Taking Steps toward Graduate School

Freshman Year (Self-Discovery)
• Explore your interests and abilities
• Talk to and visit your academic counselor
• Develop productive study habits and skills
• Establish (and maintain) at least a 3.0 GPA
• Seek research opportunities. Join an undergraduate research program on your campus, or join a research lab/opportunity on or off campus
• Develop and Practice good financial/budgeting habits
• Plan ahead about your academic course load distribution so that you do not carry more than 12-14 credits in upper level courses in your senior year

Sophomore Year (Assessing Options)
• Define and establish your personal and career goals, ask yourself what you enjoy doing unpack that; visit your career services office and graduate programs, for assistance
• Begin to make contacts in your chosen career area
• Identify potential mentoring relationships with professors and graduate students
• Begin or continue conducting undergraduate research with a professor
• Attend graduate and professional school fairs, meet with recruiters and ask questions. Start a diary/journal
• Begin web searches on summer research internships and co-ops at various universities and apply to those which match your goals, for example SROP at the Big Ten Universities. This is an important step toward graduate school admission
• Join a grad prep/research training program (for example, McNair Scholars Program)

Junior Year (Setting Goals)
• Graduate Schools pay particular attention to grades in the major, so keep grades up, and get tutoring early, if needed
• Examine and confirm your career choices
• Determine a relevant major and minor. If possible, talk to graduate students and faculty in your major area about graduate studies
• Strengthen your mentoring relationships. Discuss your interests with faculty and advisors
• Look for relevant graduate programs. Contact departments for catalogues and visit programs and campuses that interest you, when possible. Research the grad program profiles for details on the program
• Get acquainted with the faculty/authors of specific research that interest you and locate the graduate programs where they teach
• Participate in research, learn academic/scientific writing. Enroll in a research methods course
• Contact and meet with people to discuss how to fund your graduate studies
• Start your Personal Statement and Statement of Purpose; it takes time to write a good, concise, impactful statement
• Take the appropriate entrance exams. Some, but not all, UW–Madison graduate programs require the GRE (Graduate Record Examination)

Senior Year (Making Your Choice)
• Enroll on upper level classes and keep the grades up. Grades in the Fall Semester are critical, graduate programs admit on the basis of these grades
• Continue research and/or apply for pre-doctoral fellowships (e.g., NASA, Ford, AAUW, NSF GRFP)
• Contact faculty with whom you may want to work, after you have familiarized yourself with their research work
• Start Early! Inquire about application deadlines based on when you plan to enroll
• Remember you have to pay for undergrad transcripts, GRE transcripts (if required by the program), and application fees
• Contact graduate programs for information about eligibility for application fee waiver
• Complete the application process (letters of recommendation, statement of purpose, transcripts)
• Contact the schools to ensure that your application is complete

Based on the University of California System checklist

grad.wisc.edu