

# Getting to 'YES': A Guide to Your Rights and Responsibilities as a Graduate Applicant

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So you've narrowed your choices for a graduate program down to a manageable size. You visited the campuses. You met with faculty. You've gotten acquainted with or learned about your prospective cohort. Maybe you have been admitted to the program. Now you have an offer for admission and/or a graduate assistantship.

## **WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?**

Now you weigh your options and make an *informed decision*. How did you feel about your campus visit(s), the faculty and prospective students, and the academic courses and requirements? What options do you have? This is an important decision. **What feels like a good "fit" for you? Where do you want to go?** If you are offered a graduate assistantship, fellowship, or scholarship, **remember that you have until April 15 to accept that offer.**

Since the mid 1960s, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) has published a resolution regarding the rights of graduate applicants, and deans from nearly 400 institutions have endorsed it. In 2003, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) Commission for Professional Preparation also endorsed it, and faculty members in student affairs preparation programs at those institutions are expected to honor this agreement. A copy of the resolution and background information can be found by opening [this link](http://www.cgsnet.org/portals/0/pdf/CGS_Resolution.pdf) ([http://www.cgsnet.org/portals/0/pdf/CGS\\_Resolution.pdf](http://www.cgsnet.org/portals/0/pdf/CGS_Resolution.pdf)).

## ***Is the institution you're looking at represented in this list?***

The general spirit of the Resolution is that students should have an opportunity to consider more than one offer and should have until April 15 to do so if they would like. Likewise, both institutions and students should view acceptances after April 15 as binding agreements. In this way, everyone should know what the rules are: an offer by the institution and its acceptance by the student constitute an agreement which both are expected to honor. The intent of the Resolution is to provide a uniform and widely acceptable framework for handling offers, one that provides protection for both student and institution.

***If a representative from an institution requires that you accept an offer before April 15, they are violating the intent of this resolution. You have until April 15 to make a binding commitment to accept an offer, even though you may decide that it is wise to accept an offer much earlier.***

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

***Why is the CGS resolution an issue, and why should I care about it?*** The resolution strengthens the importance of encouraging well-informed choices, understanding rules, and honoring agreements in the graduate school decision process. The resolution honors good practice by encouraging open communication between applicants and institutions in the student affairs profession. Professionals in the field should want for prospective students no less than we would want for the new professional who is about to launch a career from our graduate programs: we should want you to take your time, collect the information you need about your fit with an institution, visit the campuses in which you are most interested, and get a sense of your future classmates and mentors.

The other reason to care is that, from an ethical perspective, rushing students to a decision compromises the ability to make informed choices and erodes the autonomy of the decision-maker. The resolution is designed to clarify expectations between students and institutions, and compliance is expected of all institutions that signed on the resolution.

***So I can take as much time as I want on this?*** You are entitled to the time you need – up until April 15. But this right comes with some responsibility. We want you to accept or reject offers in a timely manner – and this may well be before April 15. In most cases, if you decline the offer, it will be extended to another student. You might find yourself waiting on someone else to decline an offer so that it might come to you. The idea here is not to relinquish any privilege you have to wait, but if you know, then go ahead and act. After April 15, the institution has the right to rescind the offer of financial award.

While we want you to carefully consider your options, it is not usually necessary to hold more than one offer at a time. If you are lucky enough to entertain multiple offers, consider letting go of all except the one in which you are most interested. This way, other candidates are able to receive offers and schools stand a better chance of filling their positions with their preferred candidates.

***The faculty at the institution I'm looking at are all in favor of this. However, the employers and supervisors are the ones violating the agreement and pressing me to decide. What should I do?*** If the institution you are interested in has supported the resolution, you may be in an awkward situation. Describe the circumstances to the program faculty and tell them you are uncomfortable and would like their support. It is our duty as faculty and program directors to inform our on-campus partners and employers of this policy, and to help them act ethically and abide by this April 15 deadline.

***What if I want to commit earlier than April 15?*** Offers of financial support may be made at anytime. However, we cannot insist upon a response to the offer until April 15. If you are ready to commit to an offer, you may do so at any time and are encouraged to do so. You should not accept an offer, however, if you are unsure of your intentions to honor it.

You will quickly learn that the student affairs field is a fairly small profession. Most of us are just “one or two degrees” of separation from each other. A cavalier attitude about your responsibilities to colleagues and classmates can come back to haunt you. Likewise, a less-than-ethical approach toward dealing with prospective students can give an institution unwanted negative press.

**By honoring the “April 15 Common Response Deadline” everyone wins.**