Why go to graduate school?

An undergraduate degree provides a very broad educational background. Graduate school, on the other hand, allows one to specialize in a specific area. Many professions (doctor, social worker, psychologist, professor) require an advanced degree. Although some jobs may not actually require an advanced degree, employers may prefer to hire individuals with education beyond a bachelor's degree. Some people choose to go to graduate school simply because they are passionate about a certain field of study and are eager to learn more. Typically, graduate school is not a good place to figure out what you want to do with your life. Have a clear idea of your career goals and what kind of educational background is needed to enter the profession. For some professions, the master's is the most common degree offered and the degree needed for entering the field (such as Master of Public Health and Master of Fine Arts). Other fields, such as medicine, require a doctorate degree. Talk with professionals who are working in a career you would like to pursue. They will be able to tell you what it is like to work in the field, and may also be able to advise you about graduate programs.

Where can I find additional information on graduate school?

For BYU Graduate Programs:
Graduate Studies Office
B-356 ASB, 422-4091
**What is Graduate School?**

Graduate school is study beyond the bachelor's degree. Graduate programs fall into two categories: professional and academic. In addition, there are two levels of degrees: the master's and the doctorate. Professional degrees such as the MBA (Master of Business Administration), MSW (Master of Social Work), MD (Doctor of Medicine), and MOB (Master of Organizational Behavior) will provide students with the practical skills and knowledge to enter a profession. Whereas, academic degrees such as the MA (Master of Arts), MS (Master of Science), and PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) tend to be more academically oriented and focused on original research.

**What is involved in getting a graduate degree?**

Graduate programs will vary in length from one to three years for a master's and from five to eight years for a doctorate. Most academic graduate programs involve research, as well as course work. Master's programs typically involve writing a thesis (a research paper) or doing a practicum (professional work experience). Master's programs may also involve taking comprehensive oral and written examinations. The PhD degree involves course work, comprehensive oral and written exams, and writing a dissertation (a piece of original research). Both master's and doctorate degree programs may also require mastery of a foreign language.

**How can I find out what programs are available?**

A good starting place is the Peterson’s Guides to Graduate Study. This is a six volume set of books organized by academic discipline. All available programs are briefly described and contact information is listed. College Source, an on-line criteria search database for all institutions of higher education in the United States and a few select international schools, is available in The Career and Learning Information Center.

Talk with professors and a career counselor about your academic interests. They may have ideas about programs that meet your needs.

**How will I pay for graduate school?**

Some of the more academically oriented programs such as PhD in English or History may offer teaching assistantships. Many scientific disciplines will offer students teaching assistantships for the first two years and then research assistantships when they start assisting faculty with their research (this research is also used for the student’s dissertation). Some Universities may also give students tuition waivers. Professionally oriented programs such as the MBA and MSW usually do not offer many teaching assistantships or research assistantships. Other options include obtaining loans, fellowships, grants or scholarships.

**What is involved in applying to graduate school?**

You should begin the process of researching different programs by the end of your sophomore year if you intend to start graduate school immediately upon graduation. Most graduate programs have deadlines in December or January for the following fall. Typically, your application will include the following:

*College transcripts*
Graduate schools take into account undergraduate GPA, especially in the major field. However, you may be relieved to hear that admissions committees take extenuating circumstances into account.

*Standardized tests*
Many standardized graduate admissions tests are offered in computer-based format, like the Graduate Record Exam (GRE).

*Letters of recommendation*
Most graduate programs will require that you send three letters of recommendation. Programs are most interested in hearing from people who have credibility, know you well and are familiar with your potential motivation for graduate study. Consider taking courses with the same instructor. Conducting research with a professor can also be beneficial. Meet with faculty during office hours to ask questions and let them know you are thinking of graduate school.

*Statement of purpose*
The “Statement of Purpose” or “Personal Statement” should be tailored to the professional program for which you are applying. It should demonstrate your understanding of the department and the potential contribution you could offer the department.