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A Pro Writer's Path to Grad School

By Andrew Faustmann

Many students attend grad school to concentrate their skills and knowledge for their future career; however, not every school is going to have the curriculum that supports your personal goals. Instead of wasting two years of school and several thousand dollars, make sure to research each school carefully before applying.

WHERE SHOULD YOU ATTEND?

When searching programs that will further your professional writing skills, be aware of the various names for each program. Many will be called “Rhetoric and Composition” or “Technical and Professional Writing.” However, you will sometimes find the term “Communication” instead of “Writing.”

This process is similar to a job search, so persistence is key. Depending on your proximity of school searches, Gradschools.com may help for a national search. If you are restricted to only a handful of local schools, you can jump straight to each school’s website.

You may want to look for a school that employs professors who share a similar background to your own. Many professors typically had or still have jobs as a professional writer with a corporation. This will open up networking opportunities and knowledge from first-hand experience.

Go to the faculty page on the English department’s website and look at the professors’ profiles. Most professors

will provide a short bio, recent courses, relevant publications and even their website, but you may even have to dig a little deeper. You can either email those professors directly or research their names in scholarly databases, such as JSTOR or Proquest.

While specific areas of study may not be 100% relevant to your career



pursuits, their individual research will inform you more of their academic and professional interests, which will help you decide on the most suitable courses.

WHAT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE DO GRADUATE SCHOOLS OFFER?

Many schools offer financial support in the form of assistantships, scholarships and conference funding. The assistantship typically includes full tuition remission and a stipend to survive on while you complete your degree in two years. Each school has different programs set up—you could be working for the school as a tutor, research assistant and/or teaching assistant. This opportunity not only allows you to receive a fully-funded education but also to gain experience working at the university.

The assistantship is not for everyone, as a great full-time job is not to be given up lightly. In this case, many English departments and graduate schools offer scholarships to assist with the cost of tuition.

It is also encouraged that you present at conferences related to your field of study. Even though conferences are directed towards those who wish to publish academic research, the experience gained from presenting is transferable to any workplace. When contemplating this, see if the schools offer conference funding for travel costs.

GO START APPLYING

Pursuing a graduate degree to advance your success as a professional writer is a great decision, yet you must ensure that the school you attend has a program that’ll help you build the skills to achieve your goals.

Search for programs, professors and courses that’ll help advance your skills and knowledge while also noting the multiple options regarding how you are going to pay for that education.