EXPLORING ADVANCED DEGREES AND CERTIFICATIONS

If you are considering a graduate program, an organized approach can simplify the application process and lead to acceptance into a graduate or professional degree program. When making this important decision, carefully weigh the time commitment, financial considerations, personal adjustments, and your readiness to pursue graduate-level coursework.

- Assess the value of a graduate degree in terms of earning potential, entry into a profession, advancement, and competitiveness.
- Seek guidance from faculty, people in the profession, and your career advisor.

EXERCISE 8: MY GRADUATE SCHOOL READINESS

Select one answer for each question.

1. **Do I have a clear understanding of what I want to do?**

- ○ A) Yes, I am pretty sure!
- ○ B) Somewhat
- ○ C) Not really
- ○ D) I do not know

2. **Does my ideal career require an advanced degree?**

- ○ A) Yes, in most cases
- ○ B) Sometimes
- ○ C) Not usually
- ○ D) I am not sure

3. **What are my plans for financing graduate school?**

- ○ A) I have already developed a financial plan
- ○ B) I do not have a finalized plan, but I have done some research into fellowships, scholarships, and loans
- ○ C) I know that it will be expensive, but I don't know how I will pay for it
- ○ D) I have not thought about finances at all

4. **Am I prepared for two to seven more years of schooling?**

- ○ A) Absolutely
- ○ B) Maybe
- ○ C) No way
- ○ D) I have not thought about it

5. **How would I describe my time-management skills?**

- ○ A) I always work ahead
- ○ B) I tend to manage my time well, though there are times when I get off track
- ○ C) I am a bit of a procrastinator
- ○ D) What time-management skills?

6. **Does the field I want to go into or the program I am interested in prefer work experience before getting an advanced degree?**

- ○ A) Yes, and I do have experience OR No, people tend to go straight from undergraduate to graduate school in my field
- ○ B) It is preferred, but I do not have experience
- ○ C) It is required, but I do not have experience
- ○ D) I am not sure

7. **What are my motivations for going to graduate school?**

- ○ A) I know what I want to do, and getting an advanced degree will help me achieve my goals
- ○ B) It might help me in achieving my career goals
- ○ C) I am not ready to enter the workforce
- ○ D) I do not know what else to do

8. **Have I researched the degree I want?**

- ○ A) Yes
- ○ B) Just a little
- ○ C) Not really
- ○ D) I do not know what degree I want yet

9. **How do I feel about the subject I am going to study?**

- ○ A) I cannot get enough of it!
- ○ B) It is okay
- ○ C) It is pretty dull
- ○ D) I don't know what subject I am going to study

10. **Can I afford to give up a full-time working salary to attend graduate school?**

- ○ A) Yes, probably
- ○ B) Maybe
- ○ C) Probably not
- ○ D) I am not sure

If your answers are mostly

A - Having done your research, you have found that graduate school will improve your career prospects by making you a stronger candidate in your field. It is recommended that you begin to look into the next steps that will prepare you to be the best candidate possible for the programs you're interested in.

Recommended Next Steps (A)

- Visit your career and academic advisors to discuss graduate school options
- Speak with faculty in your department to find the best program for you
- Research the application process for your programs
- Visit the Writing Center to discuss your writing sample and personal statement
- Take the appropriate graduate school exam
- Meet with a peer career advisor to discuss your resume or CV

B - It is unclear whether graduate school is the right fit for you. If you conduct some more research, you should be able to form a clearer idea. Consider everything, from whether you possess the commitment to your subject to be in school for another two to seven years to whether you can afford graduate school right now. You may consider taking a few years off before graduate school to get some hands-on experience in your field.

C - Graduate school may not be the best fit for you right now. Consider your other options. Have you looked into internships or full-time positions in your field? Take the time to plot out your possible career routes, both with and without graduate school, to determine which path will be the best fit for you.

D - You likely do not have enough information right now to decide whether graduate school is right for you. Because you have not yet done much research into graduate school, that may be a good place to start. You should consider looking more into the requirements for your ideal career field, as well as information about specific graduate programs you may be interested in. Upon doing some additional research, reflect on what you've learned about yourself and again assess whether or not graduate school will be beneficial to you.

Recommended Next Steps (B, C, D)

- See a career advisor
- Speak with faculty or academic advisors in your major
- Find a professional in your field to find out more about the pros and cons of going to graduate school
- Browse petersons.com to learn about potential schools and programs
- Register for UNIV 421 College to Graduate School

Another thing to consider when you are deciding if you want to go to graduate school is if you hope to work in academia or pursue a nonacademic career path with your degree. There are significant differences between working in the academy and in industry around roles and responsibilities, workplace culture, and career advancement. Explore the notable differences between academic and nonacademic careers.

ACADEMIC	NONACADEMIC
Publishing in peer-reviewed journals is necessary for success.	Publications are nice to have, but not needed.
You can experience a great sense of autonomy.	There is often a clearly defined set of reporting lines and accountability.
Work schedules can be irregular and driven by the schedule of classes. Breaks are built around the academic calendar (e.g, winter and summer breaks).	Although evolving, standard business hours are considered Monday–Friday 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Breaks are not set or built into the calendar, and busy times are driven by the cycle of the specific industry.
Your budget is often determined by fundraising and grant-seeking. These efforts are frequently part of the job, particularly for career advancement.	Your budget is often determined by a centralized resource allocation process and set by the fiscal year.
Tenure-line positions are highly coveted for job security, but the number of tenure-track positions is on the decline.	There is no equivalent to the tenure track.