

# A Guide to Applying to Teacher Ed Programs

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## **Introduction**

Deciding to become a teacher is one of the most exciting decisions you will make in the course of your professional career. However, you want to be sure this is the right path for you, as you will be making a major commitment of time and money.

Not all Teacher Education programs are the same. Some offer masters degrees as well as teaching credentials, some are specialized by subject or population, some take a year, some take longer. There is a wide array of options for you to choose from, which means you will need to do some research to determine which programs will work best for you.

This guide will provide a framework that will help you make an informed choice about a teacher education program. It will provide an overview regarding the information you need to obtain, the persons and resources you can seek out, organizations you can consult with, and the procedures required for applying to the schools of your choice.

The information in this guide should serve as a starting or reference point as you set about the process of deciding and applying to credential programs. It is by no means all inclusive. Each application will be unique, but the information contained in this packet will begin to give you an idea of the things you will have to do in order to insure the most accurate and professional application possible. There is no standardized application procedure, and there are usually exceptions to every rule, so make sure to contact the program directly if you are in doubt regarding a particular requirement.

## How to Research Teacher Education / Certificate Programs

It is very important for you to begin to research the programs early in order to get a feel for what each one offers, what their requirements are, what graduate admission tests are required and whether the program meets your academic and career goals. The best place to start your research is at our Career Services webpage under Careers by Major. From this page you can link to information on all California approved teacher education programs. Learn about the credentials offered, specific program specializations, (CLAD, B-CLAD, etc.) and get contact information. You also might want to check out the homepage of the California Commission of Teacher Credentials at [www.ctc.ca.gov](http://www.ctc.ca.gov). This page is the penultimate source of information on all aspects of teacher credentials in California.

### General Books and Directories

There are quite a few reference books that provide general information for students applying for graduate programs in a number of disciplines, which discuss the process of getting into and being successful in a graduate program.

### Additional Resources

Career counselors are also available to answer questions concerning letters of recommendation, a statement of purpose, and decisions about whether to enter the workforce or go directly into graduate school. Pick up a copy of the quarterly Career Calendar in the Career Resource Room for information on grad school workshops.

### How to Select the “Best” Program for You

The “best” way to select a graduate program is to develop a set of criteria based on what your own individual academic, professional, and personal goals are for wanting to pursue a teaching credential.

There are many things to consider when narrowing down your list of potential programs. Your criteria might include the quality of the program, costs of the program (including tuition and books as well as living expenses), reputation of the faculty, and reputation of the department within the field of education.

Some questions you might want to consider when developing your own set of criteria for selecting graduate schools are:

- ✦ How does the program rate? (What matters most to you - prestige, employability, educational philosophy, faculty-student ratio, or earning an additional Master’s degree? Make your choice based on the strength of the program in your field rather than general reputation of the university.)
- ✦ Does the faculty have a special strength and a strong academic reputation, as determined by the quality of

their research projects and/or published works? Is there someone in the faculty you want to work with directly?

- ✦ Does the program fit your experience base? What are the specific requirements of the program? Can you match up with the admissions timeline? How are you placed in local schools, for how long, and with what kinds of master teachers?
- ✦ Are the libraries, laboratories, and other research facilities adequate for your needs? Are you academically prepared for the kind of program being offered? Is financial assistance available?
- ✦ What has happened to their recent graduates? Ask about the average student as well as the superstars.

To do further research on the programs that are best studied for your interests and goals, you may want to speak with the Credential Analyst in the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education. While she specializes in helping students applying to UCSB’s credential programs, she has a wealth of information on a variety of schools. Also, if possible, visit the schools that appeal to you and talk with faculty and current credential candidates for a better perspective.

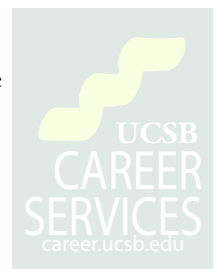
### Corresponding With Graduate Schools

The majority of your correspondence will be directly with the teacher education office within the school to which you are applying. The departments commonly have information about their program on their website. However, you can request further information to be mailed or e-mailed to you. Some programs have online Information Request forms while others just ask prospective students to e-mail the department with a brief request.

