



CENTER FOR CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Should I Attend Graduate/Professional School?

Why to Go to Grad School

- **PASSION:** A strong desire to pursue your vocation/subject
- **VOCATIONAL INTEREST:** Some vocations, such as law and medicine, require grad/professional school for entrance into the field, while others require it in a timely manner for career advancement
- **MONEY:** Average salaries for graduates with Master's and PhDs 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

TARGET

- Subject (e.g. English Literature, Microbiology, Law, etc.)
- Degree: Master's programs usually take 1-3 years; PhDs take 4-5 years, minimum.

HOW TO SELECT POTENTIAL GRADUATE SCHOOLS

- 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 professors, alumni, and currently enrolled grad students about graduate programs.
- Do research (e.g. gradschools.com, academic journals, professional associations, practicing professionals, etc.)
- At schools of interest, identify faculty members who have the potential to be future mentors. Email faculty and currently enrolled students. Try to visit campuses. Ask questions.

FUNDING FOR GRADUATE STUDY

- Types of aid: Teaching Assistant (TA), Research Assistant (RA), Fellowships, Grants, Waivers, Loans
- Sources of aid: www.finaid.org; contact schools' graduate studies offices for lists of available fellowships

SELECTION CRITERIA

- Grades
- Recommendations
- Application essays
- Entrance exam scores

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 experience in the targeted field
- Work in a "real job" in the targeted field
- Get an intermediate degree
- Try again

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? |

Do I qualify for admission?

- | Yes | No | |
|-----|-----|---|
| ___ | ___ | Will my GPA qualify me for admission? |
| ___ | ___ | Are my entrance exam scores suitable for admission standards? |
| ___ | ___ | Can I satisfy all educational prerequisites? |
| ___ | ___ | Can I satisfy any work experience prerequisites? |
| ___ | ___ | Are my letters of recommendation strong? |

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 explored the possibility of employer-financed graduate education? |
| ___ | ___ | If the only form of financial assistance available to me is work as a teaching or research assistant, am I prepared to assume that responsibility? |
| ___ | ___ | Am I willing to continue a student lifestyle? |

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 if the program is research- or practicum-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? |

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

- | Yes | No | |
|-----|-----|---|
| ___ | ___ | Talked with recent graduates in my field and asked about their job-search experiences? |
| ___ | ___ | Checked with CCPD to see what kind of jobs graduates in the field I'm considering have secured? |
| ___ | ___ | Contacted industry recruiter/personnel director for recruiting forecast for the next several years? |
| ___ | ___ | Researched labor market trends for different career fields? |

How many questions did you answer with a "no"? How many questions were you unable to answer? Uncertainty in your own responses may be an indication that you should reconsider your decision to attend graduate school immediately. Faculty, staff (Center for Career & Professional Development, Counseling Services, the Center for Academic Success, etc.), recent graduates, alums, and other people you know and trust can all help you think about and weigh your decision.