

# FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN EXPLORING GRADUATE SCHOOL

*Below is an overview of five factors to keep in mind when considering applying to graduate school. For each factor, there are important questions for you to keep in mind when making this decision, as well as suggested action steps and resources to help you begin to answer these questions.*

## 1

### Program Specifics

- How long is the program?
- Are you interested in a program which focuses more on theoretical foundations or on practical applications?
- What coursework is offered through the program?
  - To what extent is the curriculum predetermined?
  - Do graduate students have the opportunity to select specific courses that are of interest to them?
  - What makes the curriculum in one program unique from other programs?
- What degree(s) are offered by the university?
  - Do these align with your professional aspirations and requirements within your industry?
- Are there additional certificates, concentrations, or foci within the program that students can pursue to specialize within their program?
- If applicable to your industry, does the program have the necessary accreditation(s)?
- Are the program's available applied opportunities (e.g., internship, practicum, clinical, etc.) a good match for your aspirations?
- If you are seeking licensure or certification in your field, will the program prepare you to be eligible?
- Is this program a match with your professional interests and goals?
- What are the application requirements and program prerequisites?

## 2

### Research & Faculty

- How research-oriented or research-focused is the program? Are graduate students expected to contribute to research or is it an optional component of the program?
- What research is currently being conducted in this program?
- What supports does the program provide for graduate students in pursuing professional activities, such as publications, presentations, and conferences?
- Are current faculty members active in the field (i.e., publishing in journals in which you would like to be published, attending conferences, and presenting their findings)?
- Do you feel you match or "fit" well with a current faculty member and their research interests?
  - Do any of the faculty members specialize in your niche area of interest?

## 3

### Finances

- Are you eligible to take a loan or to receive financial aid?
- Does the program offer opportunities for financial assistance, including stipends, fellowships, assistantships, and/or scholarships?
  - Assistantships are opportunities to teach, support research, or work a set number of hours, which may be paid and/or reduce the cost of your tuition.
- Would you be able to work part- or full-time while enrolled in your program (consider program commitments, etc.)?
- Would you need to take out loans to finance your graduate degree? Do you have any existing loans?

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## 4

### Logistics

- Do you have a preference for a specific geographical location?
- Do you prefer an urban, rural, or suburban setting?
- Do you prefer to attend an in-person or online (virtual)?
- Is the degree you are pursuing offered as an online program? Would this be appropriate for you, if you need or prefer to attend remotely?
- Does the university offer on-campus housing, or will you be looking for housing off-campus?
- When do you plan to go to graduate school?
  - Do you plan to pursue graduate school immediately upon completing your current degree, or to apply after having acquired work or other related experience?
  - What other types of opportunities (e.g., full-time work, travel, volunteer, or post-graduation internships) might you consider before going to graduate school?

## 5

### Program Culture & Atmosphere

- Does the institution offer student activities for graduate students?
- What resources are available to support graduate students in this program?
- What kind of academic culture does the program have (e.g., competitive, cooperative, etc.)?
- What is the social culture in this program or at this institution?
- What has the school or department done to create an inclusive environment for diverse populations of students?
- Is the program and/or institution a match for your personal values?

## 6

### Suggested Action Steps

- Perform an initial search for general program information.
  - Conduct research using search engines (see suggestions in Resources) to identify potential programs of interest.
  - Consider the program's reputation amongst employers, rankings and accreditations, and employment rates for graduates in documents called "Student Admission, Outcomes, and Other Data," found on program websites.
- Seek additional information about program specifics.
  - Review course catalogs on program websites to find out more about specifics of the curriculum.
  - Speak with faculty to learn more about the classes you will take throughout the program.
  - Search using online databases for recent research published in an academic journal in your field, specifically on your topic(s) of interest. See whether any papers have been published by a faculty member at a program you like.
  - Review faculty biographies and/or lab websites to get a sense of what topics are being researched in the program.
- Take the following steps to explore financial aspects of your decision.
  - Create a budget to determine what you can afford (including tuition, fees, materials, transportation, etc.).
  - Do your research about the tuition cost and available financial aid for each school you are considering.
  - Compare cost of attendance for each program, taking into consideration the availability of funding opportunities.
  - Consider that some companies may offer education benefits, such as tuition assistance, to employees.
- Identify logistical factors that may affect your decision.
  - Consider what would be involved in the relocation/moving process.
  - Take into account both physical and cultural environments.
  - Be aware that program length, and thus how long you will be living there, may also impact your choice.
  - If possible, you may want to visit the campus to see how comfortable you feel in the city or town.
  - If you are thinking about delaying graduate school, consider obtaining faculty and/or staff recommendations before completing your current degree and staying in touch with them until you are ready to apply.

### Resources

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| CCD Resources    | <a href="https://career.uconn.edu/grad-school-prep/">How to Navigate the Graduate School Application Timeline</a><br><a href="https://career.uconn.edu/grad-school-prep/">https://career.uconn.edu/grad-school-prep/</a>   |
| Search Engines   | <a href="http://petersons.com">petersons.com</a><br><a href="http://gradtrek.com">gradtrek.com</a><br><a href="http://usnews.com">usnews.com</a>   |
| Networking       | <a href="http://linkedin.com">linkedin.com</a><br><a href="https://career.uconn.edu/resources/husky-mentor-network/">https://career.uconn.edu/resources/husky-mentor-network/</a>  |
| Test Preparation | <a href="https://kaplan.com/individuals/prepare-for-an-exam/#graduate-admissions">https://kaplan.com/individuals/prepare-for-an-exam/#graduate-admissions</a><br><a href="https://www.princetonreview.com/grad-school">https://www.princetonreview.com/grad-school</a> |
| Financial Aid    | <a href="http://studentaid.ed.gov">studentaid.ed.gov</a>   |