Thinking About Graduate School?

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Presented on OU Campus, Spring 2007

Rogers presents information based on her experience as a graduate student, a graduate faculty member and the Graduate Program Director for OU’s Economics Department. This lecture is for students thinking about continuing school beyond the undergraduate level. It will provide information about the operations of graduate education in the United States. The following questions will be addressed:

1. Is graduate school for me?
2. Am I qualified for graduate school?
3. Can I get into graduate school with my less than stellar overall GPA?
4. How do I find out about graduate programs in my field of interest?
5. How do I pay for graduate school?
6. How should I prepare myself for graduate study?
7. What can I do to increase my chances of getting into a good graduate school?
Thinking About Graduate School?

1. Is graduate school for me? (Motivation)
   Do you need an advanced degree for your desired profession?
   Professor=PHD, Lawyer=JD, Physician=MD, etc.
   Are you passionate about field?
   Do you understand exactly what the field entails?
   When you read in the area do you have a hard time stopping?
   Have you investigated what one does as a professional in the field?
      Consider doing interviews, internships, etc.
   Are you willing/able/prepared to work hard?
      Will you have the time to do the work? Think of it as a full time job.
   Do you have the necessary financial support?
   What other responsibilities will you have? Kids, bills, job, etc.
   Have you considered your opportunity costs?
      Will the time, money and effort be worth what you give up?

   NOTE: If you answered no to any of these then you should reconsider.

2. Am I qualified for graduate school?
   Check requirements for admission to program of interest
   Grades- most programs have a minimum required GPA for previous course work
   Degree- not all PhD programs require a master’s degree
   Courses- try to exceed the minimum theory and quantitative courses
   Experience- MBA programs generally require work experience
   Entrance examinations- GRE, GMAT, LSAT
   Letters of reference- you need 3 professors to vouch for you
   Can I get into graduate school with my less than stellar overall GPA?
      Grades
      - Poor freshman grades are minimized by doing better in junior and senior years
      - Some programs only look at the last 60 hours of undergraduate coursework or a certain number of previous graduate hours
      - If you don’t meet the undergraduate GPA requirement, you can take a semester or two of graduate work to meet requirements.
   Exemptions from grade and other requirements
      - Most requirements can be waived at the discretion of the program director
      - Ask for conditional admission to prove your ability
      - Demonstrate key qualities: motivation and determination
      - Distinguish yourself by having special experience (research, internship, etc.)
      - Speak to admissions director in person or appeal to a graduate faculty member to intervene on your behalf.

3. How do I find out about graduate programs in my field of interest?
   Ask faculty members in the field of interest
      - Be sure to investigate specialization within field of interest
- You may have to find a faculty mentor at another institution
Check out ranking of schools (these are not very reliable)
- Check out the degree institutions of the program faculty – top schools hire faculty from top programs
- Check out placements of graduates—top schools have better placements
Read top journals in the field and note institutions of contributors
Check out web pages of various programs

4. How do I pay for graduate school?
   Savings, family, loans
   Fellowship/scholarships
   Teaching/research assistantships
   Employer sponsorship

5. What can I do to increase my chances of getting into a good graduate school?
   Have good recommendations from faculty in the field
   Get good grades, or show strong improvement
   Take the hardest most quantitative/analytic undergraduate courses in field
   Take a graduate course as an undergraduate
   Participate in undergraduate sessions at conferences
   A master’s degree may pay off if it gets you a fellowship in a great program
   Start at a less distinguished school and then transfer to the better program
   Visit the school and meet with the graduate program director and faculty
   Network- ask all your professors if they have contacts at good programs

6. Which school/program should I choose given multiple opportunities?
   Visit the program. Meet with faculty AND graduate students.
   Investigate retention rates and placements of students in program
   Check out the research and expertise of faculty
   Accept the offer from the best school that provides enough funding to get by

7. How should I prepare myself for graduate study?
   Undergraduate Coursework:
      Do well in required courses and take even more advanced material
      Take challenging courses
   Do research in field, preferably with a professor in the area
   Address your weaknesses
      Improve writing, math, logic, communications, etc.
      Improve study habits
   Save as much as possible to give yourself a financial cushion from which to draw