

GRADUATE SCHOOL

RESEARCHING PROGRAMS

DETERMINE IF GRADUATE SCHOOL IS FOR YOU

For some professions, an advanced degree is required to enter the field. College teaching, law, and medicine are examples of such professions. If you have chosen a field such as this, then graduate school is a necessity. For other fields, such as education or business, graduate school is not necessary for an entry-level position.

Another reason to attend graduate school is to specialize in a subject of personal or professional interest. If you are unsure of your career choice, you should delay graduate school until you are more focused. Likewise, it is not a good idea to attend graduate school for the purpose of delaying a job search or to please someone else.

GATHER INFORMATION ON PROGRAMS & BUILD A LIST

You will want to have enough information to make an informed decision about what program to attend before investing a great deal of your time and money. You should build an initial list of possible schools. Be sure to look nationwide; do not limit yourself geographically. Consider tapping into the following sources:

Published Guides

Peterson's Guides to Graduate School is a highly recommended series. The Career Resource Center in Chapman Hall has these available for students. Get basic information on the schools that interest you. Peterson's is also on the web at www.petersons.com/graduate/.

Professors

Ask for suggestions from Pacific professors about what programs you should explore. They may know colleagues at some of the institutions you are considering. Find out if any Pacific professors attended the school you are interested in whether or not it is in the same discipline.

Parents & Friends

If your parents are paying for part or all of your tuition, they will probably have some input. Don't forget those closest to you when looking for suggestions. Some schools even have scholarships available for children of alumni.

Graduate Students in Your Field

Ask your professors for the names of alumni who have attended graduate schools in your field. Contact those alumni for advice on programs. If you visit schools, ask to speak to currently enrolled students.

Professional Journals

Note which faculty members are publishing in professional journals or textbooks in your area of specialization and the programs with which they are affiliated.

Published Ratings

Periodicals such as "U.S. News and World Report" publish periodic ratings of colleges and universities. It is a good idea to consult several ratings for comparison. Also, be aware that these can be prejudiced toward research-oriented institutions.

COMPARE SCHOOLS

Aside from basics like geographic location and admission requirements, consider the following criteria when selecting the graduate school program that is best for you:

Time Commitment/Attrition

How long does it take to complete the program and how many students drop out before completing? Be sure to ask students in the program for the realistic answer to this question. Are they on a cohort basis or can you complete at your own pace?

Approach

Does the department take a specialized or more generalist approach? Which suits your needs better?

Size of Department

Can you get the attention you want from faculty members? How many faculty are devoted to the department? Are they part-time or full-time?

Size of the Institution

Would you feel comfortable there? Are you aware of the benefits and deficits of a small, medium, or large institution? What is a good fit for one person may not be for another individual.

Student Mix

Are the other students in the program much older or younger than you? Would you be comfortable with that? Also consider gender

and ethnicity.

Reputation

Remember to explore not only the reputation of the institution as a whole, but also research the specific department and the accomplishments of individual faculty members.

Facilities

Investigate the library. Accessibility of original research is important. Check that the computer centers and labs are adequate for your research. Are there on campus living quarters or do most students commute.

Teaching Methods

Depending on your field, practical work experience in addition to classroom learning may be important. Is there an emphasis on research or on practical application?

Cost & Aid/Scholarships

Be sure to examine both of these factors. It can sometimes cost less to go to a school that at first glance seems expensive because of the opportunity for aid. Assistantships or internships may be available which offer tuition in exchange for working or teaching on the campus. Do not rule out any program because of cost; if the program wants you, there may be additional funding of which you are unaware.

Career Services

Where are the internships, practicum, or clinical experiences? How are they determined? Where have graduates obtained employment after graduation? Does the school have help finding graduates work?

Housing/Living Expenses

Consider the cost of living in the area when weighing the total expenses. Investigate on-campus and off-campus Possibilities.

RANK & NARROW YOUR LIST

You can now rank your list of schools. As criteria, use your personal interest and the relative likelihood of admission. Use three categories to rank:

- 1) Reach Schools
"I don't think I have a good chance for admission but I am interested."
- 2) Possible schools
"I have a fairly good chance for admission."
- 3) Safe schools
"I will definitely be accepted."

You should apply to at least two schools from each category.

The best way to judge the competitiveness of a school's admission requirements is to ask the people who you talked to when developing your "big list" of schools. You can also check published rankings or call the school to ask about entrance requirements.