### Timeline for Applying To A Teacher Credential Program

The purpose of providing this timeline is to give you a broad overview of a reasonable time frame to use in the application process. In fact, your preparation for getting a teaching credential should begin in your first year of undergraduate education, as you choose your classes, identify your major and consider learning a language. However, for the actual application process, your junior year is a good time to start. The following timeline should be used as a guideline only, and will change based on the schools to which you apply, whether you want to take entrance exams in your junior year instead of your senior year, what scholarships or other financial aid you seek, etc.

Note: This timeline is set up for students applying to programs with applications due dates of January and February. If you are applying to schools with early application due dates, such as November or December, adjust your personal timeline accordingly.



### Spring, Six Quarters Prior to Starting Your Program

Research teaching credential programs that meet your criteria. Remember the “best” program for you might be quite different than the “best” program for someone else. Resources you can use to determine what program will work best for you: Career Resource Room, the Internet, and most important: faculty advice.

### Summer, Five Quarters Prior to Starting Your Program

Write your rough draft statement of purpose. Prospective students might be asked to submit their application through an online account made available by the department. Begin your online application or download the application. Study for your admissions tests (CBEST, CSET, etc.). Develop a “Plan B” in case you don’t get in.

### Fall, Four Quarters Prior to Starting Your Program

Sign up now for your preprofessional hours at UCSB’s Graduate School of Education. Be sure you have completed any prerequisite courses for your credential. If you have not taken your entrance exams before now, this is your last chance. Sign up for your admissions tests no later than one month prior to the test administration. Continue studying. Take your admissions tests. Ask faculty to write you letters of recommendation. Create letter of recommendation packets for each faculty person who has agreed to write for you, including letter of recommendation forms from each school, a copy of your transcripts, a resume, and the current (doesn’t have to be final) draft of your statement of purpose. Specific faculty might want additional materials, but this is a good packet to start with. Give your faculty their packets, ensuring they have at least 4 weeks to write letters before the first due date. Mail in your financial aid information. For current test administration dates, check the website for the exams you need to take.

### Winter, Three Quarters Prior to Starting Your Program

Submit your applications, including letters, statement of purpose, transcripts, forms, etc. You should do this no later than the first week of January to meet late January due dates. ETS will send your test scores to the schools you requested. All your materials should be at the school 2 weeks prior to the due date. This gives you time to contact the schools to which you have applied and ensure all your materials arrived. Fax, e-mail or Fed-Ex any material that is still outstanding.

### Spring, Two Quarters Prior to Starting Your Program

Keep your fingers crossed. Do any required preliminary set up for your “Plan B”.

## The Application Process

Most teaching credential programs will evaluate your application for admission based on the following criteria:

1. Undergraduate GPA (primarily your upper division coursework)

2. Graduate Admission Test Scores (including, CBEST, CSET, and possibly GRE scores)
3. Letters of Recommendation
4. Statement of Purpose
5. Whether you meet other requirements such as classroom volunteer hours, language skills for B-CLAD emphasis, etc.

Students are selected for admission by a committee (that changes composition often) comprised of faculty who review each completed application in detail, rate them, and then come to a consensus regarding the suitability of the applicant to the program. Efforts are made to achieve some balance when selecting an entering class in regard to experience, undergraduate GPA, areas of interest, etc.

### Undergraduate GPA (Transcripts)

Request your undergraduate transcripts directly from all post-secondary institutions you have attended. This is usually done through each school’s Registrar’s office. When you request your transcripts, you will need to provide the names and addresses of the graduate schools where you would like your transcripts sent. There is usually a fee for each transcript. Be sure to allow several weeks for the processing of your request.

### Graduate Admission Test Scores

Teaching Credential programs generally require 2 graduate admissions tests, which you should plan to take approximately one year before your anticipated matriculation date (see timeline above). The three most likely to be required are the C-BEST, CSET, and the GRE. The school’s catalog and graduate application will specify which test you will need to take, and, in some cases, an indication of the score needed to be competitive for the program.

