

Considering Grad School

If graduate school is on your mind, this guide provides the essentials: how to evaluate programs, what to expect from the application process, and how to decide if it's the right path for your career.



Graduate vs. Undergraduate Studies

Undergraduate Studies

- Broad Foundational Knowledge
- Structured Curriculum with clear guidelines and required coursework
- Guided learning with professors providing instruction
- Balanced homework, exams, and projects
- Professors are instructors
- Social interaction across a variety of students groups
- Graduation requires certain courses and major requirements

Graduate Studies

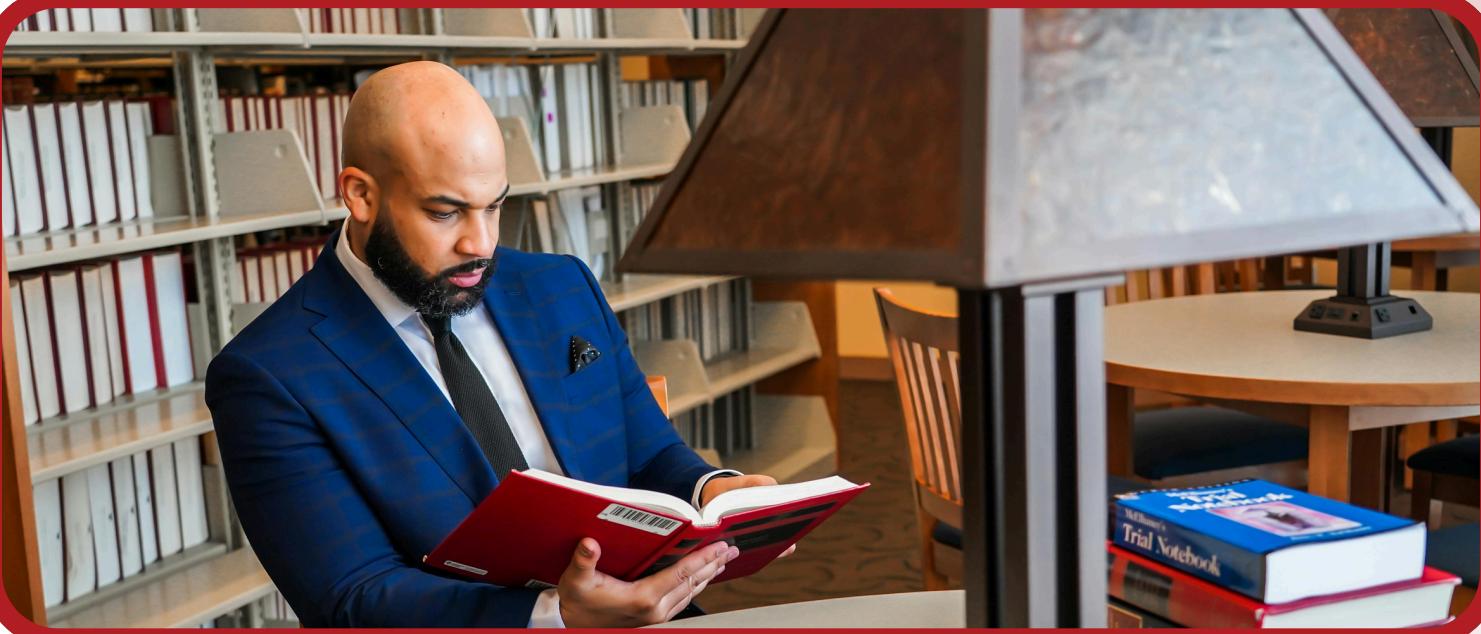
- Highly Specialized and Research Focused
- Flexible, Student led design of coursework and/or projects
- Independent learning, students expected to lead their own research
- Heavier and more intense courseload and research
- Professors serve as mentors and advisors
- Collaborative within specific academic field
- Graduation requires a thesis, dissertation, or comprehensive exams in addition to coursework



Programs, Levels, And Types

Programs:

- Graduate Certificate: Short period of study in a specialized topic after undergraduate education. Courses are generally at the graduate level and may be applied towards a master's degree.
- Master's Degree: Advanced degree for demonstrating a high level of mastery in a particular subject area. Typically takes two years full-time or three years part-time.
- Specialized Master's: Professional degrees in select fields like business (MBA), fine arts (MFA), library science (MLS), public administration (MPA), public health (MPH), and social work (MSW).
- Doctor of Philosophy: Research degree (marked by intensive, theory-based research in the form of a dissertation) that qualifies the holder to teach and conduct research at the university level or work in a specific profession.
- Professional/Clinical Degree: Rigorous, practice-based doctoral study for entry into specific professions such as educational administration (Ed.D.), law (J.D.), medicine (M.D.), and Psychology (Psy.D.).



Types:

- **Professional Degree Programs** – These programs are designed to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge needed for a specific profession, such as law, medicine, education, college student services, and many others.
- **Research Degree Programs** – These programs focus on contributing original research and expanding knowledge in a particular field or discipline, such as the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, engineering, or communications and information.

Levels:

- **Specialist** – Typically pursued after earning a master's degree and involve additional coursework, training, or internship experience. These degrees are often intended to prepare students for professional certification or licensing requirements, such as the Ed.S. for becoming a school principal or a teaching credential.
- **Master's** – Available in a wide range of fields, with some designed as a steppingstone to a doctoral degree, while others serve as the final degree for a profession (e.g., Master of Library Science or Master of Business Administration). For full-time students, completing a master's degree usually takes about two years.
- **Doctoral** – The highest level of academic achievement and typically involves conducting original research to generate new knowledge, whether in basic or applied fields. Depending on the time required for research, writing, and defending a dissertation, doctoral programs generally take 5 to 7 years to complete.



Program Selection

Once you've determined that graduate school is the next logical step in your career, you'll need to tackle an essential question: **Where should I apply?**

It's important to research various programs to find those that align with your interests and maximize your chances of admission.

Keep in mind that application fees for graduate schools can range up to \$100 or more, so it's crucial to reflect on your personal goals and values.

Apply only to programs that align with your needs and aspirations.

Start with a list of about 10 to 15 schools, and then refine your choices using the "Rule of 6": **two "reach"** programs, **two "moderately competitive,"** and **two "safe bets."**



Graduate School Tips

- **Start early:** You should plan to start researching potential schools and programs at least 12 months in advance of applying to grad school. This should give you plenty of time to learn about the programs, costs, and consider all your options in the process.
- **Start broadly:** Begin with 10-15 potential schools, if possible, and do some initial research on each. There are plenty of online resources and rankings that can help you build your potential list. You can also ask current faculty members for recommended schools and programs based on your interest.
- **Research specific programs, curricula, and coursework:** Once you have a targeted list, dive in deeper to each program. You should look at the coursework, curriculum, and research areas of each program that interests you, as well as the faculty members in the program.
- **Network and communicate:** As you continue to narrow your list, move into more personal contact with the targeted department and faculty members. You should talk with the admissions office and/or departments at prospective schools. Try to schedule time to talk with key faculty members, as well as current or former students. The best way to find out about a given program is to talk and connect with other students.
- **Visit:** If time and finances are available, you might find it helpful to make a personal visit to a few of your top schools.
- **Narrow the list:** After researching programs and talking with faculty and students from potential schools, narrow your list to the top 3-5 schools. Remember, it costs money and time to apply to graduate schools so the number of schools you choose is a very personal decision.
- **Familiarize yourself with the application process:** Examine and get familiar with the application process for each of your targeted schools. Begin to map out the requirements, deadlines, and plans for each school to ensure you fulfill all requirements for the application process.



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