

Deciding to return to school for a graduate degree is a significant choice. There are a variety of institutions and programs available that may potentially meet an individual's needs. No two schools will offer the same curriculum, although common bodies of knowledge may appear across differing programs. Determining if graduate school is a good fit and which school is the best choice, requires careful consideration of a number of factors.

Why go to graduate school?

There are two main reasons why an individual would choose to go to graduate school: professional enhancement or personal enrichment. For some individuals, graduate education provides the requisite knowledge and skills to advance in the chosen profession. Graduate education is pursued as a requirement for practice (such as medical school for a doctor) or as a means to make the individual more competitive in their chosen field. Others pursue graduate education as a way to enrich their personal knowledge and skills. In either case, the benefits achieved through the process are most significant when the individual clearly understands which motivation best reflects their circumstances.

Who is a good candidate for graduate school?

Schools consider a variety of factors when choosing candidates for their programs. Among the factors considered are prior academic record, performance on admissions exams, professional experience and recommendations. These all play a role in the final admission decision. A good candidate would show strength in most, if not all, areas considered.

How do I begin the process?

If an individual is just beginning to consider what options may exist for graduate study, there are a number of sources of information. Most programs provide details on their admission process, program overviews and specific academic requirements via a website. For those seeking additional details or assistance with specific questions, program advisors or admission counselors are available. These professionals will answer questions and help determine if there is an appropriate fit between the program and the candidate's goals.

Questions to ask myself

Do I want or need to continue working while attending graduate school?

How quickly do I want to complete my degree?

What skills or knowledge am I hoping to gain through graduate school?

What type of school culture is important to me?

What are my strengths and how would they best be enhanced by advanced study?

What are my weaknesses and would graduate study reduce them?

How would this decision impact my family?