



## Introduction

### (or Grad Schools and How They Get That Way)

If you are thinking about going to graduate school but aren't sure where to begin, if you think the cost is too prohibitive and you just can't afford it, or if you just have no idea what to study or what degree you should aim for, relax. I'm going to let you in on some open (and some not so open) secrets about how to get into graduate school—and get it paid for—including what to say and what *not* to say in the essay, how to get one or more faculty members to fight for your admission in the faculty meetings, how and where to find funding and employment in the university that will cover your tuition and living expenses, and how to work around the handicaps you fear might keep you from getting in—such as a low GPA, few references, or mediocre test scores.

I know. I've been there—as a grad student and a professor. When I made up my mind to go to grad school, I had everything working against me. I had a 2.7 GPA from a school I'd only attended for a year. Prior to that, I'd been jumping around the country from community colleges to state colleges for so long that by the time I finally did graduate, no one even knew me. Then I spent years jumping from job to job so that by the time I decided to go to grad school, I was thirty years old, which is to say, old meat.

To make matters worse, I was flat broke and didn't have any idea how to even apply to a grad school, much less what one really was. All I knew was that I wanted a Ph.D., and I wanted it in a field I had only ever taken one class in—and had earned a C minus. But not only did I get into grad school—and get it paid for—but by the time I graduated with that Ph.D. I had received over \$100,000 in grants

and fellowships, including a Fulbright award and a hefty grant from the National Science Foundation—even though I'd never scored above a C in any science class I'd ever taken.

I spent the next decade as a university professor where I taught graduate students. I evaluated grad school applications, sat in department meetings debating who to admit and who to reject and whose education we should pay for, taught graduate seminars, supervised graduate assistants, advised graduate students, supervised theses and dissertations, and helped students finishing their degrees get into other graduate programs where they could get more degrees. By the time I'd decided that the Ivory Towers were not where I wanted to spend my life, or they decided to hurl me out of the Towers for my uppity attitude, whichever story works, I knew the good, the bad and the ugly about not only the admissions process, but the whole charade of how to survive and succeed in graduate school and how and when to get out with the best chance of a decent job.

During my ten year career as a professor, I taught and mentored thousands of students, students who have gone on to careers as physicians, attorneys, government agents, authors, professors and no doubt more than a few prostitutes, drug dealers and thieves. And if there is anything I've learned from the time I decided I wanted to get into grad school to the time I got out altogether, it was this: it is not all that important how intelligent you are or how hard you work. Those things don't hurt, but *the real key to succeeding in grad school is knowing the rules of the game*. So I'm going to let you in on a few secrets about what it really takes to get into grad school, and you'll be surprised how easy it really is—and how easy it is for even the best student to get rejected, for no better reason than they didn't know the rules or what goes on inside those faculty meetings.

The first thing you need to understand before you even get started is exactly what a grad school is. A graduate school may mean to you a place to get an education and advance your career. That is all well and good, but to succeed, understand that from the perspective of those on the inside, a graduate school or program provides prestige to a university and ups their ranking, which in turn brings more donor money, more research grants, more students (and their tuition) and a bigger piece of the educational budgetary pie. It provides professors a pool of low-waged workers to teach their classes for them, grade their papers, do their research, write their peer-reviewed papers, and most importantly, feed their egos.

Some graduate schools actually teach useful skills, such as medical schools, law schools, even business administration programs. But even in these clinical or “applied” programs, the role of the graduate student is not so much to learn as it is to be enculturated into a specific professional culture where success depends upon social networks, communication skills and useful products—which is to say, papers, books, inventions, anything that can be commodified to promote someone else's profession. The more a graduate student succeeds in promoting the professions of those above him or her, the more beloved they will be by their professors and the department. Exploited, absolutely, but beloved—and hence *supported*—absolutely.

Now, before you write me off as overly cynical, let me be clear. There are as many good reasons to get a graduate degree as there are reasons not to. Getting a graduate degree over the course

of a decade to enter a job market in massive debt where there are one hundred to four hundred applicants for every position and almost always requires relocating to another part of the country or the planet to be paid less than a dental assistant is not a good reason to get a graduate degree.

Gaining a better knowledge of one's profession and the credentials to be more competitive on the job market and/or get promoted, learning how to conduct research, think critically and write under pressure and in a manner which people will take seriously, or just delaying repaying the student loans (while not incurring any new ones) when you're unemployed and having an income in the meantime, are all good reasons to go to grad school—provided you get out quickly and *with the most useful degree* to help you achieve your professional dreams.

So, first thing, let's understand the different types of colleges and universities. (If you already know some of this stuff, bear with me; too many people simply don't.) Private schools are owned and controlled by private money—which means, rich people. They don't have to follow the same rules as the public schools, and that can help or hurt you depending on your situation (and if you play it right, you don't need to be rich to get in). Examples of private schools are liberal arts colleges which tend to have four-year terminal degrees, but often have graduate programs, usually at the Master's level.

