

Undergraduate and Graduate: Compare and Contrast

Undergraduate	Graduate
Broad Foundational Knowledge	Highly Specialized and Research Focused
Structured Curriculum with clear guidelines and required coursework	Flexible, Student led design of coursework and/or projects
Guided learning with professors providing instruction	Independent learning, students expected to lead their own research
Balanced homework, exams, and projects	Heavier and more intense courseload and research
Professors are instructors	Professors serve as mentors and advisors
Social interaction across a variety of students groups	Collaborative within specific academic field
Graduation requires certain courses and major requirements	Graduation requires a thesis, dissertation, or comprehensive exams in addition to coursework

Degree Program and Levels

Graduate degrees are available in most subjects and come from three levels and two types. Graduate degrees are typically divided into two categories: professional and research, and they can be pursued at the master's, specialist, or doctoral levels. There are also various combinations of these types and levels. It is highly recommended that you thoroughly research your intended career path before deciding on the specific discipline or program for graduate school. The requirements, duration, and career outcomes of your program will vary depending on the type of graduate degree and level you pursue.

Types of Degrees

- ❖ 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.

Level of Degrees

- ❖ 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.
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Graduate School Words and Tips

- ❖ TA – Teaching Assistant
- ❖ RA – Research Assistant or Residence Assistant
- ❖ GA – Graduate Assistant
- ❖ Thesis – Research paper completed after course work for master's degree; the length varies but could reach up to 75 pages
- ❖ Dissertation – Extensive research paper completed after course work for a doctorate; usually more in-depth than a thesis and may reach over 100 pages
- ❖ Non-thesis option – taking additional hours or completion of “problems in lieu of thesis” project as a substitute
- ❖ Comps – written and/or oral exams administered at the end of course work for graduate programs. Oral exams are administered by a committee of faculty members from your program. You may or may not be allowed to contribute to the composition of the committee.
- ❖ Full load – nine hours (nine hours is a heavy load)
- ❖ Residency requirement – required on-campus full-time residence at the university (varies by institution)
- ❖ Reading list – materials to be read in preparation for comps
- ❖ GSA – Graduate Student Association
- ❖ Thesis or Dissertation Committee – faculty who “guide” the development of your thesis or dissertation
- ❖ Major Professor or Advisor – faculty member who most closely guides your work
- ❖ Failing grade – a C may be considered failing; most graduate programs require students to earn As and Bs