



Is Graduate School Really Worth It?

With the exception of those working on their Mrs. Degree, students enroll in university studies in order help themselves get better jobs when they finally enter the workforce. But what they don't know is that their undergraduate degree might not be enough to get them the job they're after.

There was a time many years ago in which the ability to read and write was enough to set a person apart from his peers. But as public schooling became more readily available, a basic education was no longer enough to make someone stand out on an application. Even now, the higher education of a bachelor's degree is becoming commonplace. More and more college graduates with bachelor's degrees are being turned down for jobs that they were previously qualified for as those jobs go to applicants master's degrees.

This is especially true in the scientific and technological fields, such as biology, chemistry, and engineering, where research is a major component of the available careers in that field. The competition in a scientific field is constantly increasing. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics says, "Management, scientific, and technical consulting services are projected to be one of the fastest growing industries over the next decade. However, because of the number of people looking to work in this industry, competition for jobs is expected to be keen."

Many of today's students grew up with the bachelor's degree as the gold standard of education. This

meant that getting a bachelor's degree guaranteed a middle-class job (or better) in the student's field of choice. Master's degrees and PhDs were exclusively the realm of professors and researchers.

But the percentage of persons 25 and older in the United States with four-year degrees has increased over 600% since 1940, arriving at nearly one third of the population by 2008. This trend has made a bachelor's degree less of a "stand-out" on an application and more of an expectation. In order to stand out in a stack of resumes, more and more employers are expecting applicants to hold master's degrees.

The question that undergraduate students are asking themselves is: Should I go to graduate school?

The decision to go to graduate school depends on several factors.



The most important factor to look at is the student's career goal. If the student's chosen field is accepting exclusively (or even mostly) graduate students, then the choice to go to grad school is a no-brainer. However, if money and salary are the goal, then it's important to look what people in a certain field are earning.

While the average annual income of those holding master's degrees is nearly \$20,000 higher than the income of those holding only bachelor's degrees, the majority of this average comes from science and engineering related fields. The US census figures show that workers with master's degrees in liberal arts only earn an average of \$5 more per month (\$60 annually) than someone with a bachelor's degree in the same field, whereas a master's degree in science or engineering can net nearly twice as much annual income as someone with an equivalent bachelor's.

Making only \$60 more per year and with an average annual tuition of roughly \$15,000, it would take almost 500 years to justify the cost earning a master's degree in liberal arts, not including the two years of lost salary. So if money is the important factor, going to graduate school is probably not a wise investment for students in liberal arts and social sciences, but an excellent choice for students studying biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, engineering and similar fields.

People who hold MBAs also tend to earn significantly more than those holding four-year degrees. In a 2007 International Recruitment Survey and



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Salary Report, the entry level bankers with MBA degrees earned \$20,000 more per year than bankers with bachelor's degrees, and \$30,000 more per year than bankers with four years of experience and no degree.

One advantage of graduate school that seems to exist regardless of field is an increased likelihood to find employment. According to International Education Consultant Tim Rogers, 59% of companies plan on hiring more employees with master's degrees this year than they did last year. He also states that while 6.1% of those holding bachelor's degrees are unemployed, only 4.8% of those holding equivalent master's degrees are unemployed.

This difference can be attributed to the additional "soft skills" such as leadership and communication associated with holders of advanced degrees, as noted by the Graduate Management Admissions Council. Graduate studies are often rigorous and focused, and are generally only a sign of dedication and commitment. Graduate students are also more experienced in research and employers believe they are more innovative and capable in their respective fields.

On a level employment field, graduate degree-holders are considered to be a step above undergraduate degree-holders, just as college graduates are considered step above high school graduates. It might not always help students earn more, but it will better qualify them for their intended careers.

Other factors in a decision whether or not to attend graduate school

includes timing and finances. The cost of graduate school not only includes tuition and living expenses, but also the salary lost by not entering the workforce right away. This can make graduate school particularly difficult later on in life, when finances and time can become strained by mortgages, car payments, children, etc. An ideal time to attend grad school can be immediately after earning a bachelor's degree, but it can sometimes be difficult to follow four years of school with more school.

If students do not have the money saved up, loans can cover some of the cost, but students should be sure that they'll be able to afford to pay those loans back. Most graduate programs also give students some monetary compensation for assisting the salaried professors with classes and research and this can help as well.

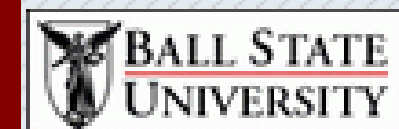
If a student is planning to pursue a master's degree anyways, it is best to finish it as soon as possible. Whether the motivation is extra income or better job opportunities, the sooner a student can start working their desired position, the better.

Overall, for students working in science- and engineering-related fields or business administration, a master's degree is a great investment. For students in liberal arts and social sciences, pursuing a master's degree doesn't make much financial sense, but if money's not an issue, graduate school can help set the student apart from other applicants to the same job.

**Field of Study:
Business**

**Subject: Business
Administration (MBA)**

**Location:
USA, Indiana**



**How will you
decide?**