

GRAD SCHOOL TO GO OR NOT TO GO

Should you go on to graduate school? Is it the right move for you at this point in your career? Give your decision careful consideration, weighing all the factors, including:

YOUR CAREER PATH

What do you truly want to do? What excites you more than anything? If it's a profession you absolutely, positively must pursue, and it requires advanced education, then you're probably an excellent candidate for further education.

"You go to graduate school to become an expert in a certain area or to be a professional in certain industries, like law, medicine, or engineering," explains Cindy Parnell, director of career services at Arizona State University.

INVESTMENT OF TIME, MONEY, AND ENERGY

Graduate students find out very quickly that their days of frat parties, general education courses, and hanging out with friends are over—graduate school is, well, about school.

ARE YOU READY TO COMMIT?

Also consider your post-undergraduate life plans. Are marriage and family in your immediate future? Graduate school can put a huge financial strain on a young couple already facing student loan debt, not to mention the burden of the time you'll be spending studying. Be sure you—and your family—are ready for the added responsibility of a few more years of schooling.

YOUR MARKETABILITY TO AN EMPLOYER

Not every profession requires an advanced degree, so do some research on potential career opportunities before committing to more education.

"Students run the risk of thinking today that grad school might be the answer. Depending on the program, you want to have the fieldwork experience as well as grad school. If you go on to grad school without having any fieldwork experience, you run the risk of being over-educated [and under-experienced]," says Shayne Bernstein, associate director, career development services, at Hunter College.

OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE FIELD

If you do plan to work before going back for that advanced degree, will more education help you move up the ranks at your company? Have you landed a job in your undergraduate area of study, and now you're thinking you want to enhance what you've learned, or pursue a totally new field? Depending on your professional career path, advanced education may help you reach your career goals.

YOUR MOTIVATION

Can't think of what else to do next? Don't think of graduate school as a way to hide from the job search. You face wasting a lot of resources.

Bernstein suggests giving careful consideration to your decision to pursue graduate school.

"Don't go if you're not passionate about something," she stresses. "Don't go for the sake of going to graduate school. Go because you're passionate and you want to develop your skill set in a certain area."

