

## Getting into Graduate School Part 1

### Summer before Senior Year:

- If any of your schools require the GRE (Graduate Record Exam), the summer before your senior year is the time to take it.
- You also need to do research on what programs you want to apply to AND look to see if you have all of the REQUIRED [prerequisite courses](#). Some schools have very specific ones and you want to know about these so if you have not had them, you still have 2 semesters to take them.

### Looking at Graduate Programs:

- There are lots of things to consider when looking at grad programs.
- You need to choose if you want to apply for Speech-Language Pathology or Audiology. Sometimes students have applied to programs in both areas. It is never a good idea to apply to both areas at the same school and it is not recommended to apply to both areas in general either. If you do not know what field to choose, you may not be ready for graduate school yet.
- The place to start reviewing graduate programs is the ASHA website which is called [Ed Find](#)
- You can use this website to look at ASHA accredited programs in different states as well as their statistics.

### Things to consider when selecting programs to apply to:

**1. Stay or Go?** This is the age-old question! Should I stay where I went as an undergraduate or should I go somewhere new? It probably makes less difference than you think. I often hear students say they don't want to stay at their undergraduate program because they have already learned all they can from these teachers. Big mistake! Keep in mind most undergraduates don't interact with any of the clinical faculty so there's a whole group of faculty you have yet to learn from! Also, the kind of learning that occurs in a Graduate Program is very different than in undergrad. Yes, you may have the same teachers again, but they will not be teaching you the same material! Sometimes it can be a big advantage to go to a new school. You will quickly learn that there are varying ideas in the areas you have studied previously. One grad program may quickly dismiss something you learned as an undergrad and present you with something completely different. As difficult as this may be for some students to find out, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ and their ideas about \_\_\_\_\_ may be considered crazy. You may be a better clinician for having seen it from 2 different sides. Sometimes it's a more practical choice. Graduate school is expensive. It may be better to go to an in-state school, or since you are going to be very busy, maybe it would be nice to be somewhere closer to home so you have a support system and someone to cook you a good meal once in a while! Some people adjust better to change than others, hopefully you know yourself well enough to know what's best for you. One more thing: although there is absolutely no guarantee that if you apply to the place where you got your undergraduate degree that you will get in, if you are competitive in grades and scores, you may

have a better chance simply because you are known to people in the department. BUT: do not assume anything! No matter how many labs you have worked in, or how many offices you have held in NSSLHA or how many times you have been a TA, if you don't have the grades and scores, you won't get in.

**2. Location** - Where do you want to live? Do you want to have to find your way around a new town and a new University? Where do you want to end up? Would you like to try out a different part of the country?

- There are different ways of looking at this. Some students may think it's just easier to go somewhere they are familiar with, while others may jump at the chance to go somewhere new! Keep in mind you will have a "readymade" group of friends in your grad school colleagues (in fact, some of them may end up being lifelong friends) so it's not like you will be alone. If you want to end up in California as an example...you may want to think about going to graduate school there. You are more likely to find or hear about jobs in the place that you go to graduate school than back in Maryland. Also, if you know that you are going to relocate, it's always good to go to a school that has some name recognition. While I may have heard of Bloomsburg State University, if you move to New Mexico, chances are they won't.

**3. US News Rankings** - How important are the rankings? How are they done?

Rankings of SLP Graduate programs:

<https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-health-schools/pathology-rankings>

Rankings of AuD Graduate programs:

<https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-health-schools/audiology-rankings>

- It's important to think about how these rankings are done. US News and World Report sends out surveys every 2 years to all the accredited programs in each area. Although it's great to go to a program that is highly ranked, there are many programs that are smaller or less well known that may be just as good. The reputation of a program carries over for a long period of time, even though famous faculty may be long gone or changes in the program may have occurred, a program may keep its high ranking because of a long standing, but erroneous reputation. So don't assume that because you are going to a program that is NOT highly rated, that it is a bad program. Use ranking information as just one part of your consideration of programs. It's never a bad idea to talk to professors that you like and respect and find out what programs they think would be good. Keep in mind that although it's good to ask current graduate students what they think, their knowledge is really limited to the program they are in. Faculty or professionals may have better insight.

**4. Size of the department** - number of students, faculty, clinical supervisors, part- or full-time faculty and supervisors.

