

How to Select, Apply to and Prepare for Graduate School

{ Southern CA Forum for Diversity in Graduate
Education – Cal Poly Pomona

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Introductions

Number of degrees conferred to U.S. residents by degree-granting institutions, percentage distribution of degrees conferred, and percentage of degrees conferred to females, by level of degree and race/ethnicity: Academic years 1999–2000 and 2009–10

Level of degree and race/ethnicity	Number		Percentage distribution		Percent conferred to females	
	1999–2000	2009–10	1999–2000	2009–10	1999–2000	2009–10
⊗ Bachelor's	1,198,809	1,602,480	100.0	100.0	57.5	57.4
⊗ White	929,106	1,167,499	77.5	72.9	56.6	56.0
⊗ Black	108,013	164,844	9.0	10.3	65.7	65.9
⊗ Hispanic	75,059	140,316	6.3	8.8	59.6	60.7
⊗ Asian/Pacific Islander	77,912	117,422	6.5	7.3	54.0	54.5
⊗ American Indian/Alaska Native	8,719	12,399	0.7	0.8	60.3	60.7
⊗ Master's	406,761	611,693	100.0	100.0	60.0	62.6
⊗ White	324,981	445,038	79.9	72.8	59.6	61.8
⊗ Black	36,595	76,458	9.0	12.5	68.2	71.1
⊗ Hispanic	19,384	43,535	4.8	7.1	60.1	64.3
⊗ Asian/Pacific Islander	23,538	42,072	5.8	7.0	52.0	54.3
⊗ American Indian/Alaska Native	2,263	3,960	0.6	0.6	62.7	64.3
⊗ Doctor's¹	106,494	140,505	100.0	100.0	47.0	53.3
⊗ White	82,984	104,426	77.9	74.3	45.4	51.4
⊗ Black	7,080	10,417	6.6	7.4	61.0	65.2
⊗ Hispanic	5,039	8,085	4.7	5.8	48.4	55.0
⊗ Asian/Pacific Islander	10,684	16,625	10.0	11.8	48.8	56.5
⊗ American Indian/Alaska Native	707	952	0.7	0.7	52.9	54.8

¹ Includes Ph.D., Ed.D., and comparable degrees at the doctoral level. Includes most degrees formerly classified as first-professional, such as M.D., D.D.S., and law degrees.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2012).

The Condition of Education 2012 (NCES 2012-045),

- ⌘ Personal/Intellectual Gratification
- ⌘ Requirement for the Profession or Promotion within the Organization
- ⌘ Enhanced Skill and Training
- ⌘ Increased Earning Capacity
- ⌘ Greater Career Opportunities

Why Graduate School?

- ⌘ Increase your GPA
- ⌘ Strengthen your study habits; written and oral communication skills; research and time management skills
- ⌘ **Build relationships with faculty and staff mentors**
- ⌘ **Be strategic in your leadership, service, internship, volunteer, and study abroad experiences**
- ⌘ Participate in research and other scholarly work with professors
- ⌘ Research graduate and professional programs
- ⌘ Explore your career interest(s)

How to Prepare?

- ⌘ Present at conferences, symposia, and other forums
- ⌘ Join honor societies in your department (s)
- ⌘ Read about professional organizations associated with your intended career
- ⌘ Attend graduate and professional school fairs, and program information sessions
- ⌘ Manage loan and other debt
- ⌘ Speak to professors, current graduate students, and program alumni
- ⌘ Take practice entrance exams whenever possible/offered

Cont. – How to Prepare?

- ⌘ What is graduate school and what you want to study at graduate school?
- ⌘ How is graduate school different from college?
- ⌘ Why you want to study it?
- ⌘ What kind of experience you have in your field?
- ⌘ What do you plan to do with your degree once you have it?
- ⌘ Why should I go to graduate school?
- ⌘ Should I complete a master's degree first?
- ⌘ Should I work first?
- ⌘ What can I do to prepare for graduate school?

Ask yourself ...

Factors to consider when selecting graduate programs: (Do your research)

- ⌘ Philosophy of the program or institution
- ⌘ Curriculum requirements
- ⌘ Strength and accessibility of faculty (publishing record, faculty research work, etc)
- ⌘ Availability and quality of research, library, or other facilities
- ⌘ Tuition and availability of financial assistance
- ⌘ Sufficient library, laboratories, research infrastructure
- ⌘ Student retention and attrition rates

Keep It Real ...

