

Is Graduate School for You?

Pursuing an advanced degree is an extensive commitment in terms of time, money, and hard work. It's critical to begin with where you want to be in the long run, both professionally and personally. It's important not to pursue an advanced degree to avoid getting a job or simply because you do well in school. It's not just an extension of the undergraduate experience. It's much more competitive and intensive. Ask yourself these questions:

- What are my long-term and short-term professional goals?
- Is graduate school necessary for me to achieve these goals?
- Do I have the interest and ability to succeed in a graduate program?
- By going to graduate school am I simply delaying my career planning and decision-making?
- Will my ultimate career potential outweigh the loss in earning potential and debt I will incur while in graduate school?
- Will the amount of time and money spent on a program translate into greater career mobility and financial possibilities?
- Am I willing to meet the extensive research, course work and major paper demands of another academic program?
- Would continuing education alternatives (certificates, vocational school, professional seminars, workshops) assist in achieving my goals?

NOW OR LATER?

If you are interested in graduate school, plan early in your college career to assure that you take appropriate prerequisite courses and that you are well prepared for admissions examinations. Work closely with academic and Career Advisors to insure applications, essays, and recommendations are appropriate and as well presented as possible. Talk with faculty, staff, prospective employers, and students currently pursuing programs of interest in order to hear their perspectives on the advantages of immediate vs. delayed entry into graduate school.

Ask Yourself:

- Are you reasonably sure of your career goals, or is there a strong possibility you could change your mind after a taste of the working world?
- Would related work experience help to clarify ambiguous career goals?
- Is an advanced degree a pre-requisite for your chosen career?
- How much will your job and salary be enhanced by a graduate degree? A master's degree almost always commands a higher yearly rate of pay
- Do you have a strong GPA? Would work experience enhance your application credentials by offsetting mediocre grades or test scores? Some professional schools are just as interested in your work background as in your "numbers"
- What are the direct and indirect costs of graduate school? Include the cost of the program and books, living expenses and loss of income
- Is there a possibility that a future employer might pay for you to attend graduate school?

TYPES OF DEGREES:

Two Types Masters Programs

- Generally two years long
- Academic tract focusing on classical research and scholarship culminating with a thesis
- Practical track which is a professional training program that commonly incorporates practical, experiential components into the curricula and prepares students to practice in particular professions (i.e., law, education, social work)
- Generally limited financial aid
- Often master's students work part time and attend classes either part or full time

Doctorate Programs (pursuit of knowledge):

- Designed to create scholars capable of independent research that will add new and significant knowledge in their fields
- First year or two is generally spent on coursework followed by "field" or "qualifying" exams
- Once the qualifying exam is passed, you will be permitted to move on to independent research in form of a doctoral dissertation
- Financial aid available in form of teaching or research assistantships
- Talking with professionals in the field, faculty, and current students enrolled in the program in which you are interested is the best way to learn about the different types of degrees offered and their advantage and disadvantages.

HOW TO IDENTIFY PROGRAMS:

- Visit [Peterson's Education Center](#) to identify universities that offer programs in your area of interest.
- Ask several faculty members in the discipline about programs they would recommend
- Ask professionals in the field you hope to enter where they did their graduate work, what degrees they hold, and what programs/ institutions they would recommend
- Contact professional associations, using the *Encyclopedia of Associations*, to determine which programs they approve
- Read related professional journals to determine where leaders in your field of interest are teaching/engaging in research
- Send for graduate catalogs or review home pages for institutions that interest you; analyze and compare the programs you are considering
- Visit the graduate department and interview faculty and enrolled students. Determine whether students are satisfied with the quality of instruction, advising and with the library and research facilities.
- Keep a file/journal of all materials you've accumulated and conversations you've had to determine which graduate schools and programs best fit your needs . . . then apply!

COMBINING WORK AND EDUCATION:

Numerous corporations provide assistance for tuition. Some companies combine the tuition assistance benefit with a "front-pay" option that allows direct billing from college to the corporation, eliminating the need for out-of-pocket expenses. Other companies allow employees to apply for upfront advances on 50% of tuition costs. Usually classes have to be taken during evening or weekends to qualify for assistance.

APPLICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS:

Before you apply to a graduate program, ask yourself any last minute questions that might affect your decision.

- Does the program allow for part-time study?
- Is work experience required to get into the program?
- Does the program allow flexibility such as dual majors, interdepartmental or interdisciplinary study, individualized majors, and combined degree programs? These often lead to the most interesting jobs.

Procedures:

- Check graduate catalogs for admissions requirements and deadlines.
- Identify what type of entrance exam is required and when it is offered (i.e., GRE, GMAT, LSAT, and MCAT)
- Graduate schools will also require official transcripts from each college attended, which must be obtained from the Registrar's Office of the colleges you attended
- Obtain letters of reference from faculty and others who know about the quality of your academic and professionally related work will be requested
- You may expect other requirements such as essays, general interviews or situational interviewing

