Graduate school is an important next step in your life or career. It is an intensive two to three year art experience in a concentrated environment. Specific degrees include the following:

**Master of Fine Art (MFA)** – the primary studio and performance degree. An MFA requires 60 or more credits of study that includes primarily a studio concentration in one area. Additional coursework outside the concentration might include art history, drawing, and design. The MFA is the terminal degree for college teaching jobs in studio and some performing arts areas. (Terminal degrees are considered the highest possible degree in the field.)

**Master of Art (MA) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)** – for study in art history, art education, museum studies, criticism and other non-studio degrees. The PhD is the terminal degree for teaching art history, some performing arts areas, art theory, museum studies, dramaturgy, and other non-studio courses at the college level.

**Other graduate art degrees** include the Masters of Professional Development (MPD), or a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT), both for Art Education, although there are many more. Most AU students go on to MFA or MA programs.

We will assist you in preparing your graduate school applications whenever you choose to apply. Many AU students go straight on to graduate school. However, you may want to consider sitting out for at least one year.

**Advantages:**
- Gives adequate time to photograph work from your senior show and include that with your application.
- The application process will not conflict with work done in your senior year.
- Provides at least seven months to research graduate schools and get materials together.
- Allows time to visit schools.
- Allows time to earn money.
- Gives time to get over “undergraduate burn out” and become eager and excited about going back to school.
- Performing arts graduates may audition and “strike gold” in the first few weeks.

**Disadvantages:**
- May lose artistic momentum.
- May be swayed by the enticements of the “real world,” such as earning money and having freedom from getting up early and making art on a schedule.
- May lose studio access, unless you rent space or have generous parents.
**Contact at least 10 graduate schools to begin your search:**
How to get started researching schools to contact:
- Come to the CDC library and ask to see the *College Art Association Guide to MFA Programs* in the Visual Arts. We can show you how to use all of our database programs.
- Talk to advisors and teachers who know your work (art pieces) well and ask which graduate programs they recommend.
- Use internet resources such as <www.gradschools.com> (best for international searches) or <www.Petersons.com> (best for domestic searches)
- Consider how important location is to you: urban vs. rural, area of the country, climate, part time employment possibilities, etc.
- Look at the websites of each of the colleges you are considering. Pay special attention to the faculty in the studios in which you are interested. What sort of work do they do? Where are their degrees from? You are choosing a faculty member or members to study with, not just a university.
- **When you contact graduate schools**, either by email or phone, ask for an application, catalog, or specific description of the program, which entrance exams or auditions are required for your program, and any information they can provide about financial aid, including assistantships and fellowships.

**The ideal timeline:**
- Begin your search at least by September of the year before you plan to enter. (The earliest application deadlines are in January of the year in which you intend to enter; the latest are mid-April. Assistantship deadlines are usually earlier.)
- Find out whether or not you need to take the GRE, MAT or other entrance exams (September). If so, contact the CDC for information about the tests.
- Investigate scholarships, fellowships, and other ways of paying for grad school. Start in October, with the understanding that this process will not be complete until you receive financial aid packages from schools.
- As you receive materials (October), organize them by application deadline date.
- Allow a few weeks to look them over (November) and visit the schools if possible or practical. We highly recommend you visit to check out the facilities, talk with students, meet faculty.
- Ask your professors for letters of recommendation (November). Allow them a minimum of two weeks, and many will need more to really be able to evaluate your work. Provide them with all necessary information: schools you are considering, application deadlines, etc. You will likely need to give reminders!
- Allow a month to write (and re-write) your application essays and put together your portfolio (November).
- Application packet should be almost complete by December.
- Build in time for auditions and campus visits (December through February, or whenever the deadlines are).