- ⌘ Average degree completion rates
- ⌘ Job placement rate and assistance
- ⌘ Flexibility of classes (i.e., day vs. night, focus on graduate vs. undergraduate students)
- ⌘ Demographics of the student body
- ⌘ Reputation of the program/faculty/institution
- ⌘ Accreditation
- ⌘ Geographic Location/Size
- ⌘ Housing, transportation to school

Cont. Keep It Real

Studies indicate that graduate students who receive effective mentoring demonstrate greater productivity in research activity, conference presentations, pre-doctoral publications, instructional development and grant writing

- ⌘ academic success in persisting in graduate school, achieving shorter time to degree and performing better in academic coursework
- ⌘ professional success with greater chances of securing a tenure-track position if seeking employment in academe, or greater career advancement potential if seeking leadership positions in administration or sectors outside the University.

Mentoring

- ‡ acquire a body of knowledge and skills
- ‡ learn techniques for collaborating and networking
- ‡ gain perspective on how a discipline operates academically, socially, and politically
- ‡ develop a sense of scholarly citizenship by grasping their role in a larger educational enterprise
- ‡ deal more confidently with the challenges of intellectual work.

Benefits of Mentoring

- ⌘ You should apply to 3-8 schools
- ⌘ Find online application materials and email the department materials and email the department staff with any logistical questions about deadlines, application materials, appropriateness of visiting/contacting faculty, etc.
- ⌘ Research faculty and contact them (where appropriate). Inquire about compatibility of your interest and the research they are currently conducting
- ⌘ Inform them you are interested in applying to their program
- ⌘ Contact students in the program, learn from their own experiences/satisfaction

Graduate Application 101

- ⌘ Grab the spotlight by highlighting your passion
- ⌘ Must be personal and personalized
- ⌘ No “one-size fits all” - Show instead of tell.
- ⌘ Perfect grammar and punctuation. Eliminate typos, misspellings or other inaccuracies.
- ⌘ Seek feedback.
- ⌘ Particularly for a specific graduate program- mention faculty by name
- ⌘ Provides a succinct account of research experience(s) to date with your specific role and accomplishments
- ⌘ Explains your interests in graduate school and beyond
- ⌘ Social Media

Statement of Purpose

- ⌘ Should be confidential
- ⌘ Should come primarily from researchers, if possible
- ⌘ Even better if they come from faculty at your school of interest
- ⌘ Should come from faculty rather than graduate students, post-docs or technicians
- ⌘ Should not come from relatives or personal/family friends
- ⌘ Should be specific for graduate school applications
- ⌘ If you are also applying to medical school, ask your recommenders to write separate letters

Letters of Recommendation

&GRE, General and Subject

&LSAT, MCAT, PCAT, GMAT, etc.

Standardized Tests

- ⌘ Research experience and financial survival are not mutually exclusive
- ⌘ Plan ahead- many professional societies offer funding
- ⌘ School-year experiences
- ⌘ Quality vs. quantity
- ⌘ If possible, seek authorships

Research Experience

& CV or Resumé

& Writing Samples

& Poster Presentations

& Publications

& Cover letter/bio

Other documents

- ⌘ Decentralized among campuses, like the UC System. You apply to each campus separately.
- ⌘ Decentralized among departments, your application must specify an academic department
- ⌘ Role of the Department vs. Graduate Division. Departments make “decisions” and Graduate Divisions handle administrative details

The Admissions Committee

- ⌘ Evidence of intellect, creativity, direction, tenacity
- ⌘ Research experience
- ⌘ Interest in their graduate program
- ⌘ Should be a good fit on both sides
- ⌘ Interest in graduate school rather than professional (i.e. medical) school

Admissions Review Committee

- ⌘ August: Online application opens
- ⌘ December: Many department deadlines close: each department has its own deadline, ranging from December 1 to May 1
- ⌘ January: Departmental nominations for central fellowships begin
- ⌘ January-February: Admissions notification begins for some departments
- ⌘ March: Admissions processing and notification continues
- ⌘ April 15: Deadline for student response to admissions offers

General Admissions Timeline

- ⌘ Obtain research experience
- ⌘ Write a compelling personal statement
- ⌘ Secure a strong set of letters of recommendation
- ⌘ Apply for independent fellowships
- ⌘ Maintain solid grades and GRE scores
- ⌘ Explain any gaps
- ⌘ Remember grades are not the primary consideration and are not a great predictor of success in graduate school

Convince them you are the One

Q & A