- Especially in Speech Language Pathology, keep in mind that you are choosing a graduate program primarily for its clinical possibilities and less for academic reasons. Most of you may know the teaching faculty in our department, but you may not know the clinical faculty. Let's use University of Maryland as an example: we try to admit between

22-25 SLP students per year because that assures that you will have classes that are not too big and that you will have quality supervision in your clinical training on campus. We have 6 full time clinical supervisors that provide you with guidance during your on-campus clinical experiences during the first 3 semesters that you are here. If you are looking at a program that accepts 40 students and has 4 clinical faculty, it tells you one of two things: much of your clinical experience will be off-campus, or the clinical faculty will be spread very thin trying to give you clinical training. For AuD students, the same is true, however, if the program you are looking at requires some type of research project, you also want to make sure that there are enough PhD level faculty to guide you through that piece of your program.

**5. Clinical training** - Do they have an on-campus clinic? Where do they send students for clinical training? Who decides where a student gets placed? Are there clinical “tracks” that you must choose? Does the faculty find the placements (4th year and clinical) or are you expected to find your own? How far must you travel for your off campus practicum? Is the school in a setting where you can get the training in your area of interest?

- Keep in mind that schools vary widely on how they provide clinical training. Some have on-campus clinics, like Maryland, where your training is provided in a closely observed, protected setting. The clients know you are students and the supervisors are specifically trained to provide guidance as you progress through your training. Some schools have done away with their on-campus clinics (they are very expensive to run and bring in very little income) and they rely on clinicians at other sites (who may or may not have had specific training in working with graduate students) to provide your training. Programs are very proud to list their clinical practicum sites in all their literature, however, just because it appears in the list doesn't guarantee you or anyone will go there. For example, UMD lists Johns Hopkins as a practicum site. That's true it is a site we use every year, however, usually only 1 student a semester goes there and they often have to interview for that position against students from the other local programs. If you want to work in a hospital setting, you may want a more urban setting so there are more possibilities for placements for you. If your program is in a town in the middle of the state and the closest hospital is in Baltimore, you may be expected to move there for the semester that you do your practicum. Some programs divide their programs into “tracks” like a medical track or a public school track. Be careful, you don't want to put yourself in a position where you do not receive training in all areas. The goal of a MA/AuD is to provide a broad and general clinical training to assure you a position in whatever setting you choose.

**6. Financial Aid** - Who gets it? Is it decided by merit? Need? When will I know if I am getting aid? If you don't get it the first year, can you be considered later? What type of aid do you have? Most schools have different types:

- Fellowships (\$ without work)
- Assistantships (\$ for work)
- Hourly (departmental work in the office, clinic, etc).

- Can you apply for Assistantships in other Departments? How do you find out about those jobs? If you get an Assistantship, do you get in-state tuition? How many hours a week do you suggest we can work? Do you have any partnerships with schools or hospitals that will help me pay for my tuition in exchange for working there when I graduate?
- Graduate school is expensive! So most students are looking for some financial assistance. You want to start with the Department and get the answers to the questions above. Keep in mind that you will be very busy and your time will not always be flexible. If you are working in a University clinic, they may have evening hours and your schedule is likely to change each semester. Also, if an advisor at your program says you should only work 10 hours a week, LISTEN TO THEM!!!! Most programs will be able to tell you if you are admitted BEFORE they can tell you if you will get financial aid. This can make decisions hard. I will talk about this more in the next part of this series.

**7. Faculty/Academics** - Have you heard of the faculty? Have they published anything? Are there faculty in the area you are especially interested in? Do they have elective courses that you may be interested in? How many of your classes are taught by PhD faculty vs. Clinical or Adjunct (people who come from outside jobs to teach) faculty? Do they have faculty in the whole range of areas in SLP or Aud.? If you are hoping to work with a specific faculty member, will they be there while you are? Are you interested in pursuing a PhD?

- Having famous faculty is nice...but if a faculty member is famous it doesn't always mean that they are good teachers. Faculty who are well known are usually well known for their research. Sometimes their research is so good that they never teach. Or sometimes a person who is well known in our field may actually be in a completely different department and you may never see them. If you choose a program with the hope of working with a particular faculty member, remember they often get sabbaticals (years off) and may not be there when you are. Some programs have many adjunct faculty who actually work somewhere else and teach one or two courses. This can be a plus or a minus. If they are good teachers and they know their area better than anyone on campus, that's great for you. Sometimes if they are not on campus it's frustrating to try to reach them or they may not have office hours, etc. Most schools have a mix of regular and adjunct faculty. Clinical faculty sometimes teach graduate courses too. Keep in mind that once you finish your Master's degree, that is the end of your clinical training. People who go on to get a PhD usually do not get advanced clinical training. So, a good clinical faculty member, with years of clinical training in a specific area can sometimes provide more valuable and useful information than a person with a PhD who has not seen a client for 20 years!! Although most of the courses you will take in graduate school are dictated by ASHA, it's nice if there are some elective courses as well. If you are really interested in Autism, is there a course in that? Will you have enough time to take that course?

