

# **PURSUING GRADUATE SCHOOL**



Learn how to find and research programs,  
make important connections, write  
application essays, and more!



CAREER SERVICES

**Use this information as you consider or prepare for graduate school.  
Connect with a Career Coach in your college for additional support in  
making your decision and developing application materials.**

## **CONSIDERING GRADUATE SCHOOL**

### **IS GRADUATE SCHOOL RIGHT FOR ME?**

When making the decision to pursue a graduate degree, research and reflect on:

- Your long-term career goals
- Degree requirements for your career goals
- Academic challenges presented by the degree
- Time demands and length of programs
- Financial investment required for degree completion
- Your commitment to the field of study and career goal

### **HOW CAN I BECOME COMPETITIVE FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL?**

Graduate schools look for candidates with backgrounds and qualities which include:

- Appropriate undergraduate and prerequisite coursework
- Research, teaching, or other career-related experiences
- Clear understanding of how a graduate degree advances your career goals

### **WHEN SHOULD I ATTEND GRADUATE SCHOOL?**

Attending graduate school right after graduation or after taking some time off from school have different advantages.

#### **Advantages of going straight to graduate school:**

- Your professors can write letters of recommendation with recent experiences in mind.
- You are accustomed to living on a student budget.
- Your study skills and success strategies are practiced and familiar.
- You are used to academic schedules and demands.

#### **Advantages of taking time off from studies:**

- You have more time to explore and decide on career and program options.
- You can save money for graduate school and gain greater financial stability.
- You may become more energized to take classes again after a break from coursework.
- You may be able to get into more competitive programs after gaining additional experience.

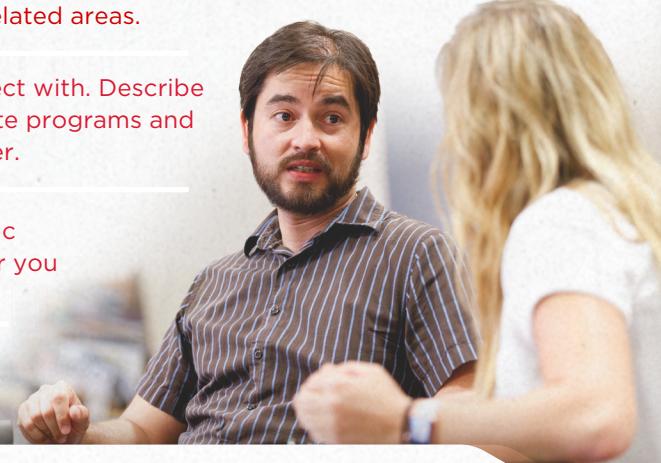
## **CONNECTING WITH FACULTY**

Faculty are a valuable resource for students interested in graduate school. Reach out to faculty to:

- Identify undergraduate research and/or teaching opportunities
- Learn more about their area of expertise
- Get suggestions of specific programs to explore
- Develop mentoring relationships
- Connect with their colleagues at other institutions
- Gain letters of recommendation

## HOW DO I CONNECT WITH FACULTY?

- ① Identify faculty in fields of interest.
  - Consider faculty in a field of interest who teach a class you are taking or have completed.
  - Research faculty by department on the UNL web site to determine their areas of focus in the field.
  - Ask your Academic Advisor for suggestions of faculty in related areas.
- ② Send a brief, personalized email to the faculty you want to connect with. Describe your interest in learning more about the field and related graduate programs and ask to meet at a time convenient for them to discuss these further.
- ③ Prepare questions in advance on topics such as their field, specific research interests, specializations, education, and suggestions for you based on your interests.
- ④ Send them a thank you email after your conversation.



## RESEARCHING GRADUATE PROGRAMS

### WHAT DO I LOOK FOR IN A GRADUATE PROGRAM?

If you decide to pursue a graduate degree, research schools and programs to identify those fitting parameters you best match and prefer such as:

- Program requirements, length, cost, and financial assistance available
- Location, including city and institution size, cost of living, housing, and cultural and social opportunities
- Format, including on campus, online, or a combination, and accelerated programs
- Accreditation as appropriate to your field

### GRADUATE SCHOOL COMPARISON AND TRACKING WORKSHEET

A system such as an Excel worksheet that will organize your efforts and help you save time looking for information. Items to track may include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School and Program</li><li>• Link to Program</li><li>• Location</li><li>• Department Contact</li><li>• Cost of Program</li><li>• Assistantships Available</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fellowships Available</li><li>• Application Materials Required</li><li>• Application Deadline</li><li>• Key Pros and Cons</li></ul>
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### HOW DO I PAY FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL?

Assistantships may pay tuition, fees, books, and/or a stipend for living expenses. Selections are made by program faculty and/or staff. Assistantship responsibilities typically include:

- Teaching Assistants (TA) support and instruct undergraduate courses.
- Research Assistants (RA) assist faculty with specific research projects.
- Graduate Assistants (GA) may or may not be related to their academic program.

