



# Grad School Application Best Practices

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Graduate School



**VCU**

Graduate School

# Why Should I Get a Graduate Degree?

- Required for some careers
- Can help you get promoted and make a higher salary in some cases
- A graduate degree can make you more competitive and increase your chances for acceptance into a professional program
- Allows you to pursue an interest or passion in a more tailored degree program relevant to an area

# What different types of degrees are offered?

- PhD
- EdD
- DNP
- MS
- MA
- MPH
- MEd
- DPT
- OTD

# Graduate Degrees Defined

- PhD= Doctor of Philosophy
- EdD= Doctorate of Education
- DNP= Doctor of Nursing Practice
- MS= Master of Science
- MA= Master of Arts
- MPH= Master of Public Health
- MEd= Master of Education
- DPT= Doctor of Physical Therapy
- OTD= Doctor of Occupational Therapy

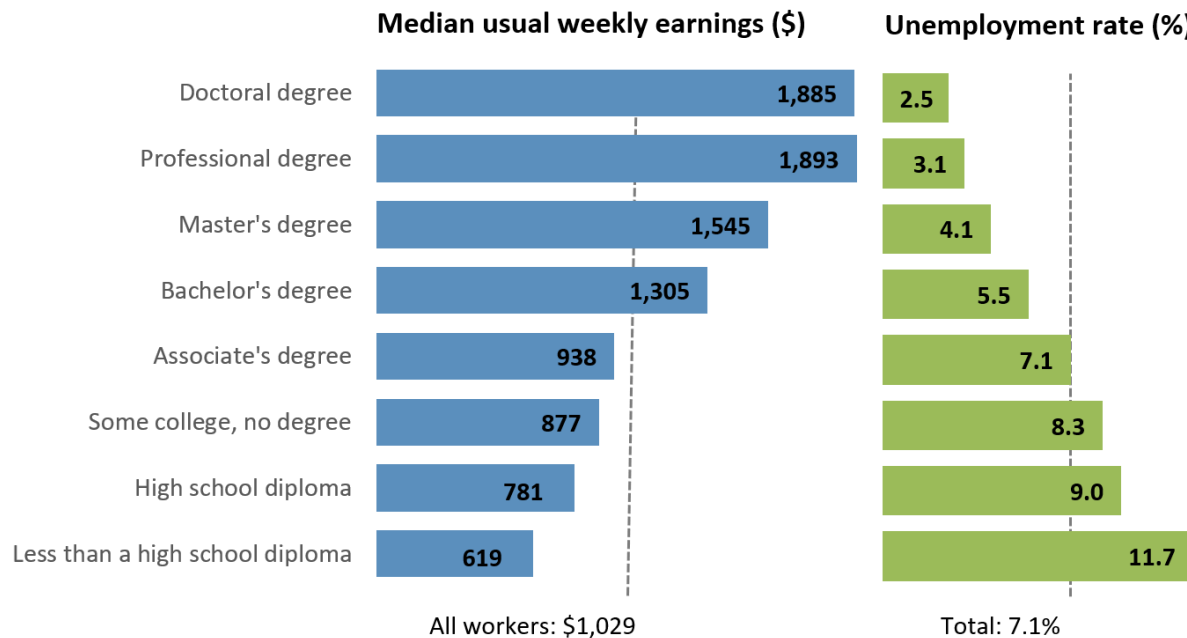
# Salary Data

Major	Average bachelor's starting salary	Average master's starting salary	Differential percentage
Biology	\$37,182	\$69,353	87
Communication disorders sciences	\$34,517	\$58,890	71
Business administration/management	\$54,392	\$82,372	51
Education administration and supervision	\$39,380	\$59,032	50
Communication and media studies	\$42,345	\$62,166	47
Registered nursing	\$58,626	\$84,674	44
International relations and national security studies	\$46,592	\$66,900	44
Human resources management	\$47,860	\$68,272	43
Psychology	\$37,006	\$52,786	43
English language and literature/letters	\$38,597	\$54,102	40
Public health	\$44,017	\$60,624	38
Social work	\$35,622	\$48,711	37
Computer science	\$78,603	\$104,081	32
Management information systems	\$62,429	\$82,555	32
Criminal justice and corrections	\$45,556	\$58,060	27
Special education and teaching	\$41,772	\$52,105	25
Statistics	\$75,916	\$90,528	19
Finance	\$59,627	\$68,678	15
Accounting	\$54,809	\$56,791	4

Table: Abigail Johnson Hess • Source: The National Association of Colleges and Employers • Created with Datawrapper

# Employment and Earnings

Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment, 2020



Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.  
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

# Taking a Step Back....

- What is the difference between a master's degree and a doctoral degree

# What is a Master's Degree

- A **master's degree** (from Latin *magister*) is an academic degree awarded by universities or colleges upon completion of a course of study demonstrating mastery or a high-order overview of a specific field of study or area of professional practice.

(Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master%27s\\_degree](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master%27s_degree))



# Thesis vs. Non-Thesis Masters

- What is a thesis?
  - A master's thesis is an extensive scholarly paper that allows you to dig into a topic, expand on it and demonstrate how you've grown as a graduate student throughout the program. Graduate schools often require a thesis for students in research-oriented degrees to apply their practical skills before culmination.

(Source: <https://www.gradschoolhub.com/faqs/what-is-a-thesis/>)

# Non-Thesis Based Masters

- Minimum of 30 credits in graduate level classes (500 level and above)
- Generally does not require you to do research work, but you may have to do a capstone project or portfolio assignment
- Usually requires enrollment in the summer semester in order to finish in one year
- **Can increase your competitiveness for doctoral graduate programs or professional schools**

# Thesis-Based Masters

- Minimum of 30 credits in graduate level classes (500 and above), but the total number may be considerably higher
- Requires original research work and of course writing a thesis on describing your project and findings
- Thesis committee and thesis defense usually required
- Usually takes more than a year to finish, you may need to enroll in the summer
- **Can increase your competitiveness for doctoral graduate programs or professional schools**

# PhD Degree

- Doctor of Philosophy
- A number of classes maybe required, but the focus is on training you to do research
- Number of credit hours required varies by field or discipline
- Includes writing a dissertation
  - The doctoral student will have to go before other professors and defend research

# The PhD Process-> A Long Road Ahead

- Time in graduate school= 4-6 years
  - Graduation time impacted by part-time vs. fulltime status
- Opportunities for graduate assistantships
- Possible postdoctoral fellowship
- Possible internship

# Is it Worth the Time and Effort?

- Individual decision
- Required in many cases if you want to be a professor

# Requirements for Graduate School

- Most of the time you need a B.S. or B.A. degree
- At least a 3.0 GPA

# What Should I Major in and what Classes Should I Take?

- Make sure you know the answer to this question before your senior year
- Check into different graduate programs via the web as early as possible
- Talk to your Advisor, other Professors, Graduate Directors, or Admission Counselors
- **Do this early in your college career!**



# The Most Important Part

- Avoid the C grades and below, especially in your classes related to the graduate discipline you want to apply to
- Maintain a strong GPA!

# Requirements: Research Experience

- Why do I need research experience prior to entry into graduate school, won't I get the proper training during my thesis work?
- Answer:  
**It's very difficult to get into PhD and some master's programs without any research experience**

# Graduate Programs in Your Area of Interest

- How do I find out about the various opportunities for graduate training in the scientific area that I want to go into?
  - **Web**
  - **Ask your professors**
  - **Ask different graduate students and postdocs**
  - **Ask the VCU Graduate School**
- Make sure the school has the degree program you are interested in
- Do your homework and learn about the program and it's faculty

# The Application Process

- Fill out the forms correctly, completely, and on time
- The application may not be the same for every program
- Make sure you get all of your documents, such as official transcripts, GRE scores, letters of recommendation, and other materials sent to each school/program in a timely manner
- **Start early- Get your applications well before the deadline**
- The recommendation letters usually take the longest to get sent in, start on this early and follow-up with your professors!

# Personal Statement

- Discuss why you want to go to graduate school and what areas you would like to focus on for your thesis work
- **Make sure you come across as very interested in the field/discipline and with getting your graduate degree!!!**
- Talk about your long-term career goals
- Explain what attracted you to the school's program
- Discuss your previous research other important experience
- Bring up and deal with any of your deficiencies, honesty is the best policy

# Standardized Test Requirements

- GRE, GMAT, others
- **You may not need to take one of these, programs may waive this**
- GRE- Verbal, Quantitative, and Analytical Writing sections
- Try to shoot for a combined score of 310 or more (verbal and quantitative sections)
- I like to see an Analytical Writing score of 4.0 or higher

# Letters of Recommendation

- Very important!
- Try and get a letter from at least one person who can comment on your research ability and potential to be a successful graduate student
- Talk to the professor writing the letter about your specific interests in graduate school, different areas of science, future careers, etc.
- Start communicating with these individuals in the spring/summer before your senior year

# How do I find out more Information about Graduate School?

- Google it!
- Ask your Professors
- Ask current graduate students
- Ask us, the Graduate School





# Questions?



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