

Graduate School Application Success

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**Unofficial* advice based on Army guidance AND the realities of graduate school admissions*

Overview

1. What sort of program am I looking for
2. The application itself
3. Setting yourself apart
4. Once you're admitted

General Programs Description

- You are looking for a *terminal* master's degree program...that can be completed in 12 to 18 months...and is within current FAO funding guidelines.
- Different programs have different strengths: reputation, location, academics, connections...which means tradeoffs are involved.
- You should try to find a program that is the right fit for **you**...

Programs to Consider

University Type	University	Program
Private - Elite	Georgetown	Walsh School of Foreign Service
	Princeton	School of Public and International Affairs
Private	American University	School of International Service
	Syracuse University	Maxwell School
State	Georgia Institute of Technology	Sam Nunn School of International Service
	University of Illinois at Urbana	Illinois Global Institute
Government	National Intelligence University	College of Strategic Intelligence
	Naval Postgraduate School	Department of National Security Affairs

Letters of Recommendation

- Typically require **three** letters of recommendation with at least one being from an academic (which means someone with a PhD who has taught you in the past and evaluated your written work)
 - Ideal mix would be 1 academic, 1 military/academic, and 1 military **all of whom have directly worked with you in the past.**
 - You should plan on providing your recommender with the following: a draft (with bullet points), your CV, your transcript, a list of dates when each program is due, and your statement of purpose for each program.
- Letters of recommendation are sent directly to the school; you will know when the letter has been received. Do not/not add a recommender on your application to the application without asking them first!

Statement of purpose

- The statement of purpose showcases your writing and gives the schools a sense of whether you'll be a good fit for the program.
- Your essay should incorporate some sort of **personal** experience that led you to a **puzzle** that you will **resolve** by going to **this particular** graduate school.
 - Personal: allows you the chance to be interesting and brag about your real-world experience
 - Puzzle: allows you to relate your real-world experiences to larger issues of national importance
 - Resolve: shows that you value academics and want to use their program to explore this issue, and that your studies will lead to future career outcomes
 - This particular: shows that you understand their graduate school's distinctives and values
- About 85% of your work will go towards your generic statement of purpose, about 15% will go to tailoring for each school.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion statement

- Usually optional, but absolutely include this. You can stress how the military service has exposed you to many different cultures, working with people of a variety of backgrounds on a unified goal, etc.
- These statements are critical to show that yes you are military, but that you also play well with others.
- Remember that diversity is broadly defined.

- Schools may have specific guidance for this: avoid Army acronyms, and translate into civilian *only when possible*. An armor company commander is not a “small business owner” or “director” or “senior manager” - and that is okay.
- Templates are available online; I suggest either using Word or Overleaf (considered more professional, but requires a bit of a start-up cost to learn how to write with it).
- Include: education, duty assignments, publications, volunteer work, and languages. Probably do not include: military schools, military awards, references.

Setting yourself apart

- Publishing
- GRE
- Reaching out to faculty

Publish or perish

- Not only do publications align with the CSA's goals for the Army for improving professional writing, they will set you apart from other candidates who are only able to submit previous classwork.
- The bar to publishing in most Army journals is low (which is helpful as you get started), so think about branch-related publications, *Military Review* if you're more ambitious, and *Parameters* if you really want to impress.
- You can also subscribe to the Harding Project substack, which emails articles each week about ways the Army profession can be improved by professional writing.

To GRE or not to GRE?

- No GRE required: no problem!
- GRE required: take the GRE!

GRE OPTIONAL: DANGER

In this case, you should take the GRE. If you do poorly, do not send scores forward. Not providing a GRE (particularly if your peers do so) will suggest to the schools that you did poorly on the test, which will disadvantage you.

- Studying tips: *Five Pound Book of GRE Problems* and the Victorian-era novel *Vanity Fair*; have two or three historical references readily at hand for their essay section.

Reaching out to faculty

- Don't overdo this, but reaching out to faculty can be a great way to improve your admissions prospects. A short email introducing yourself, stating that you're interested in the program and would value their perspective on their program's distinctives, can be helpful. Expect about a 25% response rate.
- Reaching out to Army War College fellows (or Army officers at the school) might also be helpful, both to network and get their perspective on the program.

Once you're admitted

- Tuition negotiations
- Campus visit

Tuition negotiations

- Schools that are already on the ACS list are familiar with the Army funding model, and are comfortable with negotiations (generally consisting of you telling them that their tuition needs to be lowered to a certain dollar amount).
- A problem may come if more than one officer is admitted to a program: they might not be willing to lower the cost for more than one officer.
- **DO NOT OFFER FULL PRICE: DO NOT PAY ANYTHING YOURSELF.**

Campus visit

- Some programs may offer to defray the cost of a campus visit, but most will not. Expect to do this on your own dime.
- Use a campus visit to focus on three aspects of a graduate program:
 - What the surrounding area will be like to live (particularly if you have a family, you should be thinking about towns and neighborhoods and schools).
 - What are the sorts of other students who have been admitted (if you're the first Army officer they've ever had, that is a good data point to know in advance).
 - Are there any real aspects that make you uncomfortable (faculty or students).
 - Meet with Army officers who are there as well.

Contact

Send me a note if you'd like further advice or feedback on a CV.
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