

## Choosing to Go to Graduate School

The choice to pursue graduate school can be daunting, and that is even before you start an application! The following advice may help you think through the process and make it feel less formidable. Plan to visit Career Development to talk through the process; it makes it feel less lonely!

- Plan to apply to graduate school because you have a professional goal that requires a graduate degree.

Graduate school does not replace career counseling! You go to graduate school to become something (e.g., social worker, doctor, dentist, or academician). You do not go to graduate school because you do not know what else to do or you are struggling to find a job! Visit Career Development to start the career exploration process, if that is what you need.

- There are few financial resources to help you pay for graduate school; and it ain't cheap.

Graduate/professional school is expensive and time consuming. You will rarely have time for a part-time job to help finance it. Make sure you can handle the financial burdens. Grants, fellowships, and assistantships are competitive and limited, so make sure you are ready in your mind and wallet to go. Career Development can help you with applications.

When searching for programs to apply to, keep in mind the following:

- The "big name" schools are not always the best schools to apply to. The "best" program for your particular focus could be anywhere around the country and not necessarily found amongst the "ivy." It is also likely that there won't be a magic "top 10" list for your program (or the specific focus). Talk to your faculty advisor to help you identify the best program to meet your professional goals.
- Most graduate programs are found at big universities, but that does not mean the grad program is big. You are used to a small, close knit, and active faculty and that is what you will find in many grad programs, regardless of the size of the larger university.
- Ask yourself, who is writing the research articles and books and giving the presentations at conferences on the subject you want to study? Find out where those professors teach or where they received their degree; those may be good places to start.

- Geography is important but can be restrictive. In-state tuition is nice, but make sure the program offers what you need; otherwise, the "cheap" price may be expensive in the end.
- If the profession you are entering offers certification or accreditation of grad programs, make sure the program you want to attend provides it. Accredited programs often offer additional credentials or may be recognized by the state you want to practice in. Graduating from such programs may give you an advantage when applying for jobs.
- When in doubt about a program, contact the professors at the university. Writing a formal letter inquiring about the program, the focus, research, and experiences such as internships can help you gain insight. Many faculty are receptive to such contact. Keep the academic calendar in mind when you write—don't be surprised if you don't get a quick response.