**Apply to at least four schools:**
- One or two schools with a particular area of concentration or person with whom you would like to study.
- Two schools with strong overall reputations.
- One or two larger schools with a favorable admissions ratio.
- Schools with some type of inside connection: your advisor went there; your major professor has friends there, etc.
- Apply for assistantships at all schools you apply to.
A Completed Application Usually Includes:

Transcript: Admissions committees require official transcripts of your grades. If you attended one or more institutions prior to AU, you will likely need to submit those official transcripts, as well. To send either a hard copy or an electronic version of your transcript to a graduate school, you need to contact the Registrar's Office, <http://www.alfred.edu/registrar/>. According to Federal law, the Registrar's Office is the only office on campus that can forward your transcript to a graduate school or company. In addition, you must make the request personally: a school cannot request them for you. Be sure to request your transcripts well before the application deadline.

Letters of Recommendation: Most graduate schools require 2-3 letters of recommendation. Letters from your current faculty will carry the most weight with graduate admissions committees. Be sure to ask your references if they think they know you well enough to write a meaningful letter. Be aware that the earlier in the semester that you ask, the less busy faculty will be. If the application requires original, hard-copy letters, it is a courtesy to provide your references with addressed, stamped envelopes for their convenience. DO NOT ask them to send the letters directly to you to forward. In addition, giving your professors such documents as transcripts, a resume, a copy of your application essay, and a copy of a research paper may help them write a thorough recommendation. Most grad schools will expect you to have waived your right of access to recommendation letters. **Pick up our handout on Letters of Recommendation for more specific ideas.**

The Career Development Center offers two credential file services, Interfolio and SchoolSpring. There is a charge for each service. See <http://www.alfred.edu/cdc/services/credential_files.cfm> or contact the CDC at 607-871-2164 for more information on this option.

The Personal Statement: One or more essay(s) on why you want to go to graduate school in the arts, your goals or philosophy of art, what you hope to accomplish in graduate school, the particular direction or focus in your work, etc. This is often the most difficult and time-consuming part of the application process. Your aim should be a clear, succinct statement showing that you have a definite sense of what you want to do, and showing your enthusiasm for the field of study you have chosen. Your essay(s) should reflect your writing ability and reveal the clarity, depth, and focus of your thinking.

Admissions committees will assess a number of variables from your statement, including: writing ability; your motivation and commitment to the field of study; realistic expectations of the program and resulting career opportunities; major areas of interest within the field; research or work experience; educational background (formal and informal); short- and long-term goals; reasons for deciding to pursue graduate education in a particular field at a particular institution; maturity; personal uniqueness - what you would add to the diversity of the entering class.

Questions to ask yourself as you begin to structure the personal statement:
- What sets you apart from other applicants? Why may you be a stronger candidate for graduate study – and more successful and effective in your chosen field – than other applicants?
- What factors or events have contributed to your personal development?
- What is special, unique, distinctive, or impressive about you and your life story? What are some experiences – academic, personal or work-oriented – that would help the committee gather further information about you?
- When did you originally become interested in the field, and what have you learned since that time that has strengthened your resolve?
- What are your specific career goals?
- Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that need explanation?
- Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles to get to where you are now?
- What personal characteristics do you possess that would enhance your prospects for success in your profession? How have you demonstrated these characteristics in the past?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

Other general suggestions:
- The number one mistake people make in writing personal statements is not proofing the names of the universities! For example "For as long as I can remember, I've wanted to get my degree from Duke University."... Except that you are writing to Princeton!
- Creative opening sentences are great IF you can find something unique, and if you stick with the theme throughout your essay.
- Back up your claims with solid examples of when you have demonstrated the skill or competency you are describing.
- Do not address information that might reflect badly on you such as poor grades or a low GRE score in your essay. Keep it positive and inspired. Address these other issues in an addendum to your application or in a cover letter that you will enclose. Your explanation should be short and to the point, avoiding long, tedious excuses.

The CDC has several books on writing application essays that you might want to look at before starting. We strongly recommend that you have your letters reviewed by a counselor at the CDC, the Writing Center, AND at least one faculty member: we would all assess different qualities of your essay and would give you a wide range of feedback.

