

Tips for Applying to Graduate Programs in the Arts and Sciences

Provided by the Yale Graduate School's Office for Diversity & Equal Opportunity

Do your research. Get to know the university and the program to which you intend to apply. At any time point in the application process, feel free to contact ODEO to discuss any questions or concerns you might have about drafting materials or communicating with a department. The Director, staff and graduate fellows can help you with the application process in various ways.

When considering whether or not to apply to a given program, applicants should ask themselves the following questions:

- What scholarly research is currently being conducted in your program of interest?
- How highly ranked is that particular program? What is the reputation of the program? Although there are systematic rankings published by various agents, such as *US News and World Report*, it is often more accurate to discuss this issue with faculty mentors at your current institution, preferably a mix of faculty at different stages in their careers.
- Are there specific faculty members in the program with whom you would like to work? Have you read any of their publications? Are they highly respected in the field? (Again, conversations with faculty at your current institution are a useful source of such information.)
- What financial assistance does the university provide for graduate students? Does it provide five years of support? Does that support include the summer months? Do most or all students receive funding?
- How extensive and well maintained are the research and library facilities at the university?
- What are the degree requirements for the program? Is there any preparation (e.g., language study) that you should undertake before applying or before enrolling to assist you in completing them in a timely manner?
- Does the department have a good record of graduating its students in a reasonable time and placing them in appropriate employment?

Office of Graduate Admissions

www.yale.edu/graduateschool/admissions/

Prospective students are encouraged to visit the Graduate School's admissions website for detailed information concerning application procedures and access to the online application.

Departments & Programs

www.yale.edu/graduateschool/academics/departments.html

Contact the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) in the department to which you will apply. The DGS can often connect you with current graduate students who will candidly discuss their graduate experience with you and offer some friendly advice. If you intend to visit the campus, many departments can arrange for you to have a lunch meeting with a current student, enjoy a tour of the department/campus or make appointments with faculty members or fellow students.

Faculty

Each department's web site provides lists of current faculty, the courses that they teach and their research interests. Browsing through this information will help you get an idea about which professors might make a good mentor for you. You should identify multiple faculty members with whom you could work in order to create as many options for yourself as possible.

Admissions Process

Each department has its own admissions committee comprised of faculty who will review your credentials (including your GRE scores, GPA, personal statement, research experience, awards and activities, writing sample and, if applicable, publications). Although having high GRE scores (>700 per section) and a high GPA (>3.8) will certainly help you, these are not the only aspects of your application that the admissions committee will consider when identifying successful candidates. Attention is also given to research experience in the potential field of study, strong letters of recommendation from people in that field, the extent to which the statement of purpose highlights an applicant's qualifications and future goals, and how well suited an applicant is to work with faculty in a particular program. As it is very important that there is a match in research interests between the applicant and a faculty member, applicants are advised to make contact in advance with several faculty members who might ultimately serve as advisors.

Application

The Graduate School uses an online application, which becomes available to prospective students in mid-August each year. Applicants are encouraged to prepare and submit the application well in advance of the deadline, providing references with copies of the application materials and ample time to write and transmit their letters of recommendation to the Graduate School.

The application fee is \$95, although fee waivers are available in certain instances. Applicants should contact either ODEO or Graduate Admissions to find out if they qualify for a waiver.

Personal Statement

The personal statement is required of applicants to all programs. The statement should be no longer than two double-spaced pages, but must be written carefully, as it performs several functions. The applicant must describe how his or her research interests will contribute to the academic focus of the department and what he or she can learn from the work currently being conducted by the faculty. As most programs do not conduct interviews, the personal statement is often the applicant's only opportunity to convey a sense of themselves as an individual with unique experiences and motivations. Provide concise and clear information about your qualifications in your proposed field, noting specific details about professional experience or academic research that you have conducted with faculty which has helped to prepare you to undertake the rigors of graduate study. Be sure to leave time after you have completed the personal statement to obtain feedback from faculty members, mentors and students at your current university to refine your thoughts and ideas.

Graduate Records Examination (GRE)

For admission to most graduate programs, including those at Yale, applicants must report at least general scores on the GRE, which can be taken year round. Some programs require a GRE subject test, which can only be taken three days out of the year and thus requires more planning.

The General Test of the GRE consists of three scored sections assessing verbal, quantitative and writing skills. Each section is scored on a scale from 200 (lowest) to 800 (highest). It is important to realize that even if your GRE scores are not as high as you might like them to be, that should not deter you from applying to any programs, as they are regarded differently by various institutions. Further information about the GREs can also be obtained on the Educational Testing Services (ETS) website at <http://www.ets.org>.

Writing Sample

Some programs require applicants to submit a writing sample for the faculty to review. A well argued and highly polished writing sample can contribute significantly to the competitiveness of your application. This writing sample should reflect your critical thinking and analytical skills, as well as the research interests you want to pursue as a graduate student. Many students choose to submit a term paper or research paper that they completed as part of a course. Take care in selecting the piece that you submit and invest time in editing it. When possible, share it with peers and mentors for suggestions for enhancements. If the sample was a term paper, implement revisions based on comments from the faculty member who graded it.

Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are extremely important in the admissions process. Sometimes outstanding letters of recommendation can compensate for other aspects of your application that might not be as strong.

The Graduate School requires three letters of recommendation. You can select either faculty members with whom you have studied or supervisors with whom you have worked (in situations that have some relationship to your proposed field of study). Whomever you select, these references should be well positioned to evaluate with specificity your academic performance or related skills. It is important to make clear to the reference writer that if he or she has any reservations or concerns about writing you a strong letter of recommendation, you would prefer to ask someone else. Do not be afraid to ask them, "Can you write me an outstanding letter of recommendation?"

Although the reference writer may be quite willing to write you a passionate letter of support, you will need to provide him or her with the materials to make the letter specific and compelling. Give your reference writers a resume or curriculum vitae, a paper or exam that you did well on in their class, a transcript of your grades, and a copy of your personal statement. Ask them if they wish to submit their recommendation online or in paper form, and if the latter, as a matter of courtesy you should provide them with stamped and addressed envelopes.

Financial Aid

In most departments and programs at Yale, doctoral students are guaranteed five years of twelve-month stipend and tuition support. Applicants for admission to Ph.D. departments and programs will automatically be considered for all Yale fellowships, traineeships, research assistantships, and teaching fellowships for which they are eligible. These awards of financial aid are announced in letters of admission, which are usually mailed during the month of March. Applicants for admission to the DSR and to terminal master's departments and programs are required to complete the financial statement contained in the application brochure.