

Selecting A Graduate School: Look Before You Leap!

Once you're certain that grad school fits into your career and life plans, you need to find out as much as possible about the program you have in mind. Early in your junior year, begin to explore schools offering the type of program you want.

A common concern deals with which institution has the "best" program. There is no single reliable ranking of graduate schools. National rankings do exist, however each is based on different criteria. Therefore, it may be more meaningful to talk to faculty in your field and see which professors are doing research and publishing.

While actual rankings may be somewhat misleading, comparative information about various programs is readily available. As you attempt to gain an overview of the many graduate and professional school programs available, you may find the following directories particularly helpful. They are probably available in your Career Resources Library.

- **Peterson's Annual Guides to Graduate Study**, published in six volumes, profile over 1400 accredited institutions offering masters and/or doctoral programs. Many profiles list faculty and their research interests.
- **The Guide to American Graduate Schools**, describes post-baccalaureate study opportunities at more than 685 accredited institutions. Sections include: admission and degree requirements, tuition, degrees conferred, enrollments, fields of study, and financial aid opportunities.
- **The Directory of Graduate Programs**, published by the Graduate Record Examinations Board. This four-volume publication contains information on U.S. graduate programs in over 80 major fields.

Additional Ways to Evaluate Programs

- **Review Graduate Catalogs.** Your Career Resources Library should have a comprehensive collection of in-state college and university catalogs, with selected holdings of out-of-state institutions. The Microfiche College Catalog Collection, which encompasses most U.S. and foreign colleges and universities, may be available in your student library.

You may also request catalogs directly from the Admissions Office of the institutions you are considering.

- **Talk with Graduate School Admissions Representatives.** An annual Graduate & Professional School Information Day is held on most campuses each fall. You may confirm the date with the Graduate Affirmative Affairs Office.

Other annual events where you'll be able to meet representatives from grad schools across the country include the GRE Forum, Law Forum and MBA Forum. Information on dates and locations is available at the Placement and Career Planning Center.

http://www.csusm.edu/CATSS/gradschool_info.htm

- **Visit the Campus.** Perhaps nothing can help you get a better perspective than an actual campus visit. There you'll have a chance to observe the following: Do students and faculty interact productively? Is faculty easily accessible? Do the school, campus and community satisfy your lifestyle and extracurricular needs?
 - **Talk to Current Students.** The Admissions Office can arrange meetings or provide phone numbers if a campus visit is not possible. Beyond basic questions, you'll want to determine responsiveness to student opinions and concerns. Do students serve on committees How well, and by what means, are students informed of academic, administrative and social matters?
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Criteria for Evaluating Graduate Programs

These criteria may help you to decide which graduate programs are best suited to your talents, your ambitions, and at a time of soaring college costs, your pocketbook:

Admission. What are admission requirements? How important are GPA and test scores? What criteria is used to evaluate and select students? Will it be easier to get accepted after gaining work experience? What types of students does the program attract? Some schools attract highly competitive people while others foster teamwork.

Programs Offered. What specializations are available? Does the program focus on theory and original research, or does it stress the practical application of knowledge and skills? Does the program provide real work experience such as practicums or internships? Is the curriculum structured or flexible? Are there opportunities to work on research projects? What resources, such as computers and laboratories, are available?

Faculty. Who are they? What are their credentials? Do they hold degrees in fields of expertise from leading universities? What awards, grants and special recognition have they earned? What have they published? What research projects have they conducted? Do they hold chairs or professorships? Does the department have nationally or internationally known scholars in the field? Do the top scholars in the program teach, or are they primarily involved in research? Do they actively participate in the graduate school community? Is there diversity? What is the faculty/student ratio?

Philosophy of Education. What is the average length of time spent in the program? Do opportunities exist for specialization in areas of your own interest? Is the approach theoretical or pragmatic?

Reputation. Is the university accredited? Is the program nationally ranked in terms of excellence? Is the program well established or relatively new? Who has graduated from the program and what are they doing now? What is the attrition level?

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Multicultural Opportunities. What is faculty and student composition? Will you have an opportunity to work with students from other cultures? What foreign exchange programs are available? Is it possible to study foreign languages? What multicultural experiences do the faculty bring to the classroom? Are international concerns substantially integrated into the curriculum?

Library. Is there a comprehensive reference collection in your area of specialization? How many volumes? What special collections? Is the material accessible? Is a computerized system available? How many trained staff members are there?

Physical Facilities. Are there adequate study facilities? Sufficient classrooms and seminar rooms? Are there areas for student interaction? Are the surroundings attractive and pleasant enough to endure throughout the program?

Cost. What are the tuition and fees? What financial aid is available in the form of loans, scholarships, internships and work study funds? What about teaching and research assistantships? How much is a non-resident tuition?

Geographic Location. Considering the weather and political/social climate, do I want to live here for several years? Would I be happier in a small town or a large urban area? Does the area offer cultural and recreational activities? Is this a place where I might want to stay? What kind of impact will this location have on my family and friends? What are the employment opportunities in the area?

Size. Look at the size of the department as well as the university. A large institution will have more extensive facilities and libraries; a smaller school will offer more personal attention and a sense of community.

State Regulations & Residency Requirements. Many state universities are required by law to give admission preference to in-state residents. These regulations apply to your legal residence and may affect the cost of your tuition.

Career Assistance. What career planning and job search assistance is available through the department? Is there an on-campus career center that offers counseling, job search training, employment leads and library resources? Does the program provide real work experience such as practicums, cooperative programs or internships to give you solid work experience? Are career services offered to alumni?

Networking Contacts. If you hope to develop relationships with industry leaders, select a school that prides itself on real-world orientation and opportunities to mingle with living legends. If you want a program that encourages graduates to network, seek a school with a well-developed alumni relations office.

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