

Snow Flaky Tips about Graduate School

By Christabel E. Dadzie '04 (cdadzie04@alumnimail.wooster.edu)

Winter is on its way, and this time comes with it some major decisions – if you are a senior whether or not you should go to graduate school, is usually one of them.

I would like to give you some personal tips about going to graduate school, don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions or need further explanation. Please note that I am speaking as an International relations major, so not all my tips may be applicable to people in other disciplines, but for the most part, everyone will hopefully gain a thing or two.

The big questions to consider: WHEN should I go to graduate school? WHY should I go to graduate school? And WHERE should I go to graduate school?

WHEN: Some people go to graduate school right after they are done with College. This may be a good or bad idea depending on your situation. My advice is to take some time to reflect on whether you want a break, want to gain some work experience, and most importantly whether you are ready to do graduate work. Let me be honest, even though I was ready for it (and I took a year's break), grad school turned out to be a little tougher than I imagined - so make sure you are absolutely ready because 2 years goes by pretty quickly, but you want to make it through in one piece. For majors like political science, international relations, and the like, I would advice making use of your optional training (if applicable) and gaining some work experience in the field as those experiences really come in handy during workshops, and other practical experiences in school. If you are an economics major, then you definitely need the work experience as most graduate programs require that.

WHY: you should also spend sometime thinking about, and consulting with others about why you want to go to graduate school. For some people, it is just for status, while this is great, grad school could be a painful experience if you are not there for the right reasons. For others, your major requires a graduate degree in order to gain access to top notch positions - if that's the case, then go! For yet others, you are thinking about teaching, and in those cases, I will advice that you apply for a PhD program right away if that's a possibility as this shortens your years in school. If you are not really sure why you should go to graduate school, then talk to your adviser - mine was extremely helpful to me in making that decision. I wouldn't advice anyone to take that step if they are not ready and if they have not found a program that fits their interests.

WHERE: The where question is very important because you want to make sure that you are in a place that you can enjoy during a difficult process. My personal experience was of two fold: first I wanted to go to a school that had a name as that would make it easier to enter the job market right after school, so I considered mainly Ivy League schools. Also, I wanted a location that would enable me to acquire practical skills. Therefore, all my choices were in the North East. Columbia has been extremely beneficial to me with its proximity to the United Nations, and other international organizations; D.C. would also be an ideal location for public and non-governmental organizations. Finally, the program I chose fit my needs, again, the program you are considering should be at the top of the agenda at all times. Finances is also highly important, I will confess that I didn't make that as much of an issue as my hope is that a good school will

land me a job that I love and can also pay the bills. However, I will be paying quite a large debt for a long time, so make sure you are willing to make such a sacrifice.

So to wrap up, take your time to make this important decision, don't go simply because others are, and consult with as many people as possible. Make use of campus visits since you have the opportunity to do so, and work on your strong holds during the application process - I am not a test taker, so the GREs were my weak point, but I used my involvement in campus organizations and the many values that I picked up from them to leverage my applications. Maintain a good relationship with your Professors because their recommendation letters can make or break your entry; remember to give them ample time to write the recommendations. Finally, spend a lot of time on the personal statement: write it, get a second and third opinion, and rewrite it again as this will be one of your key selling points.

Good Luck!