

Considering Graduate School

Why are you considering a graduate degree?

Deciding to seek one or more graduate degrees is a major commitment of time and money; a decision not to take lightly. You will face several years of intense work and research -- a much more demanding course load than in your undergraduate program. Before deciding your next step, you should take the time to honestly answer these five questions.

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Career Goal: You need to have a clear understanding of what you want to do with your career -- and how earning a graduate degree will help you reach that goal. If you have any doubt at all about your professional goals, consider putting off graduate school and, instead, spend some time working on some self-assessment and career planning. If you go to graduate school without a clear goal, you will probably end up wasting both time and money.

While certain careers definitely require an advanced degree -- doctors and lawyers, for example -- many other careers offer plenty of job opportunities for job-seekers with just an undergraduate degree. In fact, in some situations having an advanced degree can actually hurt you in a job search if you also have little or no job experience.



Compensation: Most studies show that people with advanced degrees earn more on average than people with bachelor's degrees.

Staying Marketable: While a graduate degree is not required for many "entry-level" jobs, you may need to earn an advanced degree to keep your training and skills current -- and make you more marketable for career advancement.

Career Change: A graduate degree can often make sense for a job-seeker who is looking to make a career change. In this case, degree in the field you plan to enter

When should you consider obtaining a graduate degree? One of the questions most often debated is when is the best time to consider a graduate degree. Is it better to attend graduate school right after you complete your bachelor's degree, or is it better to wait a few years and gain some work/life experience first. As mentioned above, certainly do *not* consider going immediately to graduate school as a default move -- or to avoid getting a job.

The reasons for going straight to graduate school after earning your bachelor's degree:

- you are accustomed to being a student -- and have momentum;
- your study skills are sharp;
- you have few obligations;

WHEN SHOULD YOU CONSIDER OBTAINING A GRADUATE DEGREE?



University of California, Berkeley

- some occupations require an advanced degree even for "entry-level" positions. *The reasons for working for a few years before going to graduate school:*
- some graduate programs require work experience;
- you can better know your career goals by working in the field for a few years;
- you bring a broader world view to your studies;
- you have a more mature outlook on school and work;
- many employers will pay some or all of your graduate school expenses;
- you can gain solid financial footing;
- you can improve your chances for acceptance to graduate programs -- especially if you were not the best student in your undergraduate program.

Can you afford graduate school?

“One of the questions most debated is when is the best time to consider a graduate degree”

Just as with your undergraduate college, it is crucial to look at the costs of the various graduate programs that interest you and determine what mix of financial aid will make attending the programs feasible. It's best to study the

literature each school sends you and then talk with a financial aid adviser at those schools that interest you. Besides some of the same types of financial aid offered at the undergraduate level, most graduate programs also offer

fellowships (for teaching or research assistance).

And if you're currently employed, don't forget to see if your employer has a tuition reimbursement program.

What is the Best Graduate Degree For You?

There are two traditional categories of graduate degrees -- master's and doctoral -- although there are also numerous hybrid combined-degree and certificate programs at many universities.

Master's: Master's degree programs are growing and evolving, with degrees offered in just about all fields. Master's degrees can be professional or academic. Professional degrees, such as a Master of Business Administration (MBA), are designed for employment or advancement within a given field. Academic degrees, such as a Master of Science, are designed for intellectual growth and (sometimes) a prerequisite for doctoral work within a given field. Master's degrees may take one to three years to complete.

Doctorate: Doctoral degrees, the highest possible earned academic degree, can also be professional or academic. Professional doctoral degrees, such as the Doctor of Medicine (MD) and the Juris Doctor (JD), stress the practical application of knowledge and skills. Academic doctoral degrees, the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), focus on advancing knowledge through original research in a given academic field. Doctorates may take three to six years to complete.

