



Grad School Chat

Presented by
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Why go to graduate school?

Values

- You value research, scholarship, and/or teaching
- You value skills and expertise

Goals

- Your future career requires an advanced degree (e.g., you want to be a clinical psychologist or teach at a college level).
- You would like to gain an advantage at the job market
- You want to make more money

Note: ideally, your goals should align with your values. Not knowing what you want to do with your life is NOT a good reason to go to grad school.



Will I make more \$ if I get an advanced degree?

- It depends! Generally, yes. But not always.
- Consider:
 - future career prospects
 - starting salary
 - debt you will take on
 - lost earnings while going to grad school
- Do follow your passion BUT also do your research about job market prospects vis-a-vis the expenses you will incur
- Rule of thumb: your debt should not exceed your starting salary. Ideally, it should be half that.



Questions you should consider

1. What are my long-term and short-term goals?
2. Is graduate school necessary to accomplish my goals?
3. How will graduate school affect my daily life and future?
4. Do I have the support and resources that I need?
5. Am I ready to commit to the rigor that graduate school requires?



MA or PhD?

- The two paths are quite different/distinct
- Your choice will depend on your values, career goals, personal situation, and resources



What can you do with an M.A. degree?

Examples of jobs you can get if you hold an M.A. degree in sociology:

- College lecturer
- Data analyst
- Evaluation researcher
- Graduate college liaison
- Grant writer/specialist/manager
- Market research analyst
- Policy analyst
- Project coordinator
- Research assistant/associate/specialist
- Research coordinator
- Statistician

What can you do with a PhD degree?

Academic vs. non-academic jobs

Academic route: Ph.D. degree enables you to do research and teaching at the college level.

Note: your pay, benefits, career prospects, and quality of life depend a lot on whether you are tenured/tenure-track faculty or contingent faculty. Only a relatively small (and decreasing) proportion of all instructors in higher education are tenured or on tenure-track.

Non-academic route: you may choose to work outside academia in governmental organizations, non-profit organizations or as an independent consultant/researcher. If you have a Ph.D., you are in a better place to have a senior researcher position.

Choosing a graduate program

1. Your goals
2. Geographic location
3. Cost/funding
4. Advisors and “fit”
5. Where to find this information

Choosing a program: Your goals

You career goals should determine which programs you apply to. If your future career requires:

- Research skills: find a program that prioritizes (and funds) research
- Teaching skills: find a program that provides teaching opportunities
- Application: find a program with connections to policy centers or industry



Choosing a program: Geographic location



Choosing a program: Cost/funding

- Masters programs often cost money, although financial aid and scholarships may be available
- PhD programs often pay *you*
 - How much?
 - How many years of funding do they offer?
 - What are the requirements for funding (e.g., being a teaching assistant or research assistant)?
 - Are there research, travel, computer, and other bonus funds?

Consider what you will need to be successful!



Choosing a program: Advisors and “fit”

Faculty will serve as “advisors” on your research. It’s important they have expertise in your areas of interest. Find a program that will support your research goals:

- Do faculty and students study what you study?
- Does the program support the topics and methods you’re interested in?



Choosing a program: Where to find this information

The program's website

- Go to the university's website < “Academics” or “Degrees and Programs” or “Graduate Programs”
- Check out:
 - Required courses: courses and workshops can give you a clue about what topics and methods the program supports
 - Faculty webpages: recent publications by faculty can give you a clue about what they study
 - Degree requirements: teaching/research assistant requirements indicate what experiences a program prioritizes
 - “Placement” of former PhD students: indicates what types of jobs graduates are competitive for

Choosing a program: Where to find this information

Carnegie classifications: <https://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/lookup/lookup.php>

University of California-Riverside

Riverside, California

Level	4-year or above	<input type="checkbox"/>
Control	Public	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student Population (Fall 2017)	23,279	

Classification	Category	
Basic	Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity	<input type="checkbox"/>

PhD programs,
very high
research activity

Only MA programs,
less emphasis on
research

California State University-San Bernardino

San Bernardino, California

Level	4-year or above	<input type="checkbox"/>
Control	Public	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student Population (Fall 2017)	20,692	

Classification	Category	
Basic	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	<input type="checkbox"/>

Choosing a program: Where to find this information

Ask current students! Find students with interests similar to yours via the program website and email them to ask (politely) about their experience with:

- Faculty advisors
- The funding package & cost of living
- The department's culture
- How long it takes to graduate

Books that summarize and rank programs

- The American Sociological Association has a Guide to Graduate Departments of Sociology
- US News & World Report

How to Apply: Application Expectations



How to Apply: Application Expectations

MA, MSW, and PhD Programs Usually Expect To See...

