

GRAD SCHOOL 101 • OCTOBER 1, 2026

IS GRAD / PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL FOR ME?

Dr. Michael A. Hunt

Director, UMBC McNair Scholars Program & Retriever Graduate
Preparation Network (RGPN)





ABOUT ME

DR. MICHAEL A. HUNT

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Big Black Man

Husband, Son, Brother

First-Gen PhD

Follower of Christ

Mentee, Mentor

Father

Friend, Director

Activist

From Low-Income

TODAY

01 **Why Graduate School?**

02 **Aligning Your Goals** · Reflection · Cost · Timing

03 **The Application Process** · Materials · Timeline

04 **Questions to Ask** · Your Questions · Network

05 **Ask Me Anything Panel**

WHY GRADUATE SCHOOL?

SPECIALIZED EXPERTISE

Deeper field knowledge ·
Advanced skills

CAREER & EARNINGS

Required for many professions ·
Higher-level roles · Job security ·
Salary potential

GROWTH & IMPACT

Critical thinking · Research ·
Problem-solving · Community
contribution

PART 1

ALIGNING YOUR GOALS

ASK YOURSELF

GOALS

Where am I in 5–10 years?

Does my field require an advanced degree?

Which degree fits: master's, PhD, JD, MD, other?

READINESS

What skills do I have now?

What gaps would a program fill?

Am I ready to commit: time, energy, finances?

COST & FUNDING

COSTS

Tuition & fees
Living expenses
Application fees
Test fees

Weigh against return: career prospects, earnings

FUNDING SOURCES

ASSISTANTSHIPS

Teaching/research work · often tuition + stipend

FELLOWSHIPS

Merit-based · no work requirement

SCHOLARSHIPS & GRANTS

Institutional and external

LOANS

Federal aid via FAFSA

PhD: often funded · Master's & professional: often self-funded

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

01

RIGHT AWAY OR LATER

Both work · Personal
circumstances · Financial
stability · Readiness

02

FULL- OR PART-TIME

Work-life balance · Current
commitments

03

EXPERIENCE FIRST

Strengthens application ·
Clarifies path

PART 2

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

WHAT YOU SUBMIT

Varies by program — check each one

APPLICATION + FEE

Often \$50–\$150 · Ask about waivers

TRANSCRIPTS

Every college attended · GPA

TEST SCORES

GRE often optional · LSAT, MCAT, GMAT by field

RECOMMENDATIONS

Usually 2–3 letters · Faculty, supervisors

STATEMENTS

Personal statement · Statement of purpose

RÉSUMÉ / CV

Research, work, service

FIELD-SPECIFIC

Writing sample · Portfolio

INTERVIEW

Some programs · By invitation

WHERE YOU APPLY

DIRECT TO THE SCHOOL

Most master's & PhD programs One portal per university Separate fee each

CENTRALIZED SERVICES

Law: LSAC Medicine: AMCAS Other health fields: CAS systems (e.g., PharmCAS, CASPA)

TYPICAL TIMELINE

Start 12–18 months before enrolling

SPRING– SUMMER

Research programs
Test prep & exam

LATE SUMMER

Request letters
Contact faculty

SEPT–NOV

Finalize materials
Law: apply early

DEC–FEB

Most PhD deadlines
File FAFSA

FEB–APR

Interviews · Visits
Offers · Decide

QUESTIONS TO ASK PROGRAMS

FUNDING

Are admitted students funded? For how many years? Assistantship duties? Fee waivers?

ADMISSIONS

Minimum GPA? Tests required? Typical admitted profile? Rolling or fixed deadline?

PROGRAM

Time to degree? Completion rate? Where do graduates work? Advisor/mentor fit?

FROM YOUR PRE-EVENT SURVEY

YOUR QUESTIONS

GPA UNDER 3.0?

Holistic review at many programs · Upward trend counts · Extra coursework can help · Check stated minimums

ASKING ABOUT FUNDING?

Expected, not rude · Ask early · “What funding is typical for admitted students?”

WHEN TO CONTACT FACULTY?

Before applying · Late summer–early fall · Short email: your interests, their work, taking students?

RIGHT AWAY OR EXPERIENCE FIRST?

