Graduate programs can be divided into three kinds: professional programs, like law or medical school; master's programs; and Ph.D. programs. Making a good decision about whether or not to go to graduate school requires the same kind of process that applies to other career decisions. As a potential grad student, you need to understand your interests and aptitudes; you need to gather information about schools and programs; and you need to be clear about your goals and the best ways to achieve them. You may want to explore questions in this flyer on your own, with faculty and with Advising & Career Services (ACS) staff.

Graduate school is expensive. Entering doesn’t guarantee finishing, and finishing doesn’t guarantee a job. For example, master’s degrees in some areas do not guarantee a higher salary than a bachelor’s degree. For those considering a Ph.D., it is important to know that most programs take 6 to 8 years to complete.

Questions to ask about schools and programs:
- Which schools offer the program(s) you’re considering?
- What are the different kinds of programs in your field, and which will most benefit your goals?
- What are the requirements and deadlines?
- How long does it take to complete the program?
- How many students finish?
- How many get jobs?
- How is graduate school different from college?
- What will the program cost? How will you pay for it?

Ask yourself:
- Why do you want to go to graduate school?
- What do you want to study?
- How good of a student are you?
- Do you enjoy research and working independently?
- Do you love school? Too much?
- Do you need a break from school?
- Are you considering pursuing graduate education for its own sake?
- How will a graduate degree add to your career direction?
- What other options have you considered?

Information in books and on the internet should be supplemented by informational interviews with faculty and advisers in the field you’re considering, both at PSU and at the graduate schools that interest you. Find out about placement rates and completion rates at schools you are considering, as well as about facilities, financial support, quality and reputation.
Goals:

- What is your career plan? What are your long-term and short-term goals?
- What do you want to get out of graduate school?
- Is a graduate degree a requirement in the career you’ve chosen?
- What are the pros and cons of gaining work experience first?
- What would be the benefit of not going to graduate school or postponing it?

Graduate school is a means to an end. Define that end before pursuing further education. There is no harm in waiting a few years after graduation before applying to graduate school; in fact some programs require it. Gaining relevant professional level experience may enhance your graduate school application. Work experience may also increase your knowledge of yourself, bolster your confidence and improve your work habits. Faculty, advisers, and staff at Advising & Career Services can help you to get the work experience related to your field of interest.

Reconsider going to graduate school if your reasons include any of the following:

- You’re not ready for employment.
- You don’t have a better idea.
- Any decision is better than no decision.
- All your friends (family) are going (went) to grad school.
- Any graduate degree will lead to a better job.
- You believe the myth that a bachelor’s degree isn’t enough.

Continue exploring graduate school if you:

- Need the degree to practice your chosen profession.
- Need a (specific) graduate degree to advance your current career.
- Want to enrich yourself intellectually and understand the time, cost and effort involved.
- Desire to immerse yourself in the study of a particular discipline. purely for the love of it.

Your professors
Mentors
ACS Staff
Current Graduate Students

Can all provide valuable insights about pursuing graduate school. Ask them if they recommend a certain program to you and the reasons behind the recommendations.