Information on the CSET can be found at [www.cset.nesinc.com](http://www.cset.nesinc.com). Information for the C-BEST can be found at [www.cbest.nesinc.com/](http://www.cbest.nesinc.com/). Before you fill you the test application, you will need to know the graduate schools to which you will be applying. ETS will send your test scores to 5 schools for free, if you specify the schools when you sign up for the test. After that, they will charge you for additional requests for scores. You will also receive information on your test scores in the mail. Some of the informational websites for the exams include preparation material. To prepare for the GRE, you can pay a fee to compose and submit essay responses online. Your analytical writing will provide you with a score for your answer as well as give you additional feedback. This is available through [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org). On their site you will also find sample questions and free preparation software with practice tests.

For the CBEST, free sample test questions are available online at [www.cbest.nesinc.com](http://www.cbest.nesinc.com). For the CSET, there is a free practice test for multiple subjects, and downloadable study guides for

various single subjects. Go to [www.cset.nesinc.com](http://www.cset.nesinc.com). In addition, study guides for various exams are available at the UCSB Bookstore.

There are also a variety of preparatory courses available through large, nationally recognized businesses like Kaplan Educational Centers, The Princeton Review, and regional businesses you will find in the local yellow pages under Educational Testing Centers. Most university Extension Centers also offer preparatory courses for a number of graduate exams. Be prepared; there is a fee for many of these services.

The UCSB Bookstore carries numerous study guides for admissions tests. We recommend that you buy at least one study booklet for each test you are taking. To study for Multiple Subject Area Exams, purchase and study *What Every 5th Grader Should know* and *What Every Sixth Grader Should Know*. For Single Subject Area Exams, review introductory college texts in that subject.

### Letters of Recommendation

All graduate schools will require anywhere from two to five letters of recommendation from professors and/or employers, with three being the norm. Applicants pursuing a teaching credential immediately after their undergraduate work will want the majority of their letters to be from professors, while those entering graduate school after several years of work will use professional references. At least one of your letters should be from a faculty person with whom you have studied and at least one from a teacher under whom you have accrued your prerequisite teaching experience.

The letters are typically used to augment, validate, or explain the information provided in your formal application, statement of purpose, and/or essay. For some applications, the information provided in these letters will mean the difference between acceptance and rejection.

Unfortunately, it is all too common in a large university for students to complete their undergraduate study without becoming personally acquainted with any of their professors. Consequently, as applicants for graduate study, such students are often reluctant to approach even the friendliest of professors, not wanting to impose upon their time. To make matters worse, in an effort not to appear bothersome, students sometimes merely leave forms or addresses for professors who are willing to write letters, thereby submitting themselves for whatever characterization the writer can vaguely recall. When the critical decisions are made in the selection of applicants, a general or uncertain recommendation can be more damaging than helpful.

Letters of recommendation should be specifically directed toward your application for admission to teacher education programs. They should focus upon those areas that directly

pertain to your potential as a graduate student and as a prospective teacher. General character reference letters are of limited or no value to admission committees.

Letters addressing specific topical areas, that can be supported by examples from your past performance, provide the most useful information. Graduate admissions committees expect letters of recommendation to include the following:

- ✦ Assurance of the applicant's ability to do high level work
- ✦ Relatedness of the applicant's experience to his or her chosen area of graduate study
- ✦ Evidence that the applicant has special skills required in the chosen area of study
- ✦ Assurance of the applicant's ability to teach.

Although you cannot control the actual content of the letter, you can provide your references with information that will help them write informative letters. Do this by providing your letter writers with some background information; this will enable them to use it while writing the letter of recommendation. Present your references with a file containing the following information:

### Create A Packet of Information For Your References

First, give them an Academic Fact Sheet. This will be similar in format to a resume, and it should indicate your desire to pursue a teaching credential. The Academic Fact Sheet will have several sections which include the following:

- ✦ A list of your undergraduate course work in your major, as well as complementary course work by course title, and the corresponding grades in each course
- ✦ A section highlighting the teaching and teaching-related experiences you've had.
- ✦ A list of graduate schools to which letters should be sent.

