



GRADUATE SCHOOL

The end of your undergraduate degree doesn't need to be end of your postsecondary education. If you're keen to continue your studies, there are several options available. The one that's right for you depends on your unique personal goals.

What is graduate school?

Graduate school is an opportunity to extend the academic work you did as an undergraduate. In general terms, the goal of the graduate student is to study a narrow area of a discipline with intense focus and eventually make a minor original contribution to that discipline. The end of graduate school is the acquisition and creation of knowledge rather than preparation for a specific occupation. What we call “graduate” programs typically include master’s and doctoral (Ph.D.) degrees. Master’s programs usually involve a thesis component and defence, and Ph.D. programs virtually always involve a major dissertation and multiple comprehensive exams. Unlike more structured undergraduate programs, graduate degrees are conferred whenever a student has completed his or her responsibilities. Typically, a master’s degree takes one or two years. A Ph.D., which first requires a master’s, will generally take four years or longer to complete.

What about professional school, law school, “teacher’s college,” or other further education options?

Please see our resource [Stay in School: Considering Further Education](#) for much more information.

Is it worth it to go to grad school?

Most career advisors and job-seeking resources will tell you that applying to graduate school because you don’t know what else to do is a bad move. We partially agree. If your ultimate goal is landing a good job in a specific field as quickly as possible, the time and money it takes to get through graduate school might well be better spent aggressively applying to entry-level jobs, networking, volunteering, and/or building a portfolio of freelance work. Alternatively, do you genuinely like the area you studied as an undergraduate? While it won’t necessarily convey you directly into the waiting room for a high-paying job interview, graduate school is an excellent opportunity to meet people with similar interests, learn more about something that authentically interests you, and acquire new skills. In many cases, it will strengthen your resume, differentiate you from otherwise-equal competitors for jobs, and expose you to new opportunities for working in your field. And, yes, some jobs will prefer candidates with graduate degrees.

Is it better to go to grad school immediately after an undergraduate degree, or is it better to go back to school after a time in the working world?

The best time to start a master’s degree depends on your unique circumstances. While practical experience in the business world may help you to succeed in an MBA program, enrolling in a Philosophy MA directly out of undergrad may ensure that you are able to fully devote yourself to your studies, free of outside obligations.

Is a thesis-based master’s preferable to a course-based degree?

If you plan on pursuing a doctorate, most experts will generally recommend a research-based course of study including a thesis. Otherwise, if you do not have an obvious thesis project in mind, a course-based program of study is an excellent way to increase your breadth of knowledge about your discipline.

Is grad school long and expensive?

In most fields, graduate school is a one- or two-year commitment, and tuition is comparable to undergraduate fees. Many students are able to secure funding – either from a university internally or through an organization like OGS, NSERC, or SSHRC – and secure a paid TA/GA position. However, note that graduate students are discouraged from working outside of the university during their degree. We recommend researching your funding options at the same time as you research programs.

What kind of undergraduate program/marks do I need to attend?

It depends. Postgraduate programs have unique entrance requirements and application processes. Generally, successful applicants have a four-year honours degree with strong academic standing. In broad terms, admissions committees prefer candidates with realistic goals, relevant interests, and evidence of hard work and high achievement.

When should I start to make plans?

We recommend students start to consider grad school applications by their third year of a four-year undergrad degree. That said, it is never too early or too late.

Will I need to write a standardized test?

Applicants to most graduate programs in the United States, and some in Canada, are required to complete the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), a standardized test of verbal, quantitative, and analytical abilities. Applicants to graduate business programs, specifically, are normally required to take the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT). For more information, consult an academic advisor in your discipline.

What else do I need to do?

Transcripts: Most programs will require you to submit up-to-date transcripts. There is generally a small associated fee. In some cases, writing or work samples and/or proof of English proficiency may be required.

Statement of purpose: Many graduate programs, specifically thesis-based programs, require a statement of purpose outlining the research work you are prepared to undertake. Alternatively, some schools prefer a general “personal statement.” In this case, tell the admissions committee something about yourself that your transcript can’t represent. Include meaningful personal experiences, goals, and achievements.

Letters of reference: Most graduate school admissions committees will require you to acquire and submit two or three letters of academic reference. Note that some programs require referees to complete specific forms. We recommend you prepare a packet for each person who agrees to be your referee. It should include your statement of purpose, directions for completing and submitting the reference, and an up-to-date academic resume or CV. Check with the school(s) to which you are applying to confirm that they have received a letter from each of your referees. Mistakes do happen.

About the academic life

If you’re smart and you like school, you may have been encouraged to become a “university teacher” at some point. While becoming an academic is potentially an extremely rewarding career, it’s definitely not for all people. Before you pursue this non-traditional career path, it’s important to understand what a university professorship actually entails. The general consensus is that the average university professor dedicates about 20 percent of his or her time to teaching activities. Most professors spend the vast majority of their time doing academic work – largely researching and writing. Being a professor is not terribly unlike being a graduate student indefinitely, albeit with gradually increasing levels of compensation, influence, and (hopefully) job security. While tenured and tenure-track professors are well compensated, by most standards, for their work, sessional (adjunct) professors often work under dramatically different circumstances. Do you know the difference? Also, professors are almost always required to relocate – often to other provinces or countries.

The University of Windsor Graduate and Professional Schools Fair

Held in October, this event is a great opportunity to explore your options and have meaningful conversations with representatives of graduate, certificate, and professional programs at UWindsor and elsewhere.

Further reading:

- A Guide for Potential Graduate Students (The Canadian Assoc. for Graduate Studies)
- Graduate programs at the University of Windsor

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