THE GRADUATE SCHOOL PROCESS

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UNDERSTANDING THE GRADUATE SCHOOL PROCESS

Navigating (to) graduate school can be challenging. Much of the success in this process lies behind a wall. Over this wall, one finds the “Hidden Curriculum of Academia” containing information such as how to contact faculty members for research positions. In this infographic, we will demystify one aspect of this curriculum: how to get to graduate school in biology/ecology/environmental science (broadly). Here, we will give an overview of graduate school, questions to ask if you are considering graduate school, and career paths you could consider given the degree you choose.

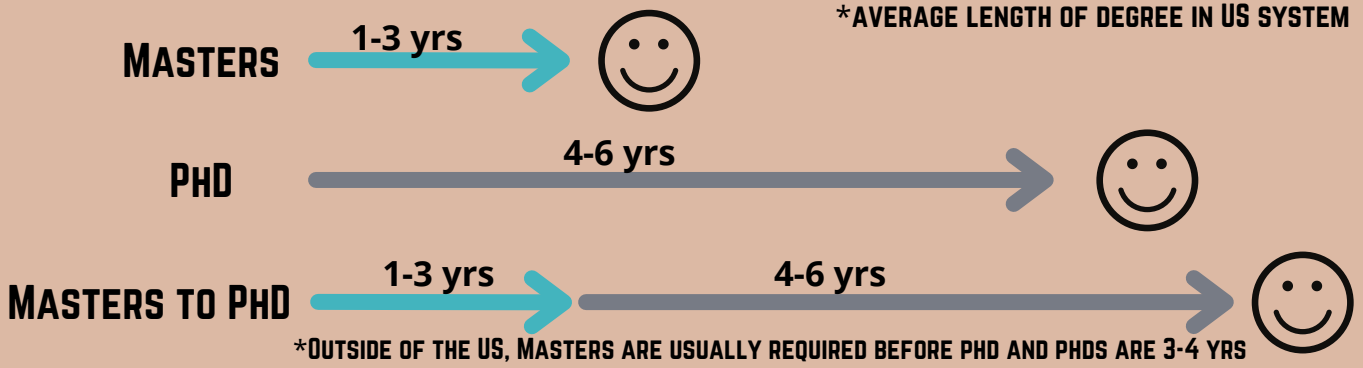
Note: This article is not meant to be a guiding document for developing your graduate school application. Please contact your mentor/advisor or our resources for how to build your application

WHAT IS GRADUATE SCHOOL?

1. RESEARCH THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PHD AND A MASTERS PROGRAM. WHAT FITS YOUR NEEDS?

There is a lot of variation in degree programs and no one size fits all! For some careers a Master's degree is the most appropriate training. For others a PhD is necessary and/or helpful. Depending on your undergradate training and your field, many students opt to complete a masters prior to a phd. Chat with people who have positions you could see yourself in - hear what trajectories they took!

*AVERAGE LENGTH OF DEGREE IN US SYSTEM



*OUTSIDE OF THE US, MASTERS ARE USUALLY REQUIRED BEFORE PHD AND PHDS ARE 3-4 YRS

2. WHEN IS AN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE ENOUGH? DO I NEED A HIGHER LEVEL DEGREE FOR THE FIELD I WANT TO BE IN?

Graduate school is not a requirement for a fulfilling career!

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION

GRADUATE SCHOOL FOCUSES MORE ON RESEARCH THAN CLASSES, PARTICULARLY IN PHD PROGRAMS. BEFORE APPLYING BE SURE TO CONSIDER:

WHAT AREAS OF RESEARCH WILL INTEREST YOU FOR 5 YEARS?

STRUCTURE OF A RESEARCH LAB:

PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR (PI)	POSTDOC	GRADUATE STUDENTS	LAB TECHNICIANS & LAB MANAGERS

SHOULD I APPLY?

1. Why do you want to go to grad school?

- Is the time worth it for the career goal you have in mind?
- What kind of life/work environment are you looking for? Work environment can vary by advisor and institution

2. MS vs PhD

- No single answer is the best answer & no one is the "better" choice!
- What is your career goal and which degree do you need to get there?
- Note: some programs offer the opportunity to transition from an MS into a PhD

3. Do I enjoy conducting research?

- A pillar to the experience of graduate school is reading and writing. From reading, you formulate questions that are meant to expand your respective field
- Reflect on if you enjoy/appreciate questioning existing processes or ways of thinking in your field

HOW DO I APPLY?

1. Find a lab

- The first step is to find a faculty member whose research is interesting to you via authors of papers you enjoyed reading, Twitter, and job boards
- Google these faculty members to find out more about them and visit their personal website if they have one

2. Contact potential advisors

- Send an email to the faculty member you are interested in working with - tell them about your research interests and background, why you are interested in their lab, and ask if they are taking new students
- Schedule a meeting to talk with them on the phone or via zoom to see if your interests and styles align

3. Apply

- In general, the grad school application consists of a personal/diversity statement, research statement, CV/resume, and letters of recommendation
- In your statements, highlight your personal story - what unique experiences have you had that has led you to apply for grad school

4. Interview

- In the spring, graduate programs will often invite potential students for an interview
- This is when you are interviewed and learn more about the faculty member, lab, and department
- Be prepared to ask questions to graduate students about: mentoring style, funding, lab culture, and collaborations within the department and university

DIFFERENT CAREER PATHS

NONPROFIT

LECTURER

DATA ANALYST

RESEARCHER

PROFESSOR

FIELD STATION MANAGER

SCIENCE EDUCATION DIRECTOR

LAB MANAGER

RESOURCES

1. National Science Foundation
Research experiences for undergraduates

2. General resources:
(1) Open academics (2) being an undergraduate
(3) academic secret menu

3. Job boards:
texas a&m, conservation, ornithology, herpetology

4. how to cold email a professor

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