**8. Your own profile** - (GPA, GRE, etc)

- Each of you has your own profile of grades, scores, writing abilities, interests and personalities. I hate to say this, mostly because I really don't want to believe it, but at some level getting into grad school in Hearing and Speech is a numbers game. You

really need to have not just good grades (which you ALL have) but GREAT grades. Between grade inflation and grad school competition, it's gotten harder and harder for programs to separate out the great students from the good ones. Put yourself in this position: you are on the admissions committee and you have 200-300 students to choose from and 60 of them have 4.0 GPAs....how do you decide? Schools DO take into consideration things like where your undergraduate degree is from (definitely a plus for Maryland students!!), were your grades in HESP better than your other grades, or were your last 2 years better (once you found your major!) than your first 2 years. Your writing ability in your essay and your letters of recommendation are really considered as well. But I will tell you- the numbers are important! Based on the research I have done from our graduates for the past 5 years, your chance of getting into a graduate program is reduced if you do not have at least a 3.5 overall GPA. However, EVERY YEAR students get into schools with lower GPA's, so don't assume the worst!! Think of your application as a PACKAGE!

**9. Attend an Open House or make an appointment to visit programs** - you should do this BEFORE you apply.

- Many programs, including Maryland, have gone to an Open House format as a way to invite interested students to visit their program, meet faculty and students and see if their program is a good fit for you. I cannot tell you how important it is that you visit the schools you are interested in either BEFORE you apply or at least before you accept an admission offer. Often students have told me that they just KNEW this was the program they wanted when they visited and just as often, students have told me that they really thought they wanted to go to a program but when they visited they didn't like it at all. Usually programs advertise their Open Houses on their website and they will usually start in the late summer or fall. Many programs DO NOT have Open Houses in the spring or summer semester, so you need to think about this early. If you absolutely cannot attend an Open House, you can contact the Director of Graduate Studies of the program and ask if you can visit. I will warn you that many programs no longer offer this as an option. Keep in mind, that's WHY they have Open Houses!! It's getting to the point that the bigger and more popular programs don't NEED to reach out to students. If they are already getting 300 applications, they may not appear quite as warm and inviting. Keep in mind that besides getting information about each program at the Open House, you can also get a feel for the general atmosphere of the program. I would encourage you to visit programs BEFORE you apply. One reason is to save unnecessary application fees. At \$50 to \$60 apiece, some people spend an entire semester's tuition just applying!!! Because the process of admission is so crazy in the Spring, you may be admitted to a program and have only a short time to decide. That is NOT the time to have to hop in the car and go visit. In fact, there are some schools who will not allow you to visit in the Spring until you have been accepted and paid your deposit!! If you haven't visited a program and seen the facilities and met some faculty and some students, you really shouldn't be applying there.

**10. How many schools to apply to?**

- Don't apply to schools that you know you cannot get into. I would suggest that you apply to 1 or 2 reach schools, 3-4 probable schools, and 1-2 safety schools.
- DO NOT apply to any school that you know you would NOT go to.
- Sending applications to 15-20 schools is unnecessary.
- You are coming from an excellent undergraduate program that is well respected in this area and nationally. In many ways a graduate program is what YOU make of it.

**Information about the GRE if you plan to take it:**

- All the information you need about the GRE is at their website:  
<https://www.ets.org/gre.html>
- You have to set up an account to get most of the information that you need.
- You can take the GRE once every 30 days and up to 5 times in 12 months! Don't worry you won't need to take it that many times.
- It is suggested that you buy or borrow the GRE prep book (make sure it is the new one) and review it carefully. Be familiar with the types of questions and how they are answered so you don't have to spend precious time reading the directions.
- Review your math! You can go online at the UMD Math Department and use the Math Placement test as practice. If you go to this [website](#) you will also find lots of online math resources to help you.
- Take as many practice GRE tests as you can. Here is a [website](#) that has LOTS of them.
- When you think you are ready, take the GRE. You will get your raw scores right away, however, it's really your percentiles that are most important. (raw scores range from 130 to 170-percentiles from 1-100%tile) More info about GRE scores can be found [here](#). They may give you possible percentiles when you get your raw scores, but you really need to wait to see them when they come in the mail. I used to tell students that you are aiming for AT LEAST the 50th %tile or higher in all 3 sections. That is still true, but the competition is getting harder every year. Keep in mind, the higher the better.
- Make sure you take the GRE for the last time at LEAST 30 days before the application deadline for the schools you are applying to.

For any questions, make an advising appointment with Stephanie Grissom.

HESP Advising is open for virtual and in-person appointments 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM Monday through Friday. You can make an appointment with her using the [HESP Advising Calendar](#).