**GRE or MAT** test scores. (Some MFA programs do not require entrance exams.)

**The Interview, Portfolio and/or Audition:** Interviews are required in some fields and highly encouraged in most others. They can be a very important opportunity to persuade an institution's admissions office that you would be an excellent candidate. Portfolios and auditions are often required for creative disciplines and can be the most important part of the application procedure. Be sure to prepare by arranging for a mock interview with the Career Development Center, or speaking with your faculty members about putting together the best portfolio or preparing for an audition.

**For performing artists: an audition.** Check with the graduate programs to which you are applying on their audition requirements, and follow their guidelines closely.

**For visual artists: portfolio** of examples of your work. This is the most important component of your application: the strength of your portfolio will make or break your admission and chances at assistantships/fellowships. Choose your work very carefully and send only images or clips of your best, most mature work. Never include works that are seconds or “filler”. The images themselves must be of the highest professional quality: no compromise of any type can be accepted on this point. Have your work professionally documented, or, if you photograph the work yourself, have the resulting images professionally critiqued. If you have any questions about submitting, presenting, or labeling your work, ask the graduate program which method they prefer. Do not send a portfolio without asking your faculty or other professionals for their feedback.

**Resume** – the CDC can assist with this.

**Fee** (usually $25-$100) – check the admissions website first! Some universities will waive the fee if you use their online application.
Submitting the completed application:
Be sure to send (submit electronically and/or mail) everything well before the deadline and call to confirm that it got there; a late application can ruin your chances regardless of whose fault it is. If you are mailing your application, package it up neatly and use an appropriately sized envelope. If you can afford it, send it certified mail so that you will know when the application has been received.

Follow-Up

• After you have submitted your application materials, call the university and confirm they received everything they need for a completed application.
• Write to the faculty person with whom you wish to study.
• Write to the head of the area in which you wish to study.
• Visit the schools in which you are interested, if possible. If admitted to more than one school, do visit to be able to make the best choice. Remember that this is an expensive, long-term decision.
• Make appointments in advance.
• For artists: take examples of your work on your visit. (Electronic documentation is best.)
• For performing artists: prepare a monologue or piece (a new one) in case. Even if you do not use it, it will not hurt to have an extra monologue or new piece memorized.
• Look over the facilities and look at student work or performances, if possible.
• Talk with the chairperson about assistantship possibilities.
• Talk with the professor(s) in your area.
• Talk with present graduate students and ask them: How accessible are the professors? Are the facilities adequate? Are the assistantships adequate?

If you are not accepted:

• Remember that your application will be in competition with a small percentage of the top undergraduate BFA /BA graduates and a school's final selection will represent a small percentage of this group (only about 5% of BFA graduates finish an MFA degree). Check the application to admission ratio for each school in the College Art Association Guide to MFAs. Your work and your application may be strong, but there may be a number of others that are stronger.
• It is impossible to know or predict how a particular department will make its final selections or to know the strengths of the other applicants.
• Contact the department graduate admissions director. Do not sound angry or defensive; this would be inappropriate. Always be polite and professional. Ask specifically if something was deficient or lacking in your application.
• Determine if you will reapply the next year after further research or preparation. Many times another year's maturity in working can help gain you admission to graduate school. Some programs can only admit a limited number of students, and re-applying may convince the committee that you are serious enough about their program to be one of the few granted admission.
• Did you apply only to schools with too high an admissions ratio? Would you be wise to apply to some larger state university programs, or less selective institutions, where your chances are better?
• Try some alternate strategies. For example, apply at mid-year if allowed. Students may drop out or graduate, leaving openings. Or, apply during the summer session and excel. This is a chance to prove your value, if you can, and then apply for program admission.

Paying for Grad School:
There are many types of aid provided for graduate study. You should never rule out a school as too expensive until you learn more about the types of aid generally received by its students. Federal aid is available to many U.S. citizens, nationals, or permanent residents. In
order to qualify, all applicants must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). For the purposes of most federal student aid, graduate students are automatically considered independent. Keep in mind, however, that some schools require parental information and expect a contribution from parents who are able to provide, even if you are an independent student.