Student Loan Programs offer long-term, lower interest loans which typically require repayment after you complete the program. You must be admitted to a program to receive such loans. Fellowships may provide funding for studies, research, or international experience. Applications, selection process, requirements, and activities vary. Consult the UNL Office of Fellowships, [unl.edu/fellowships](http://unl.edu/fellowships), for more information and assistance on the application process.

# APPLYING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

## COMMON APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

- Academic Resume/Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- Online Application Form
- Application Essay/Personal Statement
- Admission Test – Program test requirements vary. Common tests include the GRE and GMAT.

### Exam Resources:

- Educational Testing Service (ETS.org) administers the GRE admissions test and offers test prep resources.
- MBA.com offers test prep resources for the GMAT.
- **Recommendation Letters** – Three letters are often required. Faculty recommendation letters are typically weighted highest. Letters from internship or field experience supervisors can also be valuable.
- **Admission Interview**
- **Official Transcripts**
- **Application Fee** – Fees typically range from \$50 to \$85. A fee waiver may be available. Inquire with the program department/graduate admissions staff about this possibility.

## HOW DO I WRITE AN APPLICATION ESSAY

### OR PERSONAL STATEMENT?

While some programs may specify the topic or question to address in an essay or statement, others will not. Generally, topics of interest include your:

- Reasons for pursuing a graduate degree
- Areas of particular interest within the field
- Career goals and plans
- Reasons the specific institution and program is of interest
- Preparation, experience, and qualifications for the program

## WHAT IS AN ACADEMIC RESUME AND A

### CURRICULUM VITAE (CV)?

Sometimes used interchangeably, these documents differ and are used for unique purposes. An academic resume is used for graduate programs, scholarships/fellowships, research programs and academic honors. They may exceed one page but follow application instructions regarding length restrictions for specific programs. A CV is most often used by graduate students and faculty applying for academic, scientific, and research positions.

On your academic resume, present sections that best highlight your qualifications for the program of interest.

In addition to education, headings which may apply include:

- Education Abroad (listed within overall Education section)
- Research Experience
- Teaching Experience
- Academic Honors/Awards and Scholarships
- Publications/Presentations
- Internship Experience (if related)
- Leadership and Involvement
- Work Experience
- Professional Organizations
- Language Skills
- Volunteer/Service Experience

## Basic Writing Guidelines

- Adhere to length, organization, and content instructions.
- Identify and reference your main message throughout.
- Support your message using specific examples.
- Tailor each essay to its intended program.
- Get feedback from faculty and a Career Coach.

\* See page 6 for more information on developing an application essay or personal statement.

# ACADEMIC RESUME/CURRICULUM VITAE (CV)

**Herbie Husker**  
[herbie.husker@huskers.unl.edu](mailto:herbie.husker@huskers.unl.edu)  
402-555-5555

## EDUCATION

### University of Nebraska – Lincoln (UNL), Lincoln, NE

Bachelor of Science May 20XX

**Major:** Psychology **Minor:** Business Administration

GPA: 3.75/4.000

### Universidad De Granada, Granada Spain August 20XX-May 20XX

Studied Spanish Culture and History, Art History, Global Studies, Economics

## RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

### Research Assistant, UNL Department of Psychology

Paul Wilson, PhD, Culture and Academics Lab

August 20XX-May 20XX

- Transcribed and coded 140 interviews utilizing thematic analysis to identify recurring themes
- Conceptualized and developed independent research project investigating the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic satisfaction
- Designed interview protocol and identified appropriate quantitative measures to assess primary research questions
- Completed literature review encompassing 50 articles and 100+ researchers on the APA Psychinfo database, to propose research questions
- Analyzed data with statistical software SPSS and generated results and discussion section of manuscript
- Developed poster presenting methodology, findings, and conclusions presented at the 20XX UNL Undergraduate Research Fair

### Research Assistant, UNL Department of Sociology

Joan Mason, PhD, Child Development Lab

- Conducted intake of participants through parent interview and assessment of factors of children with different ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences)
- Briefed parents on process, purpose, tools, and components of study safety and goals
- Recorded individual cognitive assessment sessions
- Prepared rooms for sessions including assessment equipment
- Participants had a comfortable and streamlined environment

## POSTER PRESENTATIONS

### "Understanding the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement: An explanatory analysis." 20XX UNL Undergraduate Research Fair, Lincoln, NE

### "A qualitative investigation on the impact of ACE factors on mental health." 20XX UNL Undergraduate Research Fair, Lincoln, NE

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## HONORS

Psi Chi Honors Society, January 20XX-Present  
Study Abroad Academic Achievement Award, January 20XX  
College of Arts and Sciences Dean's List, December 20XX-May 20XX  
UNL Regents Scholar, August 20XX-Present

## ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

### Outreach Coordinator, Lancaster Literacy, Lincoln, NE

May 20XX-Present

- Implement grade school reading program reaching 50+ children through workshops and parent resources
- Develop and promote ESL program for adults through life skills focused activities and dialogue
- Recruit and schedule 10+ volunteers to serve as teachers and tutors for over 70 adult learners
- Direct phone, email, and walk-in inquiries to appropriate resources, services, and referral agencies

### Telephone Interviewer, UNL Bureau of Sociological Research, Lincoln, NE

August 20XX-June 20XX

- Completed 12-question interview of 100 first year traditional college students on their experiences with school, work, and finances
- Completed 21-question interview of 125 adults ages 35-45 for national longitudinal study to understand the effects of stress across generations
- Entered responses to SPSS based interface for analysis and reporting

### Tutor, University of Nebraska Athletics, Lincoln, NE

August 20XX-May 20XX

- Clarified concepts in Biology and Spanish courses for student athletes
- Reviewed and evaluated lab assignments

## INVOLVEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

### Big Red Investment Club, UNL, Lincoln, NE

Fall 20XX-Present

**Vice President** Fall 20XX-Spring 20XX

- Collaborate with members to grow investment fund through common bonds, equities, and mutual funds
- Manage membership communications including email and social media
- Increased membership engagement through gaming programs and incentives

### Human Resources Institute, Lincoln, NE

Summer 20XX

**Counselor**

- Mentored teenagers in developing leadership, communication and goal setting skills, and self-confidence in 1:1 and group meetings
- Led workshops for up to 40 teenagers using team building and independent activities in addition to instruction and demonstration

### Student Alumni Association, UNL

Fall 20XX-Spring 20XX

**Vice-President of Membership Development** Fall 20XX-Spring 20XX

- Collaborated with a team of 25 board members to plan events for 300+ members
- Increased membership 10% through initiatives such as a rewards program, gaming style contests, and online and in person promotions
- Mentored members on academic success, involvement, and professional development

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# APPLYING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

*The following ideas and questions can guide your development of an application essay or personal statement.*

## Introduction

### Ask Yourself

- When did I first consider this career?
- What elements were meaningful to me?
- What led to my commitment to it?

### Tell A Story

- Start in the middle of the action with limited lead-in.
- Describe relevant details.
- Connect it to goals related to the program.
- Specify the school and program.

## Body

### Ask Yourself

- What are my career interests and goals?
- What have I done to prepare myself for this career and program?
- Why does this specific program interest me?

### Make Your Case

- Identify experiences such as shadowing which gave you an understanding of the career.
- Describe how you developed your qualifications for the program and career including internships, research, coursework, or other relevant experiences.
- Share your career interests and goals.
- Connect your interests and goals to the program concentration areas, faculty, research, and/or internship opportunities.

## Conclusion

### Ask Yourself

- How have my experiences affected my initial interest in the career?
- How will this program help me reach my career goals?
- How do I feel about the potential of being in the program?

### Make Your Case

- Reference the story in your introduction.
- Specify the school and program.
- Reinforce the connection between your interests and goals to the program.
- Express confidence in your readiness for the program.

## DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Some programs may request an additional statement on diversity. Such a statement may incorporate the diversity you will bring to the program and/or your experience with diverse populations. Consider your experiences on campus, education abroad, workplaces, and social settings and think of diversity broadly as you develop your statement.

# PLANNING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATIONS

The sample application timeline below is based on a May graduation.  
( Specific program timelines vary )

## Junior Year

### Spring

- Research programs.
- Select programs of interest.
- Review application requirements and deadlines.
- Visit campuses if possible.
- Develop an academic resume.
- Identify test preparation resources.

### Summer

- Take admissions tests.
- Draft academic resume and application essays.
- Review your academic resume and application essays with faculty mentors and a Career Coach.
- Send official transcripts from all post-secondary institutions attended.

## Senior Year

### Fall

- Retake admissions tests as needed.
- Complete online application forms.
- Ask for letters of recommendation.
- Provide forms and requirements to letter writers a month ahead of deadlines.
- Submit applications.

### Spring

- Accept or decline offers.
- Submit financial aid applications.
- Send thank you notes to letter writers and others who helped throughout the process.

## DEVELOPING A PARALLEL PLAN

In addition to having more options, reasons for developing a parallel plan to graduate school include:

- Admission is competitive, you may not get in on your first try.
- You may find you lack the financial resources to go when planned.
- Unpredictable life situations may prevent you from attending when planned.

When developing a parallel plan, be specific, identifying options such as:

- Gaining relevant experience through full-time jobs and/or volunteer opportunities
- Developing qualifications for the program through additional coursework or online learning
- Generating savings to help pay for a graduate program
- Taking a gap year through temporary, related opportunities
- Pursuing related career paths which do not require an advanced degree



CAREER SERVICES

**www.careers.unl.edu  
402-472-3145  
225 Nebraska Union  
Lincoln, NE 68588-0451**