember videotapes are not recommended since the audio quality on them tends to be poor.

You may need to miss class while you audition for graduate school. These are not automatically excused absences. Talk to your teacher well in advance to discuss how you will make up the class.

For more tips on graduate school auditions please see the CRC's *Guide to Auditioning*.

Financing Graduate School

Financial aid packages for graduate programs typically include loans,

scholarships, and work-study options that are often merit/needs based. Federal loans are the largest source of graduate financial aid. Need level is based on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Many graduate programs offer graduate assistantships, which may allow for extensive professional teaching experience prior to graduating. These teaching assistantships usually help with most of the tuition cost, but may also help with living costs. It is also important to check out the freelancing opportunities in the locations of the schools you are considering, since this will help to defray costs.

Besides financial aid offered by the individual school and graduate assistantships, there are also fellowships and grants that are offered by local community organizations, foundations, and individuals. There are numerous books listing fellowship and grant opportunities located in the CRC library. You should also access the Foundation Center and its resources, which has an office in Cleveland, and web site at www.fndcenter.org.

Graduate School Testing

Be sure and check the admissions requirements for the schools you are applying to for any testing requirements. Music theory, history, and musicology programs often have specific placement exams. Generally, universities require the GRE (Graduate Record Exam) and conservatories do not.

GRE General—www.gre.org.

Tests are given year-round at designated testing centers. Register early to get your preferred testing dates, and to avoid the busy period of November-January. Call the test center directly to schedule your appointment.

The testing centers nearest to Oberlin are:

Cleveland:

Case Western Reserve University.
216-368-1030

Strongsville:

Prometric Testing Center
15201 Pearl Road
440-238-0530