

Graduate Program Considerations

Will the program prepare you for your professional goal/What do I need to do to get my dream job?

It's one thing to go to school because you like being in school and think it would be fun to learn more about a certain subject. It's another thing to choose a graduate program with the goal of learning more to help you succeed in a chosen field or profession. Graduate school is a much more enjoyable experience when you know that your hard work is helping you move toward your future goals. Do your homework first (talk to people in the field you are interested in and read job advertisements) and find out what training you need to do to get hired in that field!

Do graduates of the program get jobs in the profession I want?

It is perfectly acceptable to ask a program what their graduates go onto do. If your program advertises itself as preparing graduates to succeed in a certain field, but none of their graduates seem to be working in those fields, the program might not be as strong in that area as they advertise.

Could I stand living where the school is located?

Do you hate heat? Snow? Rain? Does the diversity of a place influence how you feel about it? If so, remember these things when you are looking at graduate programs. While it is definitely possible to justify getting outside of your comfort zone for a temporary period of a few years, your academic experience and overall attitude can be a lot better if you do not hate where you are living.

Does the program/campus/location feel right?

On paper, or on a website, a graduate program might sound perfect. If possible, make a visit to the campus and department and pay attention to how the atmosphere and interactions make you feel. Ask to speak with current students about their experience. Trust what your gut tells you.

Will the class structure match what I want from the program?

Some programs make all of their students take the same courses while others have more flexibility. Some programs require internship/practicum experiences, but some do not. Some programs allow you to minor in a subject outside of your primary department, but others may not. The majority of programs will require a final project, whether that be a thesis/dissertation, capstone paper, portfolio or professional internship experience. Be sure to know what you are getting yourself into when you commit to going. If the thought of writing a hundred page research paper turns your stomach inside out, consider programs where writing a paper is not the only option for a final project.

How much \$ will this program cost?

Does the graduate program provide funding options? Could you secure a graduate assistantship in your department or another one on campus? If departmental funding is not an option, will it be worth it for you to go into debt to pay for your advanced degree? Sometimes going to a less prestigious institution that will fully fund your experience can be a smarter choice than attending a prestigious institution and graduating with thousands of dollars of debt. Of course, this decision can be influenced by your anticipated future income from your chosen field (funding for medical, dental and law schools is primarily nonexistent because of the earning potential for graduates.)