

Thinking about Graduate School?

Graduate school can be an exciting educational experience and assist you in achieving your career goals. However, most students leave graduate school with several thousand dollars in student loans. Is the cost of graduate school worth it? Before deciding to go to graduate school, you need to consider if earning a graduate degree is the right choice for you.

ASSESSING YOUR GOALS

First, you must evaluate what you are trying to achieve by earning a graduate degree. Create clear goals and decide what occupations you would like to obtain after completing graduate school.

Most employers will expect a candidate with a graduate degree to have more experience in his/her career field than a candidate with a bachelor's degree. If you have little experience in this career field, you may want to consider working to gain more experience before starting your graduate studies.

The following are goals that indicate graduate school may be the appropriate choice for you:

Academia

You are interested in participating in research and/or teaching at the university level.

Administration/Management

You have several years of experience, but want to move to a managerial position within the same field.

Advancement

You have several years of experience, but a graduate degree is the only way you will continue to advance within your chosen field.

Career Change

You have experience in one career field, but want to move to another facet of your career or a completely different career path.

Professional Licensing

Your career of choice requires you to have a graduate degree in order to be legally licensed to practice.

RESEARCH YOUR OCCUPATION OF CHOICE

You need to understand your occupation of choice in depth before you can decide if graduate school is necessary for you to succeed. Following are some of the areas to consider:

- Occupational requirements
 - Degree
 - Licensing/Certification
 - Experience level
- Job growth rates
- Industry trends
- Salary information
- Skills, values, and interests of those in the occupation

These resources can assist you in researching your occupation of choice:

- The Occupational Outlook Handbook (<http://www.bls.gov/search/oo.htm>)
 - Provides detailed information about occupations including the nature of the work, educational requirements, outlook, etc.
- O*Net (<http://online.onetcenter.org/>)
 - Provides detailed information about occupations including tasks, job outlook, interests, etc.
- Informational Interviews
 - Select a person participating in your occupation of choice and interview them her the realities of that occupation

ASSESSING YOURSELF

Now that you've created a clear goal and chosen an occupation that you would like to obtain with a graduate degree, you need to evaluate yourself. Do your skills, values, and interests match this occupation? Do you have the required experience to be successful after earning a graduate degree?

Discover if your skills, values, interests, and experience match this occupation formally or informally by:

- Writing a list of your skills, values, and interests
- Asking friends and family to list your areas of strength and weakness
- Meeting with a career counselor in Career Services
- Participating in and reviewing career assessments with a career counselor
 - Career Services offers the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Strong Interest Inventory
- Utilizing a self-directed career assessment
 - Find SIGI³ on the Career Services website

FINANCIAL MATTERS

Depending on the type of graduate program (master's vs. doctorate, full-time vs. part-time; day vs. evening), you may not be able to work while attending graduate school. If you are able to work, you must consider how taking on the additional costs of tuition, books, supplies, etc. will affect you financially. Create a plan for how you will pay for graduate school and how you will support yourself while in school. Discussing these matters with a financial aid officer or a financial planner could be helpful.

DECIDING TO APPLY

Once you have made the decision to go to graduate school, there are many additional issues that you must consider:

- **Investigate programs of interest to you**
 - You can find information about programs through
 - Professional associations
 - Commercial guides

- Rankings (such as U.S. News and World Report)
- Graduate school catalogs
- Current students and alumni
- Undergraduate professors
- Websites (such as petersons.com or GradSchools.com)
- **Determine entrance requirements and find out if you need to complete any prerequisites**
- **If entrance exams are required, find out the exam deadlines**
 - Different types of programs require different exams or subject exams. Each school will have a deadline for when your test scores are due. Plan to take the exam much earlier than the school deadline because most exams take at least 4-6 weeks to return your scores. You can find out when tests are offered on the entrance exam websites. Common exams include:
 - GRE (Graduate Record Examinations) and GRE Subject Tests
 - GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test)
 - MAT (Miller Analogies Test)
 - LSAT (Law School Admission Test)
 - MCAT (Medical College Admission Test)
- **Request application materials from schools and find out application deadlines**
- **Complete applications, write essays or your statement of purpose and identify your references**

- **Complete admissions interviews, if needed**
- **Apply for financial aid, if needed**
- **If you plan to relocate for graduate school research the area of interest and understand cost of living differences, housing options, etc.**

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Utilize these resources to learn more about the graduate school admission process and how to improve your chances of being accepted:

- Graduate school admissions books
 - Get Into Graduate School: A Strategic Approach. (2nd ed.). (2006). New York: Kaplan
 - Available to view at Career Services
 - University or public libraries
 - NetLibrary (ebooks)
 - Access NetLibrary through the Webster University library website under Articles/Databases (<http://library.webster.edu/>)
- Writing Center
 - Use the Writing Center to improve your personal statement or admission essay (located in Loretto Hall, Room 6, 314-246-8644)
- Career Services
 - Meet with a career counselor to discuss graduate school and the admissions process.