

# Graduate School Planning

## Architecture/Landscape Architecture

Career & Internship Services  
CCE • CDes • CFANS  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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Graduate school is a big commitment of time and money. Be sure that you are going to graduate school with a clear goal and purpose. Never go to graduate school simply to avoid the job search.

### ***Pros of going to graduate school upon graduation***

- Continues the momentum of undergraduate studies-you are still in study mode
- Commonly you have fewer personal commitments such as children, mortgage etc.
- Advanced degree may be necessary to achieve career goals (i.e. licensing, etc.).

### ***Cons of going to graduate school immediately upon graduation***

- Career goals may be undefined. Working first may be helpful to clarify career aspirations.
- Professional work experience usually makes graduate education richer and more rewarding.
- Grad school can be costly. Some employers may pay for your graduate degree if you work first.
- Graduate school is demanding and requires a high level of motivation. If you are burned out from your undergrad degree it might benefit you to take a break and give yourself a rest.

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## Timeline

It is common for graduate schools to admit people only for fall semester with application deadlines in December or January so plan to begin the process one year before you plan to start graduate school. All times indicated below are approximate, deadlines for specific programs may vary.

### **Summer (1 year before you plan to start)**

Research schools and review applications  
Read about writing effective personal statements  
Study for graduate admissions tests  
Begin working on your portfolio

### **September/October**

Meet with faculty and instructors to ask for letters of recommendation  
Begin writing your personal statements & have drafts reviewed by faculty and career services  
Register for and take standardized tests  
Complete application forms

### **November/December**

Finalize and send applications  
Check to ensure all materials have been received  
Attend open houses at programs  
Send thank you notes to recommenders

### **February/March**

Contact programs to conduct a personal visit  
Responses typically received from programs  
Notify school & recommenders of your decision  
Apply for FAFSA

### **April/May**

Send graduate schools final transcripts.

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## Researching & Evaluating Programs

Architecture and Landscape Design and Planning students enrolled in University of Minnesota undergraduate programs need to pursue a professional program, usually the Master of Architecture or Master of Landscape Architecture, to receive an accredited degree.

### ***Architecture Program Options: 2 year vs. 3 year programs***

Graduate programs in Architecture vary in length. The pre-professional architecture undergrad degree at the University of Minnesota is the Bachelor of Science. Students completing the Bachelor of Science may be eligible for 2 year professional programs. Students completing a Bachelor of Design in Architecture or the Bachelor of Arts or Interior Design Program are eligible for 3 year or 3+ professional programs.

### ***Make a List of Options***

Research schools that offer your program of study and create a list of potential schools and programs you could apply to. A few resources for finding programs in Architecture and Landscape Architecture include:

- Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture [www.acsa-arch.org](http://www.acsa-arch.org)
- Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture [www.thecela.org](http://www.thecela.org)
- National Architectural Accrediting Board [www.naab.org/architecture\\_programs](http://www.naab.org/architecture_programs)
- American Society of Landscape Architects [www.asla.org/schools.aspx](http://www.asla.org/schools.aspx)
- Current students and alumni of graduate programs
- Your professors, instructors, and academic advisors
- Practicing professionals, mentors and professional associations (ex: AIA, MASLA)

### ***Narrow Your List***

Once you have a list of possible schools, take the time to narrow the list to a manageable number to which you will actually apply. The school and department web sites are great places to start researching details of the program. Be sure to request application materials and program handbooks if the information is not available online. Consider the following as you review programs:

- What courses are offered? Do they adequately address your areas of interest?
- How long does it take to complete the program? What is the program's attrition rate? (How many students left the program before completing their degree, and why did they leave?).
- What financial aid resources are available from the school? Are Teaching or Research Assistantships available, as part of the admissions offer, to incoming students? What types of fellowships (scholarships) or grants are available? Many professional programs in architecture have limited financial aid.
- If you plan to conduct research, be sure to research interests of individual faculty members related to your interests.
- Does the city fit your lifestyle and does the cost of living fit your finances?
- What are the admissions requirements? Are you likely to get into the program?

