

Should I Attend Graduate/ Professional School?



Career Services

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Explore. Experience. Engage.

The decision to attend graduate school can be a difficult one. You should consider a variety of factors, both internal (your own motivation/preparation/ability) and external (cost, location, job market, etc.). You may want to see how you answer the questions on the other side of this page in order to better understand if graduate school is the right choice for you.

Why to go to Grad School:

- Passion: A strong desire to pursue your vocation/subject
- Vocational Interest: Some vocations require grad/professional school (e.g. law, medicine), others require it in a timely manner for career advancement
- Money: Average salaries for graduates with Master's and PhD's are higher than those of Bachelor's-only graduates.

Why not to go to Grad School:

- Don't know what else to do next
- Avoiding the job market
- To please someone else

Considerations for Applying to Grad School:

1. Target
 - Subject (e.g. English Literature, Microbiology, Law, etc.)
 - Degree: Master's program usually takes 1-3 years; PhD takes 4-5 years minimum.
2. How to Select Potential Graduate School:
 - School as a Whole → Appropriate Department → Individual Faculty
 - Identify 20 programs in which you would be happy (1/3 "Safe", 1/3 "Probably", 1/3 "Reach")
 - Poll your professors, alumni, and currently enrolled grad students about graduate programs.
 - Do research:
 - Peterson's Guides
 - Specialty guides
 - Academic journals
 - Practicing professionals
 - Professional associations
 - Gourman Report
 - Identify faculty members who have the potential to be future mentors:
 1. Write to faculty and currently-enrolled students via email.
 2. Try to visit campuses. Ask questions.
3. Funding for Graduate Study
 - Types of aid:
 - Teaching Assistant (TA)
 - Research Assistant (RA)
 - Fellowship
 - Grant
 - Waiver
 - Loan
 - Sources of aid:
 - Contact graduate studies office for list of available fellowships
 - www.finaid.org
4. Selection Criteria:
 - Grades
 - Entrance exam scores (Resources: www.gre.org, www.gmat.org, www.lsac.org, <http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat/start.htm>)
 - Recommendations
 - Application essays

What to Do If You Don't Get Accepted

- Apply earlier
- Apply to more schools
- Apply to more safe schools
- Visit and "wow 'em"
- Go to summer school in targeted subject and "wow 'em"
- Take one class at a time in the targeted subject and "wow 'em"
- Get volunteer or internship experiences in the targeted field
- Work in a "real job" in the targeted field
- Get an intermediate degree
- Try again

Recommended Reading

Asher, Donald, "Graduate Admissions Essays: What Works, What Doesn't and Why," Ten Speed Press
Peters, Robert L., "Getting What You Came For", Noonday Press

The Career Services Resource Center has dozens of publications about applying to graduate and professional school, including researching programs, preparing for entrance exams, writing personal statements and obtaining funding. You don't need an appointment to visit the Resource Center. It's open Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – noon and 1 – 5 p.m.

1) Should I enter graduate school straight out of my undergraduate experience?

Yes No

- Is my motivation level genuinely high?
- Does the idea of remaining in the academic world excite me?
- Do I feel passionate about my particular field of study?
- Could lack of work experience beforehand be detrimental to success and advancement in my career field?
- Am I certain that I need an advance degree to begin my career?

2) Do I qualify for admission?

Yes No

- Will my GPA qualify me for admission?
- Are my admission test scores suitable for admission standards?
- Can I satisfy all my educational prerequisites?
- Can I satisfy any work experience prerequisites?
- Are my letters of recommendation strong?

3) Can I afford graduate school?

Yes No

- Have I realistically computed the total cost of graduate school?
- Can I defer my loans if I pursue an advanced degree?
- Have I checked out the possibility of employer-financed graduate education?
- If the only form of financial assistance available is work as a teaching or research assistant, am I prepared to assume that responsibility?
- Am I willing to continue a student lifestyle?

4) Am I sure about the academic program and school I've chosen?

Yes No

- Have I determined whether or not the program requires a thesis, foreign language proficiency, comprehensive exams, internship experience, etc?
- Do I know whether the program is research-oriented or clinically-oriented? Do I understand what difference that may make?
- Do I know whether my career field requires a master's degree or a doctorate?
- Have I checked several independent sources to find out which graduate schools have the best academic reputations and placement records?

5) Do I have enough information about the job prospects for individuals with advanced degrees in my chosen field?

Yes No

- Have I talked with recent graduates in my field and asked about their job-search experiences?
- Have I checked with Career Services about what kind of jobs graduates in the field I'm considering have secured?
- Have I contacted an industry recruiter or personnel director about their recruiting forecast for the next several years?
- Have I researched labor market trends for different career fields?

How many questions did you answer with a "no" response? How many questions were you unable to answer? Uncertainty in your own responses may be an indication that you may want to reconsider your decision to attend graduate school immediately. Faculty, as well as staff members in Career Services, Counseling Services and the Center for Academic Success, can all help you think about and weigh your decision.