

GOING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL WITH A MAJOR/MINOR IN SOCIOLOGY, CRIMINOLOGY OR ANTHROPOLOGY

Some students have trouble finding a job and FALSELY think the solution is to keep going to school, They think that graduate school is just a continuation of their undergraduate education and will magically result in a good job. Here are some things to keep in mind:

Graduate and professional schools vary greatly. There are master's and doctorate degrees in many fields (Criminology, Sociology, Anthropology, etc.) and professional schools (Public Health, Law). Getting accepted and the intensity of the program vary widely. Some (e.g., master's degree in local university) are not too competitive but other are extremely difficult to enter and very expensive (\$40-50,000 per year tuition). Do not think that going graduate school will be just an extra year or two of your undergraduate education.

Getting into a top graduate or professional school is very competitive. Top graduate or professional schools get dozens more applicants with GPA's over 3.8 than they can accept. A high GPA may get your "foot in the door" but you need more to be competitive. You also need high scores on the GRE (Graduate Record Exam) LSAT or similar standardized test, several very good letters of reference from professors who really know you, and some experience doing an undergraduate research project. A low GPA (i.e., defined as about 3.0 overall) means you might be able to get into a small, low-prestige graduate program. Just remember, the better the graduate program, the harder it is to get in, but the better the chances of you being able to land a good job afterwards.

A graduate or professional degree is not a job guarantee. Some people with master's degrees, law degrees and PhD's have trouble finding jobs. There are PhDs driving taxis because they did not go to a top graduate school, do extremely well in graduate school, and master the professional academic way of life. While there are unemployed people with master's degrees and PhDs, but not as many as unemployed people with bachelor's degrees. Adding more degrees is not a simple solution to starting a good career, it is only one part of the puzzle.

Know what you want to do. Graduate and professional schools seek bright and highly motivated people who have a good sense of their direction in life. Directionless people rarely succeed and they tend to "wash out" and leave graduate school without a degree. If you are going to graduate school "because there was nothing better to do" the odds of success are low. You need a clear vision, a plan, very strong work ethic, and a passion to learn if you are to succeed.

Do your research and be prepared to relocate. The state of Wisconsin has two PhD programs in Sociology, and one (UW-Milwaukee) is small and only a few years old. The other PhD program is at UW-Madison. It is usually rated in the top 5 – in the world. It accepts top students from anywhere and gives no preference to students from Wisconsin. While there are about 200 PhD programs in a field like Sociology (far fewer in Criminology or Anthropology), they vary a lot by prestige, specialization, how graduate students are treated, etc. Some graduate schools fund almost no incoming students, others give 90% of their accepted students financial aid or related job on campus. You should write to multiple graduate schools to get information, visit the graduate schools to talk with faculty and students, and ask your professors or people in the career that is your goal as part of the process of deciding where to go.

Be ready for the long haul and intense work. A master's or law degree involves 2-3 years of intense work. PhD programs typically require 5-8 years full-time beyond the bachelor's degree. In more

prestigious, stronger programs the work load can be intense. A beginning graduate-level course might require 3-4 times of the work/effort as an upper-level course at the undergraduate level on the same topic. There are a lot of essay tests and research papers, with few if any multiple choice tests. The PhD is a research degree, so you better enjoy doing research if your goal is the PhD. Self-confidence, organization, and good writing and speaking skills are important for success in graduate school as in most areas of professional life.

Start early. Most graduate schools award scholarships, fellowships, teaching assistants, etc. only to early applicants. Most graduate schools only accept students in fall, and they often have deadlines in January. This means you need to start the process of applying about a year in advance of your date of entry. Ideally, you need to start thinking seriously about graduate school by your junior year of college if you plan to begin a graduate program, law school or similar program the fall after graduation.