Use the information above to narrow the list of those schools to which you will apply. We recommend that you apply to several schools – not just one. Consider applying to 1-2 schools in each of the following categories: 1) good chance for admittance 2) may be admitted and 3) much less likely to be admitted.

## ***Rankings***

We suggest you exercise caution when reviewing national program rankings. In many cases, the criteria used for these lists are not the qualities that are important to you in a program. One popular ranking publication for Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Interior Design and Industrial Design is: *America's Best Architecture and Design Schools* by Design Intelligence [www.di.net](http://www.di.net). This publication is available for review at the Architecture and Landscape Architecture Library in Rapson Hall.

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## Applications

Applying to graduate school can be a time-consuming and detail-oriented process. Taking the time to research programs and fill out applications carefully can save you a lot of stress and ensure you give yourself the best chance of admission. A typical application for graduate professional programs includes:

- Official University Transcripts from ALL past institutions
  - GRE Test Scores – These are typically sent directly to the schools from the testing service
  - Personal Statement – Short essay(s) detailing your interests and experience (see details on next page)
  - Letters of Reference – Three letters from faculty and instructors are typically required
  - Application Forms – Application forms can be several pages long. Some schools require two forms – one for the college and one for the department.
  - Portfolio – A comprehensive portfolio of your work. (see details later in this packet)
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## Admissions Tests

Most graduate professional programs for Architecture and Landscape Architecture require the Graduate Record Examination(GRE) as part of the application. To learn more about the test visit:

GRE – Graduate Record Exam [www.gre.com](http://www.gre.com)

It is recommended that you spend some time preparing for the GRE. Study guides are available at most bookstores and practice tests can be purchased on the GRE web site. Additionally, the SMART Learning Commons offers test preparation resources. To learn more visit <http://www.smart.umn.edu>.

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## Personal Statements

### ***What to Include***

A personal statement is an introductory essay you can use to demonstrate how and why you are an ideal candidate for graduate education. In some cases you will be asked to address very specific questions and in other cases you will not be given much guidance. Typically you will want to include:

- Why are you interested in this field of study?
- What skills and experience support this interest and prove your abilities?
- What are your specific research interests and/or career goals?
- Why are you interested in this school and program?

## **Strong Personal Statements**

Creating a strong personal statement takes a lot of thought and revision. Follow the below guidelines when writing a quality personal statement.

- Be sure to answer questions that are asked in the application.
- Don't write what you think they want to hear.
- Attempt to answer the questions through a personal story or narrative. The narrative should be well organized and answer the questions clearly.
- Don't be general, use *specific* examples to vividly get your point across.
- Avoid the most common and cliché responses e.g. "As a kid, I loved building things with Legos..." or "I have wanted to be an architect for as long as I can remember."
- Include reference to research you have conducted on the school and program to make it clear that you know what you are getting into.
- Avoid negative experiences, or generally having a negative tone in your essay.
- If there are any problems in your academic record, you can explain those *briefly*.
- Don't simply re-list everything you have been involved in...make sure your essay provides more depth than your application and/or resume.
- Include details that show your passion for the field and your intellectual abilities.
- Make sure your statement is well written, without errors and grammatically flawless!

Personal statement critiques are available at Career and Internship Services. To schedule an appointment with a career professional, call 612-624-2710.

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## **References**

Most programs require at least three letters of recommendation. Recommenders can have a big impact on your overall application so be thoughtful about who you select and how you prepare them for writing your letters. If you take time off from school before applying to graduate school, it is critical to stay in touch with faculty so they can write strong letters for you after a break.

### **Who to Select**

It is ideal to select faculty or instructors who can speak to your work in architecture or design courses such as studios or workshops. No more than one reference should come from an employer and it should be an employer in the design field. Each school may have different rules or expectations on who you select as references – be sure to ask.

