

CHOOSING A GRADUATE PROGRAM

1. Three “types” of degree programs:

- a) **Professional degree** – Think of this as a degree type that requires advanced knowledge in a particular profession. Your learning would be skill and practical analysis driven and will usually require licensing and/or certification. Examples: MBA (Master of Business Administration), MSE (Master of Science in Engineering), MPH (Master of Public Health), etc.
- b) **Master’s degree** – Think of this as an academic degree where you are gaining a mastery level of understanding in a particular field of study. Your learning would be theoretically driven and require research, critical evaluation, analysis, and complex problem solving. Typically an academic Master’s degree is distinguished as an MS (Master of Science) or MA (Master of Arts) in a particular field. Example Master of Science in Counseling or Master of Arts in Criminology.
- c) **Doctoral degree** – This is the highest level of academic proficiency in any subject. Doctoral degrees allow an individual to practice and/or teach at the university level. Examples: MD (Medical Doctor) or PhD in Sociology (Doctor of Philosophy).

2. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education:

Knowing the “types” of universities you can attend may influence your program decisions. Here is a basic breakdown of national research classifications (please follow this link for direct and comprehensive information: http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/classification_descriptions/basic.php)

Research 1 universities – Highest research activity (ex. University of Wisconsin-Madison)

Research 2 universities – High research activity (ex. Baylor University-Texas)

Research 3 universities – Moderate research activity (ex. Boise State University)

Being aware of the research rank of universities is important because it shows the dedication the university has for research, how much money is being invested into research, and your ability to find research you would like to be a part of.

3. Other things to consider:

- a) **Reputation:** When making a graduate school decision, consider a schools ranking and reputation. Has the university or program you are seeking been recognized recently? Does the department have faculty with a variety of publications and/or recognized research? Who received the same degree you are interested in and what are they doing now (are they big names in your field of study)?
- b) **In-House Funding:** There are many ways to fund your graduate education. Most programs/universities have RA (Research Assistant), TA (Teaching Assistant), or experiential (practical job placement) funding opportunities. Make sure when you are searching for programs you seriously consider funding because loss or lack of funding may be the variable between you earning a graduate degree or not.
- c) **Faculty:** The faculty that make up a program create an academic culture. Your success in graduate school will rely heavily on your ability to form relationships with these faculty. Visit campus, make contact with the department chair to learn more about the realities and expectations of the program, and take time to look at faculty academic/research backgrounds.

4. Tips:

- a) **Talk to your current faculty:** If you are seeking a graduate degree directly related to your major at The College of Idaho, have a conversation with your department. Find out where they went to school, their experience in graduate school, and other helpful tips for finding the right program for you.
- b) **Consider taking a gap year(s):** Even if you have dreams of earning a graduate degree, consider taking some time off to gather practical experience. Don’t feel like you *have* to go to graduate school right now because of societal pressure. Gaining a graduate degree of any type is a BIG decision; take your time.

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