Public colleges or universities receive funding from the state, so they are more controlled by certain rules. Whereas a private college can require that you swear to uphold a specific set of religious principles, for example, a public university cannot do that. But both private and public schools can set rules of admission, which may include a certain GPA, a certain GRE (Graduate Record Exam) score, and any other set of requirements. But the good news is, because they all want money, these rules are usually far more flexible than you might believe, particularly if you have a wealthy relative who is happy to donate lots of money. But most likely, you don't have such a relative—if you did, you'd probably already know the unwritten rules of getting into grad school.

Among public colleges, there are two main types: research institutes and teaching institutes. Almost all universities fancy themselves as research institutes, which means their primary purpose is to support the research of the faculty, obtain prestigious grant money, and produce notable scholarship, patents, and awards. If the school name begins with “University of” it is likely a research university. The same is true of any university ending in “State University.” Almost always, the “University of” is considered superior to the “State University” (even though both are technically “state universities”) but that does not mean that the reputation is deserved.

Within each university, the prestige and value of each department varies, so don't worry at this point about which type you should be aiming for. We'll get to that in a moment. For now, just understand that *a research institute wants and needs graduate students* to teach the undergrads, help the faculty do their research and get published, and maintain their department's prestige. The down-side is they have lots of graduate students, all competing for the same professors' attentions and the same graduate assistantships, and none of them are getting enough money or attention. But almost all of them are being overworked.

A teaching institute is a private college or university, or a state college or university (usually regional), that considers its primary mission to educate students. In these universities, there may well be graduate programs, and *these programs may be desperate for students, but the faculty will teach most of the undergraduate classes* and there won't be a big focus on faculty doing research and publishing. Faculty at teaching institutions will have heavy teaching loads and be under pressure to maintain excellent teaching reviews. Because faculty like graduate students to help them with their work, and because graduate students tend to look up to, if not sleep with, their professors, many faculty at teaching institutes will fight tooth and nail for devoted graduate students. *They may be less likely to have any pots of money to pay these students, but they may be warm and welcoming to those they do have* (and that means they still may find some money to support their favored grad students).

Within each school, there are different organizational levels that you will become familiar with. There is the Registrar's Office, which you probably remember from undergrad days. The Registrar's Office is in charge of your grades and degrees. You will need to contact the Registrar's Office of each school you went to as an undergrad, and have them send copies of your official transcripts to the schools you apply to. You can usually do that on-line, but we're getting ahead of ourselves here.

There is also the Admission's Office, which becomes less important in graduate school than it was in undergrad. *What is important in grad school is the Graduate School.* Each university will have a specific "Graduate School" which you can find on the university's website, and the Graduate School will list the requirements and procedures for admission—and for graduation. It will also often list valuable information about grants, funding opportunities, and even directions the grad school is going—which as I'll show you, can help you score some valuable points when you get to the letter of admission. (Graduate Schools also often fund graduate students directly, as I will explain.)

Keep in mind that for whatever school you decide to apply to, there will be the university's admission requirements, the graduate school's admission requirements, the department's admission requirements, and sometimes even a specific program within the department will have a different set of requirements. You will need to determine what each requires, and they usually always come down to these two criteria: Your GPA (undergraduate Grade Point Average); and your GRE (Graduate Record Exam) or other graduate exam scores (such as MCAT, Medical College Admissions Test, or LSAT, Law School Admissions).

In addition to these quantitative criteria, there are many unwritten, subjective qualities that the faculty look for and evaluate when deciding who to admit and who to reject, and figuring those out can make the difference between admission and rejection, no matter what your academic background.

Most schools require that applications—including GRE or other test scores—be submitted by December or January preceding Fall admission. This means that *it will take about one year from the time you get started on the application process, to the time you are admitted.* If you aren't sure what you will be doing in another year, but think you might want to go to graduate school, get started and get the application in. It doesn't mean you have to go if you are accepted, but it creates another opportunity for you if you are.

The Graduate Record Exam is required by most, but not all, schools (or the LSAT or MCAT or whatever entrance exam is required for your discipline). The GRE's are offered throughout the year and can be taken every thirty days for up to five times in a given year. Moreover, they are good for five years, so even if you decide not to go to graduate school the following year, they are still relevant for another five years. The GRE's test verbal, quantitative and analytical ability, and you are scored in each area separately. In some cases, there are separate subject areas that your discipline might require you test in, such as Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology; Chemistry; Physics; Biology; Psychology; Mathematics; and English Literature. The subject tests are currently offered in September, October and April, so if you want to apply in one of these disciplines, keep these dates in mind.

If you do well on the GRE's, it can go far in offsetting a lousy GPA, and if you do well in both areas, outstanding! But if you blow it on the GRE's? Don't despair; some schools don't even require them. I'll say a bit more on that topic in further on, but for now, let's get started on getting you into grad school.

I hope you enjoyed this sample chapter and if you do, you can buy a copy at:

[https://www.amazon.com/How-Get-Into-Grad-School/dp/0692730303/ref=tmm\\_pap\\_swatch\\_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1493993479&sr=1-3](https://www.amazon.com/How-Get-Into-Grad-School/dp/0692730303/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1493993479&sr=1-3)

Until then, good luck on your academic journey!

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