



Going to graduate school

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Discerning: should you go to grad school?



- ▶ Do you like applied work, and helping people?
- ▶ Do you like knowing you can get a job, where you want, within a few years?
- ▶ Do you need a masters (or other) degree to get that job?
- ▶ Will you want to be done with further schooling within 2 years?

A professional program makes sense

- ▶ Do you like school?
- ▶ Are you curious and self-directed?
- ▶ Do you like research and analysis? And teaching others your age?
- ▶ Would you like to be a professor (or professional researcher)?
- ▶ Are you okay with moving to wherever the job is located?
- ▶ Are you excited to complete 5-8 years of further schooling (typically MS + PhD)?

A PhD program makes sense

Can you get the job you want without the degree? Then go for it!

Professional programs:

- ▶ Criminal Justice
- ▶ Data Science/ Statistics
- ▶ Human Development
- ▶ Business
- ▶ International Relations/International Studies
- ▶ Law Schools
- ▶ Library and Information Science
- ▶ Public Health
- ▶ Public Policy and Administration
- ▶ Social Work



Professional programs: Keep in mind...

- ▶ In general, you are more likely to pay up front (through savings, work, or loans)
- ▶ In general, you are more likely to get a return on your investment (you make more money when you finish)
- ▶ Many jobs now require a Master's level degree

Professional programs



1. Application process:

- ▶ Deadlines often fall in February and March
- ▶ Application fees vary
- ▶ Graduate Record Exam (GRE) is often required
- ▶ 3 Letters of Recommendation
- ▶ Requirements vary—most require some form of writing samples, statement of purpose, financial aid forms, transcripts, and resume.
- ▶ Work experience is highly valued—obtain practical experience (though internships and volunteering)

Note: Adapted from Western Washington University: <https://chss.wvu.edu/sociology/phd-programs>

A PhD program: Steps to take

1. Initial Research
 - ▶ Online
 - ▶ [Graduate School Rankings \(U.S. News & World Report\)](#)
 - ▶ [Sociology Grad School Rankings](#)
 - ▶ Look for programs with substantive foci in your area
 - ▶ Read articles in Sociology. Who publishes the articles that you think are best?
2. Take the [Graduate Record Exam \(GRE\)](#)
 - ▶ Use study guides , test preparation courses, and tutors
 - ▶ Scores can be reported at up to 4 institutions
3. Get your resume in good shape
 - ▶ Focus on writing well, earning good grades, and developing relationships with professors
 - ▶ Try to get “real world” experience—research, volunteering, work
4. Decide when to apply
 - ▶ Many Ph.D. students take time off between undergrad and graduate schooling

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Applying to PhD programs

1. Choose and apply to your selected schools (often, between 4-10)
2. Application packets often require the following, by mid-December, for Fall admission:
 - ▶ Fees
 - ▶ 2 copies of Transcripts
 - ▶ Signed and dated application form
 - ▶ GRE Scores: verbal, quantitative, and analytical tests
 - ▶ Three letters of recommendation (including information evaluating past academic performance)
 - ▶ **Statement of Purpose:** describing applicants' relevant background, past work, proposed areas of study, plans for graduate work and overall career objectives.
 - ▶ Because this statement is used to evaluate applicants' scholarly potential, it should be well written, cogently argued, and well conceived.
 - ▶ Applicants should offer specific ideas for **potential research** topics in the statement
 - ▶ **Sample of written work** that provides evidence of creative and critical thinking, quality of writing, and potential for engaging in independent research
3. Reach out to professors

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If you're accepted

1. Talk to professors at the school—now you are being recruited!
 - ▶ Ask **questions** about mentorship, pay/benefits, Centers or strengths in your area of interest
2. Visit the school
 - ▶ Meet with/stay with students and ask them everything you can about life as a graduate student at the university
 - ▶ Talk with professors—any red flags? You will be working closely with them for years!
 - ▶ Collect information about housing costs, community life, challenges in the program, etc.

PhD programs: Paying the bills

1. For Ph.D. programs, you should be offered some form of financial support

- ▶ Teaching Assistant position = tuition remission + small monthly income (of \$1300-2000)
- ▶ Fellowships/ grants = \$18,000/year (sometimes including tuition remission)
- ▶ PLAN apply for grants when you are a graduate student
- ▶ Research assistant position = tuition remission + \$2000-\$3000 monthly income
- ▶ You can work another (non-academic) job—but *this will make it harder to complete your degree.*

2. **Don't take out loans for PhD programs**

Where to apply: Prestige matters

- ▶ For many fields, getting a job is only partially linked to how awesome you are...
 - ▶ Many applicants for one job.
 - ▶ Fastest way to stand out: go to a “good school”
 - ▶ Get your PhD (or MSW, JD, etc.) from a well-regarded school
 - ▶ What are top schools? Depends on the program!

Why to go to—or drop out of—graduate school

- ▶ Example 1: (Masters of Science in Sociology)
 - ▶ Was in a PhD program; decided to leave after obtaining her masters
 - ▶ Just hired at Facebook as a social scientist
 - ▶ *Cons: Worked for four years at a less appealing job in Indiana in the interim*
- ▶ Example 2: (Masters of Social Work, completing PhD)
 - ▶ Earned MSW (paid for out-of-pocket)
 - ▶ Desired to learn more about the bigger systemic issues
 - ▶ Started a PhD program
 - ▶ *Cons: Needed to commute to PhD program to balance family life*
- ▶ Example 3: (Masters in Education, starting PhD this fall)
 - ▶ School district paid for master's, leading to raise
 - ▶ 10 years into teaching elementary school, going back to get PhD
 - ▶ *Cons: Took four years to complete the masters degree, attending night classes*