Picking the Right Grad School

Things to keep in mind when choosing a graduate school and program include the cost, the culture of the school, method of delivery, and student services, to name a few. Use the following tips to be confident that you’re deciding on a graduate school that’s right for you.

1. Considerations and Basic Research:
   - Have some general questions in mind: What interests me? What kind of career path do I want to pursue? What motivates me to pursue graduate studies?
   - Consider personal things like finances, significant relationships, and your GPA from the last 60 credits.
   - If you need to boost your GPA:
     a. Take courses required to complete your degree in your first couple of years.
     b. Graduate schools tend to focus on your last 60 credits and senior level courses.
     c. Re-take senior level classes or take classes elsewhere after you graduate if you need to upgrade.
   - If you’re feeling lost, browse graduate school program websites and write down key things that resonate with you.

2. Determine Key Aspects and Program Delivery:
   - Pick key aspects that will help you pick one grad school over another. For example, the cost of tuition, location of the campus, and professors.
   - Research the program itself: Is it thesis or course-based? Delivered in-person or online?
     o Thesis-Based—You will be responsible for approaching in advance a faculty member with a background in your chosen topic.
     o Course-Based—Consider the design of the program and the courses offered.

3. Dig a little deeper:
   - A school may appear amazing on paper but may not meet your needs in-person. Make sure you do in-depth research. Speak to program advisors or university representatives.
   - Consider taking a school tour, talking to people who attend, or professors who have taught there.
   - Inquire about the student services such as the library and study space.
   - **Compare and Contrast:** Create a chart to organize all of the information you’ve gathered.
     o Include categories for selection at the top and each potential grad school on the left.
     o Give a value to each category as a way to rank each school (e.g. 0 – not ideal, 5 – highly preferable).
     o Add the values in each row and consider the top three or four institutions.

4. Final Thoughts:
   - Give yourself 6 months to 1 year to research and prepare for application deadlines.
   - Application deadlines are usually between November and March.
   - Some programs require you to write a standardized test (e.g., GMAT, LSAT, GRE)—write these ASAP during downtime and remember that the results can last up to 3 to 5 years.
   - After writing the standardized tests, meet with your references. Provide them with information on each institution you’re considering, including requirements and deadline dates.
   - Additional resources are available on the Career Development and Experiential Learning website. Examples of topics in regard to professional or graduate school include the following: Deciding, Choosing, Applying, Written Statement, and Standardized Exams.