Be sure to include deadline dates by which the letters must reach the school. It is a good idea to list a date at least two weeks prior to the actual deadline date imposed by the graduate school. This gives you some reaction time, in case the school does not receive your recommendation (for whatever reason). Whether your letter writers send their recommendations directly to the different schools, or through a service like Interfolio, it is ultimately your responsibility to ensure that the letters of recommendation reach their destination. Call the graduate school a day or two before the deadline to ensure that the letters have been received and are on file.

Also in the file, it is a good idea to include a Writing Sample. This can either be a copy of an undergraduate research paper or it can be writing that you have done as part of your professional work. Either way, the Writing Sample should give your references a good example of your writing style and





perhaps a glimpse at the quality of your undergraduate research or professional work assignment. The length of the Writing Sample is not important since most references will not read the entire paper, but skim it looking for style, consistency of theme, and effective communication.

Provide your references with a copy of a rough draft of your Statement of Purpose. This gives them an idea of what you are interested in studying and your professional ambitions upon completion of the program.

Include any reference forms requested by the schools. If mailed, the last item in your file should be stamped, addressed envelopes.

It is not necessary, but you may choose to include a copy of your current resume as a source of additional information for your references. Approach your references early and give them plenty of time (e.g., one month or more) to draft and submit their letters of recommendation. Be sure to discuss with them your reasons for going to graduate school and why you are applying to specific programs.

### Statement of Purpose

The final piece to the application is your Statement of Purpose. This is your opportunity to convince the admission committee that you are qualified and a good candidate for their teacher education program. Be prepared to write an essay or statement on your background in interests as they pertain to teaching. This is an important and time-consuming aspect of the application, because it is your opportunity to present yourself beyond the “numbers” represented in your undergraduate transcripts and your graduate admissions exams. Your Statement of Purpose also gives the committee a sample of your ability to write, so be meticulous about spelling, grammar, and writing style. The essay will also be used to assess your enthusiasm for your field, motivation, creativity, maturity, and personal uniqueness. Have several people, including your letter writers, review your Statement of Purpose for clarity and composition.

Each university to which you apply will include guidelines for your Statement of Purpose. Review those guidelines and follow them carefully while still allowing some room for your own style to emerge in the writing. Campus Learning Assistance Services (CLAS, Student Resource Building) offers workshops on writing Statements of Purpose. Check their schedule for a list of dates and times.

CLAS also has sample Statements of Purpose available for your review.

Career Services has two books available in the Career Resource Room that discuss writing personal statement.

- ✦ Graduate Admissions Essays
- ✦ How to Write the Perfect Personal Statement

Each university has the option to request additional materials for review in considering your application. Read over each

application carefully to fully understand what each program considers a “complete application.” More often than not, your application will not be reviewed by the committee until your file is complete. If you have any questions, call the graduate school directly in order to clarify what is needed in order for your file to be considered complete. It is important for you to keep application deadline dates in mind when planning for graduate school. Most graduate schools will not negotiate application deadlines.

### Financial Support Information

For many students, financial support is an important factor when choosing a program. It is crucial to explore plans for financing advanced study early in the application process.

There are three basic categories of money available for a graduate student’s education:

- ✦ Grants, fellowships, and scholarships. This is “free” money provided by government programs, educational institutions, foundations, corporations, and other private sources. (The difference between a grant and a fellowship is that a grant is awarded based on financial need and a fellowship is awarded based on academic merit.)
- ✦ Education-related salaries such as those paid for teaching assistantships, research assistantships, or administrative assistantships.
- ✦ Loans from governmental, institutional or private sources

The majority of funding is administered directly from the graduate department or university. It is important to read and complete the school’s financial support application and requirements early in the application process, because deadlines for financial support frequently are a month or so earlier than the regular admission deadlines.

