

Choosing a Graduate or Professional School

This handout is designed to help you make a thoughtful, carefully researched decision about graduate school.

Consider is graduate school right for you at this time.

- Carefully reflect and ask yourself the following questions:
 - What are your career goals both short-term and long-term? How certain are you of your career goals?
 - Is attaining an advanced degree necessary to achieve your career goals?
 - Are you just delaying a post-graduate employment search?
 - Can you afford to go to graduate school right now?
 - Would an employer pay all or for a portion of your graduate program? If so what are the requirements?
 - Are you a competitive applicant (GPA, related experience, test-scores, etc.)

Identify which degree would best help you reach your career goals.

- Narrow down what type of graduate programs interest you, before you research programs in greater depth.
 - Are you looking for a Master's vs. a terminal degree such as a PhD, JD, or MD? What are the pros and cons of each in your field?
 - Is there more than one degree that would help you reach your career goals? Examples of this include counseling psychology vs. social work and EdD vs. PhD. If you are torn between two options, research the differences.
 - Conduct informational interviews with admissions officers, graduate program coordinators, professors, and industry professionals to gain additional insight into different degree options.

Research graduate programs. Online resources are great, but in-person information is even better.

Research the following aspects of each graduate program you are considering:

- Program of study, accreditation, and reputation of the program and the institution
- Cost and availability of funding (assistantships, loans, etc.)
- Program features such as required practicum/internships, research-based thesis, class size, cohort model, availability of faculty, career resources, professional development opportunities, alumni network, etc.
- For research-based degrees (PhD, EdD, etc.), investigate the research interests of faculty in the department. Being able to articulate your research interests in relation to the research interests of faculty is helpful during interviews.

Online:

- Visit these links to help you to identify appropriate graduate programs by type and geographical location.
 - Peterson's Graduate and Professional Programs www.petersons.com/graduate-schools.aspx
 - U.S. News Ranking <http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools>
 - Gradschools.com <http://www.gradschools.com/>
- Once you have a list of potential schools, review each school's website carefully. Read the bios of the professors. Read about the educational mission and philosophy of the program. Review the sample curriculum online, if available, to see if the classes interest you. Also review the requirements for admission.

In-person networking:

- Attend information sessions offered through the admissions departments. At many information sessions, professors are present and can help you discern if the program is a good fit for your goals. Ask about the types of jobs alumni get for clues about how the program aligns with your interests.
- If you will be doing a research-based degree, identify professors with whom you would be interested in working and reach out to schedule a phone conversation or in-person meeting.
- Ask admissions staff or look on LinkedIn to find current students or recent alumni with whom you can speak. Try to obtain multiple perspectives about the program.

Identify which logistical graduate school format will be the best fit for you.

- Decide if you would like to go full-time, or part-time while working. So many students see graduate school vs. employment as being an either/or decision. It's not! There are many different formats offered now. Some programs are Saturday only or condensed one week classes in the summer/ over breaks.
- Decide if you would like to learn in person, online, or through a hybrid program.
- Depending on your field, research if an employer might help to help fund your degree. For example, if you work at a college, you may be able to work towards an advanced degree part-time for free.

Identify how you will fund your graduate education.

- Ask yourself the tough questions such as:
 - How much does the graduate program in which I'm interested cost?
 - How much debt do I have already? If I have debt, what will my monthly payment be with interest?
 - How much debt will I have after this program? What will my payment look like upon graduation?
 - What is the average starting salary for someone in my field/industry with this degree?
 - What sources of assistantships/fellowships does the institution offer?
 - What outside scholarships are available in my field?

Note: typically PhD programs give more funding than Master's programs. Unfortunately, graduate programs do not give as many need-based grants as undergraduate programs do.

Identify which institutions best fit your needs.

- After doing your research, narrow down your list of schools to which you will apply. There is no set number as everyone's needs are different. Typically, you do not need to apply to as many institutions as for undergraduate.
- Create a list of school to which to apply that includes a mix of schools based on admissions criteria (GPA, standardized test scores, etc.) You should have at least one safety school, several target schools, and one reach school.

You are now ready to apply!

Long-Term Prep to Become an Outstanding Candidate

- Develop a strong academic record and challenge yourself in your coursework.
- Seek leadership roles in campus activities, jobs, etc.
- Develop positive, long-term academic relationships with professors who can write a recommendation.
- Consider taking a summer program at a top-ranked institution, especially if you want to go to graduate school there.
- Look at programs in other parts of the country or even abroad. Institutions may take a second look at your application if you would add to their geographic or ethnicity enrollments.
- Participate in independent research, especially if is required by your field of study.

Other Resources for Graduate School

- Appointments with Career Center Staff - <https://bc-csm.symplicity.com/students>
- Career Center Website - <http://www.bc.edu/offices/careers/gradschool.html>
- Career Center blogs and advice columns (type graduate school into the search bar)- <http://careeredge.bc.edu/>