- Types and amounts of aid will vary tremendously by school.
- Apply to as many sources as you can find.
- Make sure you have all the forms required by each school.
- Complete all forms legibly and accurately. Check your applications carefully, as errors and omissions can often cause problems.
- Keep copies of all forms!
- If you have special circumstances, communicate them directly to the financial aid department.
- Be aware that changes in your financial aid package may occur each year - it is up to you to find out if that happens.
- Send in your application well before the deadline.

Types of aid:

Grants and Fellowships - generally, these are awards that do not require repayment. They may be based solely on academic merit (fellowships/scholarships), or awarded based on need (grants). Many include tuition and stipends for living expenses. A database of fellowship sources is available on the CDC website under the Student section.

Teaching Assistantships - typically require about 20 hours per week and may involve delivering lectures, giving critiques, advising students, supervising studios, or otherwise assisting a professor. If you are interested in a TA position, contact the academic department: ordinarily, you are not considered for such positions until the school has accepted you. Some schools have full-tuition waivers for TAs; others will waive part of your tuition.

Loans - There are several different federal loan programs available to you. Each loan program has a different maximum amount you can borrow, different requirements for eligibility, different interest rates and different repayment options. The Financial Aid Office of the schools to which you are applying should also be able to provide you with additional information. International students not eligible for US Federal loans should research options with their home country’s government.

Some of the better known fellowships in the arts are listed below:
(but there are so many more out there – take time to research more options):

The Mellon Fellowships – Open to seniors who plan to apply to a PHD program. Masters degree students who attended a university without a PhD option are also eligible. This will aid students with outstanding potential to be teachers or humanitarian scholars and covers full tuition and book plus $15,000 annually. The deadline to apply is December 18th.
http://www.woodrow.org/mellon

Jacob K. Javitz Fellowship Program - This fellowship provides support to students of superior ability and a promise of a Master’s degree that will lead to a doctoral degree in fine arts. This program grants the graduate student a stipend of $18,000 annually. The web address is http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/HEP/legps/javits.html

The Marshall Scholarship - This scholarship is open to all students. It gives graduate students the opportunity to study in The United Kingdom. Students are awarded $16,500 a year to spend on their academic studies. The deadline to apply is late September. Their web-site is
http://ukscholarshipsdatabase.britishcouncil.org or go through http://www.britcoun.org and click on students.

**Rotary International Academic Ambassadorial Scholarship Program** - Open to any student. This scholarship sends a student to any country they wish as long as it has a Rotary club. This student must promote friendly relations between different nations. The student has tuition and fees covered plus $23,000 for any other academic endeavors. The deadline is early March and the web address is http://www.rotaryfellowships.org.

**Fulbright Scholarship** - This is an educational exchange program offered to students who are interested in a study abroad program. This scholarship is awarded to top bachelors and masters candidates. The deadline for this scholarship is no later than October each year. The web address is http://www.iie.org/fulbright.

**Thayer Fellowship** – This is a SUNY award for artists in the New York State College of Ceramics. Deadlines are late November/early December. Applications are available in the Art Office in Harder Hall.

**American Association of University Women** [http://www.aauw.org/3000/felgrawa.html](http://www.aauw.org/3000/felgrawa.html)

These grants are open to women who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Applicants should be preparing to re-enter the work force, change careers or advance their current careers. Funds are provided for tuition, fees, books, transportation and dependent care. The deadline is December 15. Application needs to be requested by December 1.