- Statement of Purpose (and/or Personal Statement)
- Transcripts/GPA
- Letters of Recommendation
- Fees

PhD Programs Also Expect...

- GRE Scores
 - +TOEFL
- Writing Sample
- Research Experience



How to Apply: Statement of Purpose & Personal Statement

- Most important (and most difficult) part of every graduate school application
- Tells the admissions committee *who you are* and *what you want to do*

Statement of Purpose:

- All about your WORK
- Research interests
- Topic you plan to study
- Career goals
- What you'll contribute

Personal Statement:

- All about YOU
- Tell your story
- Describe your academic background in relation to your goals, achievements, and challenges
- Showcase experiences related to diversity

- Some programs will ask for both documents (UCLA Sociology)
- Some will ask for one document that does the work of both (USC sociology)

How to Apply: Statement of Purpose & Personal Statement

- The admissions committee is looking for:
 - Well-conceived research interests
 - Past research accomplishments
 - Fit with program
 - Intellectual biography



How to Apply: Statement of Purpose & Personal Statement

4 “Kisses of Death” to avoid in a personal Statement:

1. Personal Mental Health
2. Excessive altruism
3. Excessive self-disclosure
4. Professionally inappropriate



“Graduate school is an academic/career path, not a personal treatment or intervention for problems.”

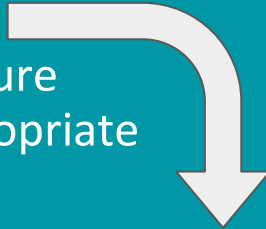


*Source: Appleby & Appleby (2006), “Kisses of Death in the Graduate School Application Process”

How to Apply: Statement of Purpose & Personal Statement

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“A personal statement should focus on the student’s professional activities such as research interests and pursuits, academic strengths, and professional experiences rather than on purely personal characteristics and motives.”



*Source: Appleby & Appleby (2006), “Kisses of Death in the Graduate School Application Process”

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TIP: Academic writing prefers **concision and clarity** above prose and entertainment.

Don't give “a long saga about how [you] the student had finished [school] over incredible odds” (if written in an unprofessional manner).



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Avoid “professionally unsuitable content include using excessive or inappropriate humor, ‘cutesy/clever stuff,’ and excessively religious references.”



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How to Apply: Transcripts/GPA

- Some PhD programs require a minimum GPA of 3.0
- Address any gaps or shortcomings from your transcript on your Personal Statement
 - OR ask recommenders to address it in their letters



How to Apply: Letters of Recommendation

- 3 letters are typical
- Committees like to see letters from tenured (or tenure-track) faculty in the field you're applying to (or close) who know you well.
 - Make sure the faculty member is prepared to give you a *positive* letter of recommendation
- Ask early and be organized!



How to Apply: Fees

- Each application you submit will usually involve an application fee
 - USC: \$90
 - UCLA: \$120
- Fee waivers are usually available for qualifying applicants
 - Apply early!



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How to Apply: GRE/TOEFL

- GRE:
 - Standardized test for graduate admissions
 - Scores sometimes used for first round of cuts
 - 75th percentile is considered “good”
 - 90th percentile is “excellent”
- TOEFL
 - Test of English as a Foreign Language
 - Not required if you’ve been attending college in the US
 - Optional if your GRE Verbal score is poor

TIP: Use the GRE-provided practice tests to study and simulate the actual test conditions as best you can.



How to Apply: Writing Sample

- Showcases your ability to write an academic paper
- Can be a course paper or honors thesis
- Original data analysis is preferred



How to Apply: Research Experience

- Part of the “hidden curriculum” of applying to graduate school
- Expected to have at least some experience doing sociological research
- Look for research opportunities on campus
 - Check job board
 - Ask your favorite professors
- Showcase your research experience in Statement of Purpose



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You got this!

