Graduate School

Should I go to graduate school?
Although four (or five) years of undergraduate study might seem like an eternity to some students, there are several good reasons for “sticking it out” for a few more years after your bachelor’s degree:

1. Career or Salary Advancement On average, Americans with a graduate degree earned an average of 35 to 50 percent more than those with just a bachelor’s degree.
2. Career Change: Many people make the decision to return to grad school after working in the “real world.” A graduate degree can allow an experienced person to gain the necessary expertise to shift careers.
3. The Lure of Ivy Walls: To teach at two-year colleges, you’ll need at least a master’s degree. To teach or do research at four-year colleges and universities, you’ll need a doctorate and/or the “terminal” professional degree - MBA, JD, MD, MFA, etc.
4. Love of Learning Many people choose grad school simply because they love the field. This is probably the best reason of all.

When should I get ready to apply for graduate school?
Fall, Junior Year: Begin researching graduate programs by collecting information and speaking with faculty, current graduate students and professionals.
Spring, Junior Year: Plan visits to programs, research the Internet, determine what tests are required for admission, and begin preparing for the GRE or GMAT.
Summer: Make a list of potential recommenders, visit campuses, begin drafting personal statement(s), contact primary programs to order newest application, ask about financial aid deadlines, and TAKE THE GRE or GMAT.
Fall, Senior Year: Arrange a meeting with recommenders and get all necessary information to them approximately two months in advance, finalize the drafts of your personal statement(s), complete and mail applications, and apply for financial aid.

What can I do to increase my chances of getting into a graduate program?
The application and selection process for graduate school is much different than for undergraduate. For starters, “overall excellence” does not always guarantee admission; most graduate admissions committees are comprised of that program’s faculty, who are looking for specific qualities. In essence, most admissions committees have two concerns: motivation and preparation.

Motivation refers to the clarity and soundness of your reasons for applying to the program and your expectations of how the program will comply with your long-term goals. It is very important, therefore, to research the programs to which you are applying well, and your personal statement should convey that you have given some serious thought to your future. As well, your resume should indicate that you have steadily developing towards this goal for some time.

Preparedness refers to your academic preparation. Graduate study is much different than undergraduate study; it is more tightly focused and moves at a much faster pace, and graduate students are expected to work independently. Admissions committees evaluate these criteria by examining the following aspects of your application:

Transcripts While grades are important, good grades alone are not enough. It is also important to remember that less than perfect grades will not rule out the possibility of study at the graduate level. Some institutions look
only at your GPA for the course work in your major field; others look only at the grades for courses taken after your first two years of study.

**Standardized Test Scores** Be sure to confirm which tests are required for admission and to take them in time to get your official scores sent to the programs to which you are applying. Some schools require only the GRE (Graduate Record Exam) General Test, while others require the GRE General Test and a GRE Subject Test. Most Business programs require the GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test), although some will accept either the GMAT or the GRE.

**Statement of Purpose** Most applications ask for a statement of interest or an autobiographical statement. Your statement of purpose should describe your interests in the field of study and how you came to have those interests, your goals and ambitions in the field and how the specific program to which you are applying can help you achieve your goals.

**Letters of Recommendation** Letters of recommendation are extremely important, and you should carefully consider whom you ask to write them. The most helpful letters come from faculty members or supervisors who have had considerable contact with you and know you as a person. A letter from a professor who has an established reputation in the field is that much more impressive. If the graduate program asks for “academic” references, you must select only professors whom you have had in class or in a research experience.

**How am I going to pay for graduate school?**
Funding can be broken down into three broad categories: need-based, merit-based and targeted aid. Upon acceptance to a particular school or department, you may be offered a “package” which could entail funding from each of these categories. The package may consist of a combination of scholarships, loans, grants, work-study, tuition reduction/remission, and fellowships (which may or may not have a service-related component, such as being a teaching or research assistant). Though most graduate students incur some debt, the level varies depending on your field of study and program. For example, few Ph.D. students bear the entire cost of their doctoral programs as most receive a combination of fellowship and assistantship funding. There is usually much less funding available for students in master's programs.

**Where can I find a list of graduate schools?**
Because there are literally thousands of graduate programs in the United States alone, finding a “one stop shop” for information on graduate study is difficult. The best thing to do is to talk to your professors, find people who are currently working in the career that you desire, and just do some old-fashioned research on the Internet. The following websites may be of some use to you as you get started on this (sometimes difficult process):

- [http://ugr.tamu.edu](http://ugr.tamu.edu)
- [http://www.phds.org/rankings/](http://www.phds.org/rankings/)
- [http://gateway.library.uiuc.edu/edx/rankgrad.htm](http://gateway.library.uiuc.edu/edx/rankgrad.htm)
- [http://www.gmat.org/](http://www.gmat.org/)