Outside sources of financial support are also available for graduate study. These often have very early deadlines, sometimes making it necessary to take graduate admission tests and to obtain letters of recommendation eighteen months to two years before your matriculation date.

Private fellowships, grants and scholarships can be identified through several reference books located in the Scholarship and Fellowship Resource Center at the UCSB Library. We also have several general directories available in the Career Resource Room at Career Services which will help you begin your search. These directories will have general information on scholarships, grants, fellowships and loans available for both Master’s and Ph.D. level study in a variety of disciplines.

You will receive some direction from your graduate schools regarding the type of money that is available through the graduate department or university, but you will want to make phone calls and write letters to discover additional monies that you are eligible to apply for. The old adage, “Apply early and apply often” should be taken literally when seeking money for your graduate education!

## Questions About Graduate School

### How many schools should I apply to?

Most people apply to between three and eight graduate schools, with five being the average number of applications submitted. Your preliminary research on teacher ed programs should give you an idea of the number of applications received versus the number of students accepted by each graduate school. This information will help you determine how many applications will give you the highest probability of acceptance into a graduate program.

### If I'm not accepted, can I reapply the following year?

Yes. It is a good idea to contact the graduate admissions committee to find out how you can strengthen your application for the following year. Your candidacy for admission will be considered anew, and your application will be reviewed and ranked on the merits of the new applications that are received for that year.

## Deciding Among Offers

When deciding which offer to accept from a number of graduate programs, it is a good idea to take a moment to re-examine the criteria you originally established when you were first applying to your chosen schools. Which offer most closely matches your academic, career, financial, and social goals and needs? Make sure you are willing to live in the community where the school is located. In choosing one offer over another, both logic and emotion will play differing roles for each applicant. Your decision should be based on what is right for you.

Once you have made your decision, let all the graduate programs that accepted you know where you plan to enroll. This is simply a matter of politeness. Most admissions committees expect that many of those accepted will go elsewhere. They bear no grudges against someone who turns down their offer, but they do expect a response. There are other applicants on alternate lists waiting for slots to open up as invitations are either accepted or rejected.

Finally, make sure you follow directions about deposits that you are obligated to make before you enroll in a program (if there are any). This is your “earnest money”, i.e. evidence that you are making a commitment to their graduate program.

## Administrivia

- ✦ Read each application thoroughly before filling it out
- ✦ Be careful to limit essay questions responses to specified lengths requested
- ✦ Proofread everything you have written. Do not turn in a messy application.
- ✦ Be sure to sign the application form
- ✦ Be sure to enclose the required fees

- ✦ Keep a file that records the dates of submission of transcripts, test scores, and recommendations to each place you apply. Be sure to keep the name, address and phone number of the admission officer or the contact person for each place to which you have applied.
- ✦ Keep a file of correspondence with faculty and/or employers who are writing your letters of recommendation, noting each program to which they are to be sent and evidence that the recommendations have been received.
- ✦ Once you have made a decision about which offer you will be accepting, notify all schools that have accepted you into their program.

## Some Useful Websites

[www.ctc.ca.gov](http://www.ctc.ca.gov)

California Commission of Teacher Credentialing.

Provides absolutely all the information you could want about California Teaching Credentials. It is a deep page and contains a wealth of incredibly useful and pertinent information. Don't be put off by the “legalese” language of the listings of credential requirements. The information is great.

[career.sa.ucsb.edu/students/career-planning/choosing-major/education-teaching](http://career.sa.ucsb.edu/students/career-planning/choosing-major/education-teaching)

Links to all California approved Teacher Education program home pages. Good for doing research on teacher ed programs in the state.

## Final Note

As with anything worth doing in life, this process is worth doing well. The stakes are high, but the potential payoff is just as high. This guide will serve as a starting point for you and hopefully a reminder of all the things that need to be attended to during this process.

## Good Luck!

*\*With acknowledgement to Lily Maestas, who wrote the original handout “Applying to Graduate School” from which this was adapted and to Ana Heras, whose comments and suggestions were invaluable.*

