

WHETHER TO ATTEND GRADUATE SCHOOL



Sometimes, even before a student has fully charted a career path, he or she will consider attending graduate or professional school.

As you continue to focus on where your career path can take you, it may become less a matter of what qualifications you need to enter into a particular occupational field and more what qualifications will permit you to advance with that field. You certainly owe it to yourself to research the pros and cons of training at a master's, doctoral, or other graduate academic level.

The first step in researching graduate study is to decide whether, in fact, graduate school is for you. If it is, then how can you choose the best program for you? There are many factors to consider, and you should consider them all—perhaps in discussion with a Career Counselor.

However daunting the prospect of graduate or professional training may be it can often open more doors in a chosen career path.

Graduate programs seek specialized knowledge and offer study concentrated in one area.

- A master's degree can be an entry to new, better job opportunities in business, industry, government, education, and more.
- A doctorate degree can open doors to college teaching, research, and corporate positions involving research and analytical skills.

SHOULD I GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL?

When deciding whether to go to graduate school, do a personal inventory of your career goals, your motives for attending graduate school, and your level of readiness to pursue more education. Listed below are some types of questions to consider:

Identify Career Goals

- What are my values and how do they relate to my career choice?
- What are my professional interests?
- What skills can I bring to the workplace?
- Have I interviewed professionals in my field to gain valuable career information?
- What are the necessary steps to achieve my career goals?
- What type of graduate or professional degree will best prepare me to enter my career of interest?

Assess Purpose

- Is a graduate degree essential to getting into my desired career field?
- What are my reasons for wanting to attend graduate school?
- By deciding to attend graduate school, am I simply trying to avoid the job search?
- Is graduate work the next logical step to becoming a professional in my field?

Assess Readiness

- Do I have a clear sense of the career I want to pursue?
- Do I have a solid understanding of what graduate or professional school entails?
- Am I ready to immerse myself in the study of this particular academic discipline?
- Am I willing to do the work required to succeed in a graduate program?
- Should I gain more experience in the field before pursuing a graduate or professional degree?
- Do I currently have the financial resources or financial assistance to complete a graduate or professional program?
- Is it possible that a future employer might agree to pay for my graduate education?

CHOOSING A GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

There are several things to consider when you are trying to decide on a graduate school or program, including: type, size, and location of the institution, cost of attendance, quality of faculty, specializations offered, facilities, and environment of the institution.

Type and Size of Institution

- Small institutions can offer more personal attention and provide a strong sense of community. Large institutions tend to have more extensive facilities and libraries. Keep in mind that large enrollment does not necessarily mean an impersonal atmosphere.
- Private institutions usually do not distinguish between resident and nonresident students for tuition. In order to provide adequate resources and opportunities for research, private institutions may offer fewer areas of specialization.
- Public institutions are generally less expensive than private institutions. In addition, they will sometimes waive nonresident tuition and fees under certain circumstances.

Location of Institution

- Decide whether you prefer an institution in an urban or rural area. Urban areas can offer more cultural resources and research/employment opportunities. However, if you are accustomed to a more rural environment, you may find the city distracting, expensive, and tense.
- Take into account the weather as well as in the political and social climate of the area.
- Investigate cultural and recreational activities.
- Consider the impact the location might have on your relationship with family and friends.

Quality

- Keep in mind, difficulty of admission is not necessarily an indication of the quality of program quality.
- Look at the types of facilities on campus to get an indication of the priorities of the institution (i.e. number and type of library holdings vs. size of athletic stadium).

Program Details

- Identify what specializations are offered.
- Find out how much time is required to complete the program.
- Research whether the focus of the program is on theory and research or practical application of knowledge.
- Be sure the program is accredited.
- Find out whether the program is new or well established.
- Look into the program's student composition.
- Investigate whether the program offers real world experiences such as practicums and internships.
- Identify the resources available (i.e. technology, equipment, libraries).
- Determine opportunities for research.
- Find out about the possibility in participating in foreign exchange programs.
- Find out how much attention is given to multicultural and international issues.

Faculty

- Look into the faculty-student ratio.
- Investigate the characteristics of the faculty including:
 - Research interests
 - Education/expertise
 - Recognition
 - Publications
 - Diversity
 - Involvement in graduate school community
- Know the teaching/research balance of faculty members who interest you.

Institution

- Explore the campus. Does the institution have attractive, pleasant, and comfortable facilities and surroundings?
- Identify student services offered (i.e. disability, career, counseling, health, and legal services).
- Research the school's academic reputation, opportunities for involvement, and networking opportunities.
- Find out availability and condition of campus housing.

Cost of Attendance

- Identify resident/non-resident tuition and fees.
- Identify types of financial aid.
- Find out the availability of teaching and research assistantships.
- Find out housing costs.

Resources

- Check graduate catalogs online or request them from admissions for different college and universities.
- Visit the campus.
- Talk to students currently in the program and find out what graduates of the program are doing now.

Helpful Websites

- www.graduateguide.com
Graduate Guide allows you to search for graduate schools by keyword, major, and state and also lists details on college fairs and conferences
- www.petersons.com
An on-line planner to research colleges, universities, and their graduate programs
- www.graduateschools.com
Excellent links and a searchable database of graduate school information by school, subject, etc.

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