**Advice from AU art alumni:**

Many Alfred art graduates have the career goal of teaching at the college level, and that is the primary career goal of many MFA degree candidates. College teaching is an extremely competitive field, so here are some ways you can prepare yourself for that career, as well as teaching jobs at other levels:

- Do not be overly concerned with rankings, or try to mold your work into what a school seems to be seeking. Look for a school and instruction that supports development of your work. This search can be something of a challenge in itself. Be clear on your own style and adaptability, but be aware that most schools are looking for artists who are willing to grow, not people who come in believing they are already perfect artisans and just need the degree.
- Stay connected to reality. In the undergraduate world of art school it is common to find most students making art that speaks only to them. Be ready to demonstrate and explain how your work and you as an artist are important to society and in particular to a university community.
- Be well-rounded. Draw well and understand the full range of composition approaches, techniques, etc. Understand and be able to work with traditional materials, processes, and compositions, and have familiarity with recent advancements in your field. Have a practical understanding of art history and the contemporary art scene. Be able to explain the range of art and performance activities to people of varied backgrounds both in speaking and writing.
- Graduate work is specific. If you cannot choose between printmaking, photography, and graphic design right now, you will need to make that choice before entering graduate school. (This is a general guideline: some programs will allow you to remain broad in your media. The school’s website will usually give you a good idea of whether or not they encourage interdisciplinary studies). For a performing arts degree, graduate faculty will expect you to have been honing your craft in a specific area long before you apply.
- Take advantage of every teaching opportunity. Take courses in how to teach. Apply for graduate assistantships. Teach at community art centers. Resume entries in this area will give you an important advantage when job searching.
• Follow the advice of CDC staff and your faculty for professional preparation: resume, artist’s statement, portfolio, headshot(s), teaching outlines, audition appointments and documentation of your students’ work (if possible and appropriate to the position you’re applying for). Many schools will ask that you please not send a videotape of your performance upon initial application; you should contact the school for specific requirements for live auditions.

• Be organized. Meet deadlines, be on time, and keep all personal files and information up to date. Read all professional publications. Budget money for the job search, professional materials, and travel. Follow up on contacts. Join the College Art Association or professional performing arts organizations.

• Be personable by nature. Be friendly and positive. Speak well. Take every opportunity to present yourself to groups. Be confident but not pushy when meeting admissions representatives and other artists.

• The reality of any artist is that for every one actor, musician, dancer, visual artist that makes it, ten are struggling to pay rent. Be prepared for the fact that a steady paycheck is not usually something that comes right away with an MFA in performance or studio: you may need to take on other work to support your art.

Visit the school! Meet the faculty, the art students, and the admissions people. Check out the facilities and make sure they are what you will need to succeed. Most importantly, make sure the school feels right.
Grad School Checklist for Sample University, MFA in Ceramics
Customize for your own use

**Sample University**
Address: 264 Sample Street, Boston MA 33004
Email: admissions@sample.edu
Website: www.sample.edu/ceramics
Degree: MFA in Ceramics
# of MFAs per year: 15
# of ceramics faculty: 4
Flexibility to individualize curriculum: Some – they encourage the use of mixed media in sculpture. Unique in that students aren’t assigned one advisor, but a team of three faculty members.

Facilities: 10 gas kilns, 3 salt/soda kilns, 1 raku kiln, 14 electric; individual studio spaces; excellent facilities overall
Thesis requirement: MFA show and artist statement; thesis is required

Study abroad program: Not specific to art school

Connections for internships: Not really discussed at interview; referred to their career services office

Unique to this university: Excellent guest lecture series; exhibit each semester; formal progress evaluation each semester; huge studio spaces.

**Financial:**
Sticker price: $17,000/year
Tuition waiver: Possible for the best candidates, no need to apply separately
Assistantship options and requirements: Yes, majority receive money. There is a separate application for assistantships.
Other university fellowships: Yes, review them at www.sample.edu/fellowships

**Application Info**
GRE required?: No
Waiver for online application?: No
Application fee: $50.00
Other requirements: Transcript, 20 images/clips of work, interview required, essays

**DATES:**
Application mailed: 11/2/2013
Transcript sent: 11/2/2013 (requested from Registrar’s office)
Emailed to follow up and confirm receipt: 11/8/2013

~ Thanks to Lindsay Gilbert ’05 and Kadie Midlam ’01 for help with this document. ~