

Thinking About Graduate School

A how-to guide to choosing good options

As you begin the process of selecting a graduate school, it is important to keep one piece of information in mind: there are most likely many schools you will succeed in. The experience you could have depends on the discipline, environment, classes, preparation, and your graduate advisor. The absolute best thing you can do for yourself is to research your options. GradSchoolShopper can help you get many of the facts you need to make a well-informed decision.

Things to keep in mind during the grad school selection process:

- **Do your homework:** Critically consider what you are looking for in a graduate program. Keep track of what schools offer and how well these offerings match your needs.
- **Masters versus PhD:** There is a huge difference between the two in terms of applications and disciplines. Many programs only admit a limited number of master's students. Some programs only offer master's programs. Investigate options on a program by program basis.
- **Make sure it's a good fit:** Don't just apply to a program because it is rated well. Seek out and apply to the programs that are the best fit for you. Programs want students who will succeed. Don't blindly apply to programs or send generic applications.
- **Physics and Astronomy stipend/salary:** Often, PhD programs offer stipends or salaries to students who are enrolled full time. Amounts do vary so evaluate on a location by location basis.
- **PhD advisors are extremely important:** Choosing the right graduate advisor, or set of possible advisors, is one of the most important decisions you can make. A PhD advisor sets the tone, goals, and style of your graduate education. Be sure to talk to a potential advisor's current students individually about their experiences.
- **Research areas:** A program's research areas change over the years and so does availability in professor's labs. It is important to select a school where there are several people you'd want to work with.
- **Don't just apply to one school:** It's common to apply to several programs if you are serious about attending.
- **Consider a variety of research areas:** Consider other fields, research areas, and advisors. Many students end up in labs that are vastly different than the one they were initially aiming for. Sometimes your dream advisor is full that year, or they retire or move. Having several options is key to setting yourself up for success.
- **Don't plan on part-time jobs or side hustles:** Graduate school will be your full-time job and you often have to formally agree that you won't get another or part time job. Plan your time and finances accordingly.
- **Ask about tuition:** For many programs, you don't have to pay for tuition in addition to being paid for your work.
- **Ask grad students about their experiences:** The best advice comes from people who are at your potential school or have recently searched.
- **Visit your top choices:** Schedule a visit with your top graduate program choices. Meet the graduate program advisor (or appropriate person) and potential research advisors.
- **University environment:** Diversity and inclusion initiatives can vary between schools and programs. Investigate differences on a program-by-program basis.

How the GradSchoolShopper website helps simplify the search:

- **Fact-Based, Rank-Free:** GradSchoolShopper provides unbiased, factual information to directly compare programs side-by-side. There are no arbitrary rankings-- just all the information necessary to find schools that match the candidate.
- **FREE for Students:** An account on GradSchoolShopper.com is completely free and access to all program information is completely unfettered.
- **Easy Search Functionality:** A custom search function finds schools by geographic region and specialty area. Create an account and bookmark favorites to review later.
- **Comprehensive Department Information:** Programs listed on the website link to research areas, program funding, equipment, faculty members, stipend and tuition information, and general university info.
- **Downloadable, Sortable Data:** A subset of sortable information, such as acceptance rates, degree types and admission deadlines, can be downloaded in an Excel sheet to offer an organized look at what each school offers.
- **In-Depth Faculty Data:** Programs link directly to faculty, including research fields and areas of expertise.
- **Degree Requirements:** Programs list and link directly to incoming degree requirements.
- **Culture & Diversity:** Prospective students can learn about the department culture & diversity. What is the environment like for students? Is there a weekly social time? What kind of graduate student groups are there? You can also quickly look up information on student and faculty demographics.
- **A Wealth of Sage Advice:** Access tips, guidance and advice on finding the ideal program. GradSchoolShopper.com has a multitude of free resources from physicists who carved their own path and know all the challenges and stress-saving insights.

Questions? Contact us at info@gradschoolshopper.com