

# UIS CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

## MASTER IN FINE ARTS (MFA) GRADUATE SCHOOL TIMELINE

This timeline serves as a general guideline for ways to prepare for graduate and/or professional school during your undergraduate career. Depending on each person's unique academic and career goals, the order and information of the steps given may vary. For a more comprehensive plan of preparing for graduate and/or professional school, consult a career counselor at the UIS Career Development Center.

### First Year

- ◆ Start taking general requirements and prerequisites:
  - Meet with an academic advisor and faculty members to arrange a class schedule that will prepare you for higher level classes and graduate school.
- ◆ Start thinking about an undergraduate major:
  - Talk to a Career Counselor at the UIS Career Development Center about the different options to meet your career goals, or just to figure out your career goals!
  - Typically, an undergraduate degree in Visual Arts, English, etc. is required for entrance in to an MFA Program, depending on your focus within that program, but, do not rule out other majors, as they can be supplemented with elective coursework.
- ◆ Meet with people who are in and outside of your major, especially ones that are already in a graduate program. They will be able to tell you many things about the program and can help you determine if the program is right for you. Questions that you should ask:
  - What classes do they recommend?
  - What professors are useful and interesting?
  - Which schools are they looking at for their graduate program?
  - When do they recommend taking certain core requirements?
  - What do they know about the GRE (Graduate Record Examination), if it is required?
  - What they wish someone would have told them. . .
  - Throughout your undergraduate career, it is important to network not only with others in your classes, but professors and other professionals in the field. Join student clubs and community organizations whenever you can to gain valuable connections and experience! Also, consider memberships to organizations as most have student discounts!
- ◆ Visit the Career Development Center to begin perfecting your resume. Working on it now and continually updating it in the future will make for a less stressful third and fourth year.
- ◆ Begin volunteering and/or looking for a part-time job or internship where you can learn valuable skills to benefit your profession. Getting a better sense of the field and networking to build new relationships is essential to a successful career!
  - This will allow you to get your foot in the door with different organizations.
  - Maintain a strong professional relationship with people who could write you recommendation letters and serve as references.
  - Working with professionals in this field will allow you to learn some of their personal experiences in the field. They can also inform you on grad school options and answer questions that you may have.
  - Even if you do not get a job or opportunity you apply for, keep in contact with the people. You never know when something may arise!

- Conduct informational interviews with professionals in the field to gain their insight and advice on the field!

## **Second Year**

- ◆ Choose an undergraduate major:
  - Complete the appropriate paperwork through Records and Registration.
  - In a professional manner, follow-up to make sure the paperwork was processed.
- ◆ Start researching schools and universities:
  - Which degree do you need? Is it offered?
  - What location? What's the job market like in that location?
  - Evaluate the size of the school.
  - Research the tuition cost.
  - When considering different options for graduate school, also think about online degree options and programs that allow you to earn a Master's degree while pursuing your Doctorate.
  - Research post-baccalaureate certificate programs, or "Post-Bac", which are especially important to MFA's and can highlight specialty areas within your career field. Be sure to consider all of your possibilities with your career counselor!
- ◆ Start thinking about the GRE (Graduate Record Examination), if it is required for the school and/or program you are interested in:
  - Meet with a Career Counselor at the Career Development Center to develop a plan of preparation for the when time comes to take the exam(s).
  - Learn what prep courses are offered for the GRE. The Career Development Center offers an online preparation course for the GRE! Contact us for more information!
  - Look into other preparatory resources, such as guides.
- ◆ Start building and structuring your artist portfolio with examples of your work (i.e. videos, pictures, publications and other examples).
- ◆ Find an advisor to guide you along the process of preparing for graduate school and fine arts career.
  - Talk to faculty and academic advisors, professors in and outside of your department, Upperclassmen, and the Career Development Center.

## **Third Year**

- ◆ Continue researching schools and programs:
  - Narrow down your choices and discuss with friends, family, and your Career Counselor.
  - Call, write, or email schools to request catalogs and other information.
  - Consider different graduate degree specialty areas at the schools you are interested in. Most focus areas within an MFA degree include Art, Film, Creative Writing, Music, Theatre, Photography and Dance. Consult your career counselor for assistance in choosing a graduate degree focus and to research the outlook of that degree and career field.
  - Seek out certifications that you can receive to further enhance your resume and portfolio.
- ◆ Start visiting schools to get a feel for the campus, students, and classes.
- ◆ Continue building your portfolio with examples of your work (i.e. videos, pictures, publications and other examples).
- ◆ Find out the requirements of the schools and programs you are considering:
  - GRE scores.
  - Portfolio requirements.
  - Residency and/or low-residency requirements.

- Other Tests? Dates?
- Application Deadlines.
- Early Decision.
- Transcript and course requirements/prerequisites.
- ◆ Start preparing for the GRE:
  - Get your hands on some prep materials and sign up for a preparation course.
  - Start studying in your free time!
- ◆ Register for the GRE:
  - Take it as early as possible to allow time to retake it, if necessary!
  - Schedule your test 60-90 days prior to taking it, allowing time to prepare.
  - Find testing locations near you.
  - Find out how/where you'll receive your scores.
  - Consider the scheduling, rescheduling, and other costs.

### **Summer after Third Year**

- ◆ Narrow the list of schools you are considering:
  - Consider your choices in light of your GRE score.
  - Re-prioritize your needs and preferences.
  - Retake the GRE, if necessary.
- ◆ Begin the application process:
  - Request Letters of Recommendation.
  - Begin your personal statement.

### **Fourth Year**

- ◆ Finalize your applications and career portfolio:
  - Have all application materials and portfolios ready by the fall term as many deadlines are as early as January!
  - Finalize your letters of reference and follow the instructions of the school for submission instructions.
  - Polish up your resume and personal statement and receive feedback from the Career Development Center.
  - Make sure everything is complete before it's mailed and that you have followed instructed completely!
  - Send applications in and contact schools to confirm completion.
- ◆ Send your updated transcripts to universities and programs you are still interested in.
- ◆ Complete and submit your financial aid forms.
- ◆ Schedule and prepare for interviews:
  - Schedule a mock interview at the Career Development Center.
  - Use the Perfect Interview program on the Career Development Center's website.
- ◆ Evaluate offers of acceptance:
  - Consider financial aid offers.
  - Send a letter of acceptance to the school you will attend.
  - Send letters of rejection to the other schools.

### **Resources**

Artschools.com <http://www.artschools.com/>

Artist-statement.com <http://www.artist-statement.com/careerhelp.html>

College Art Association <http://www.collegeart.org/>

GradSchools.com <http://www.gradschools.com/Subject/Art-and-Fine-Arts/25.html>

MFA Blog <http://terminalmfa.blogspot.com/>