



Researching Graduate Programs

NOTE: Before you begin the process of researching potential graduate programs, you should first think critically about [whether or not going to graduate school is the right choice, right now](#) – for you.

When researching graduate and professional programs, first identify the schools that have programs in your area of interest. The Career Development Center resource library and university libraries offer print and electronic reference material to help you with this task. Some online resources can be found [here](#).

After you have identified the schools, you will need to develop evaluation criteria. The following questions are useful in comparing programs.

- How important is the **prestige** of the program for my particular career goals?
- What is the program's overall structure? Pay attention to prerequisite courses, the flexibility of the curriculum, and options regarding full-time and part-time status.
- What are the program's requirements for graduation? For master's level programs, this may include a thesis or a practicum experience; for PhD programs, this will be a dissertation.
- What theoretical approach, if any, dominates the program? Does it mesh with your perspective on the discipline?
- What teaching methodology is typical of the program? Does this fit with your learning style?
- What kind of work do graduates of the program do? What types of employment opportunities are common, and where are these opportunities located?
- What percentage of graduates pass required professional exams (boards, bar exam, etc.) on the first try?
- What are the admission requirements, and are you likely to meet them? For example, does the school advertise median G.P.A. or entrance exams scores?
- How much will it cost to attend the program? You will need to factor in the costs of tuition, housing, books and fees, and consider the cost of living in the area. You should also seek information on the availability of financial aid and the average financial package received by students, [as well as opportunity cost](#).
- What is the social and cultural climate of the program and the school?
- Where is the program located? Keep in mind that you will spend several years pursuing a graduate degree, and you will have to be comfortable living in that community for a while.

With these questions in mind, review information on graduate or professional programs in your field. You will find it fairly simple to prune your list of schools.

Next, with the help of [informational interviewing](#), talk with people associated with your selected programs. New graduates, professors and professionals in the field can supply important insight. Additionally, consider campus visits as a way of gaining a first-hand perspective on the different programs. Whenever possible, try to sit in on classes or speak with current students or alumni.

After carefully examining all the information you have gathered, you should be in a position to decide which programs remain viable options for you. Given the cost of applications (which can be as much as \$75 to \$150 each), you may want to limit your approach to your top 5-7 schools.

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