- Choose faculty/staff who know your work well and also understand your professional goals.
- Ask each recommender if s/he would feel *comfortable* making a *strong* recommendation.
- Plan on soliciting at least one extra recommendation than required in case of an emergency.

### **How to Assist Your Recommenders**

- Help them understand your experiences and goals completely – provide a copy of your resume, a draft of your personal statement, and samples of design work.

- Give them suggestions on what it would be most helpful for them to cover (design thinking, professionalism etc.)
  - Since each school may have different forms and guidelines, provide clear instructions for your recommender and consider providing mailing labels with correct addresses.
  - Allow 4-6 weeks for a professor to complete a letter. Consider giving them a false early deadline by which it needs to be completed to provide time to follow up should something unexpected happen.
  - Check in once a week until the recommendations have been completed.
  - Send thank you letters to all of your references.
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## **Portfolio Tips and Suggestions**

Almost every architecture graduate school requires a portfolio be submitted as part of the application process to assess your design abilities. Portfolios are a very essential part of the application and, typically, graduate schools heavily weight an applicant's portfolio when making acceptance decisions. The following suggestions are compiled from faculty recommendations and also include excerpts from Portfolio Design 3rd edition By Harold Linton.

### ***Portfolio Basics***

- Start early! Designing and compiling your portfolio takes a lot of time. We suggest beginning the process during the summer even if you have additional projects from Fall semester that you plan to include.
- The most common portfolio size is 8.5 x 11. Oversized or undersized portfolios can be difficult to handle when shared between reviewers.
- Keep the portfolio to 10-25 pages; no more than 25 pages (1 page has two faces).
- Show your best work, but keep in mind if you leave out a studio, your portfolio might be flagged.
- Because your work is similar to that of your classmates, be thoughtful about how you will differentiate yourself.
- Be sure to show your process in your portfolio; the admissions committee likes to know how you think and make choices.
- Including a resume and cover letter is optional, but they should coordinate with the portfolio design.

### ***Organizing the Portfolio & Captions***

- All pages should be in one direction (portrait or landscape) so reviewers do not have to turn the portfolio to review work samples.
- Include your name near the beginning, if not on the cover.
- Start with strong work at the front and have strong work at the end as well.
- Include concise labels/text explaining if the project was a course assignment or independent work. Also explain the project goals, how you approached the task, and the outcome. If it was a team project, be sure to explain your role and give credit to others involved.
- Be sure to use a nice clean type face for all descriptions.

## ***Design Considerations***

- Use an ‘invisible grid’ that carries the entire organization throughout the presentation and may even be evidenced on the enclosing system in a subtle way such as position/orientation.
- Design a simple and understated enclosing system that doesn’t detract from the layout and presentation of your work. Ensure it will not harm/scratch someone’s desk.
- Be thoughtful about how you will bind it. A portfolio that lays flat on a desk once opened can be helpful for reviewers.
- Title pages for projects can have greater contrast and impact, but be careful to maintain a clear relationship between them and the invisible grid that runs throughout the entire organization.
- All detailed aspects of page numbers, running heads, titles, should be considered and do not forget an index if at all appropriate.
- Craftsmanship is essential in the final product. Cleanliness is also a must.

## ***Feedback & Samples***

- To view samples portfolios, visit the Student Services Office in 107 Rapson Hall.
- Be sure to get feedback on your portfolio from faculty, mentors, peers and lay people. Be aware that faculty who are a part of the admissions review process will not be willing to give you feedback on your portfolio.

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## **Related Resources**

Career and Internship Services in 198 McNeal Hall and 411 Bruininks Hall has additional materials to assist you with your graduate school application process. Stop by our office to check out the following materials:

### ***Online Workshops:***

Grad School Planning <https://umconnect.umn.edu/gradschoolprep/>

Personal Statements <https://umconnect.umn.edu/personalstatement>

### ***Books***

Graduate Admissions Essays by Donald Asher

Portfolio Design 3rd edition” By Harold Linton

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