

Guide to Graduate School

Engage in self-reflection and examine your reasons for pursuing an advanced degree.

Why Should I Get An MFA?

- To focus on your work for a significant period of time.
- To receive critical feedback in a serious environment and expand your critical vocabulary.
- Get credentialed to teach at the university level and potentially gain teaching experience.
- Join a community of artists /designers.
- Get exposure to a profession.
- Have the opportunity to network.

Why Shouldn't I Get An MFA?

- Don't get an MFA out of pressure from parents, faculty or friends.
- Don't get an MFA because you don't know what to do with your degree.
- Don't get an MFA assuming you that you can easily get a full-time teaching job afterward. There is intense competition today.
- Don't get an MFA without considering the debt you will be taking on. Calculate it first.

Some advantages to working first:

- Recharge your batteries
- Allow you to gain content-specific experience
- Help you to gain confidence
- Spur motivation
- Offer you the chance to investigate a field that interests you

Alternatives to an MFA

If you are not interested in teaching or the actual degree, but want some experience of an artistic community and the time to focus on a new project, consider residency programs. Some very competitive programs offer stipends and/or room and board. Other programs expect you to pay for housing, your day-to-day expenses and travel costs. A residency programs can provide some of the same networking opportunities as an MFA program without the cost of tuition. If your main goal is to get a behind the view of the art world and to learn the business of art, considering getting a job working for a well-known artist, museum, gallery or other arts related business or organization.

When to Apply

There is no best time to apply for graduate school. However if you are planning on going directly after obtaining your undergraduate degree, you should begin gathering information during your junior year. Graduate school for Art is an intense experience requiring a deep commitment to artistic growth. Some applicants do not get accepted on their first try. Make an informed decision about what program to attend

before investing your time and money. Be sure to look nationwide; do not limit yourself geographically. Consider the following sources:

Where to Apply

Choosing a graduate school is all about finding a good fit for you. Consider the following factors when conducting research:

Type of Program Some MFA programs are still strongly rooted in the fundamentals and techniques of traditional art making while others emphasize research, theoretical and conceptual study. Some separate out by discipline while others offer a studio art concentration and encourage cross-disciplinary experimentation.

Reputation Investigate the reputation of the institution as a whole. Remember that the reputation of the specific department and individual faculty members of the graduate program hold more weight than the reputation of the overall institution. Make certain you are applying to a program that has been accredited. The CAA Directory on Graduate Programs in the Visual Arts is a useful resource.

<http://www.collegeart.org/directories/>

Faculty Strong programs have faculty members that are active in the art works as artists, critics and curators. If you are looking forward to working with a specific faculty member, research to see if they will actually be teaching and not on sabbatical while you are in school.

Alumni and Current Students An excellent way to determine if a school is a good fit is to research alumni. Current students can be a great resource also

Facilities **Try** and visit the campus to actually see what resources are available. Will you have access to printmaking; woodworking and metal fabrication that you will need to make your work? Also is digital equipment available? Will the studio space be large enough to accommodate the kind of work you create? And what about studio access? Not all studios are open 24/7.

Size of the Institution While some programs admit fewer than 10 artists/designer a year, other admit 50 or more. A smaller program may allow you to work more closely with faculty. A larger program may give you more exposure to other artist and a broader community.

Cost & Financial Aid/Scholarships Consider this carefully. Do not assume you will receive tuition waivers/scholarships, stipend or teaching assistantships. Conduct extensive research to make sure you can afford a graduate degree.

Once you've considered all criteria, you can now rank your list schools. As criteria, use your personal interests and the relative likelihood of admission. Use three categories to rank: **reach schools**, "I don't think I have a good chance for admission but I am interested;" **possible schools**, "I have a fairly good chance for admission;" and **safety schools**, "I will definitely be accepted." You should apply to at least two schools from each category.

Resources

College Art Association www.collegeart.org

Council of Graduate Schools www.cgsnet.org

Grad Schools.com www.gradschools.com

Saatchi Online: Art Colleges Around the World www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artcolleges/