Either path works · Experience clarifies goals · Depends on field and readiness

BUILD YOUR NETWORK

FACULTY

Current professors · Potential advisors

PROGRAM DIRECTORS

Info sessions · Visit days

ALUMNI & CURRENT STUDENTS

Real program culture

MCNAIR & RGPN

Grad prep · Mentoring

ADVISING OFFICES

Pre-law · SMART · Professional programs

CAREER CENTER

Career & grad school advising

RETRIEVER GRADUATE PREPARATION NETWORK

JOIN RGP

Grad & Professional School Prep

Mentoring & Peer Community

Workshops & Application Support

REGISTER TODAY



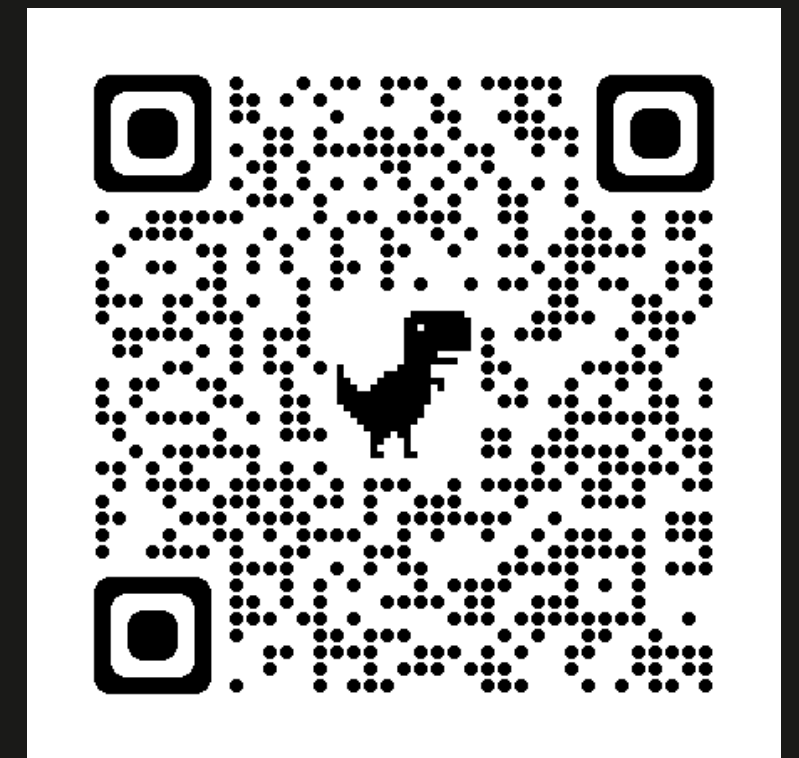
SCAN TO LEARN MORE

THANK YOU

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5:40 Ask Me Anything panel

6:20 The Application Process: Strategically
Telling Your Story



CONNECT VIA BLINQ

ASK ME ANYTHING

REAL TALK WITH PROGRAM DIRECTORS & PROFESSIONALS



MOLLY TIMKO, J.D.

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DR. RAMON B. GOINGS

Professor & Director, Language, Literacy, and Culture (LLC) Doctoral Program

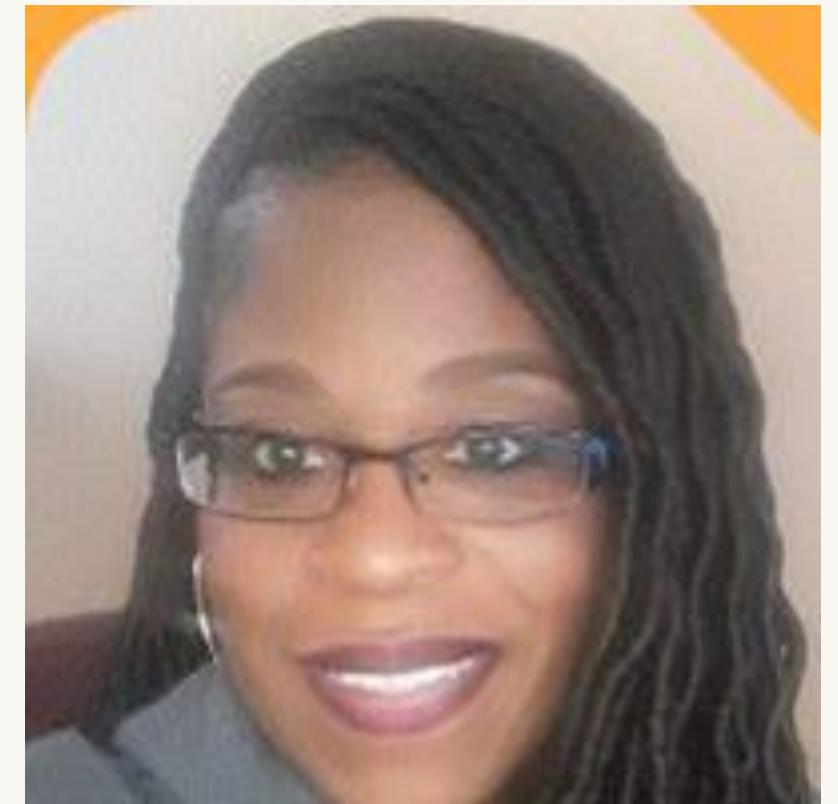
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ASK ME ANYTHING

TO START US OFF

- 01 What's one thing you wish you'd known before starting your own graduate, professional, or career journey?
- 02 What part of the application or decision-making process do students most underestimate?
- 03 What should students ask you about funding and admissions expectations, and when?
- 04 What is graduate school culture actually like, and how do students balance it with work and life?