Graduate School research and comparison

There are many factors to consider when evaluating an advanced degree. This worksheet is designed to help you identify key factors in evaluating your options. You should evaluate at least three programs.

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Program overview

Program Overview	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3	Program 4	Program 5
School/Program name:					
Type of degree/program of interest Example: Master of Business Administration (MBA), Master of Arts (MA), Doctor of Medicine (MD), Juris Doctor (JD)					
Brief description of school and program Example: The MS in Criminal Justice prepares students to acquire jobs or advance their careers in the field of criminal justice policy and practice. Students receive the scientific foundations and practical insights required to evaluate, select, and implement criminal justice policies and practices that are effective, efficient, and fair. They also learn data analysis skills that equip them with the knowledge required for many policy-oriented and front-line operational positions. Criminal Justice, MS graduates are prepared to be leaders and change agents in the criminal justice field.					
School/program ranking Example: #3 Best Engineering School (*U.S. News and World Report*)					
Program focus Example: theoretical, research-driven, practical/applied, skills-based					
Method of instruction Example: in-person, online, hybrid					
Program start Example: fall only, any semester					
Student to faculty ratio Example: 12 students to 1 faculty					
Advising/mentoring Example: faculty advisor, optional peer mentor					

	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3	Program 4	Program 5
Average time to complete degree Example: overall rate of graduation for the program; percentage of students who graduate within a specified number of years					
Acceptance rate					
Rate of student employment after graduation					
Salaries of new graduates					
Other notable program outcomes Example: alumni or career/employment outcomes					

Requirements to complete program

Program requirements	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3	Program 4	Program 5
Thesis or Dissertation					
Comprehensive exam					
Internship/practicum/etc.					
Number of credits					
Full-time					
Part-time					
Publishing or presenting at conferences Example: encouraged, required					
Residency/travel requirement Example: requirement to visit campus or another site for some components of the program like classes, field work					

Program costs and funding opportunities

Tuition is the cost of taking classes at your school - actual instruction. Tuition is not the full cost of attendance, which can also include fees, books and supplies, and more. These other costs vary by school/program, and you should investigate each program to learn the full price of attendance.

Program costs	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3	Program 4	Program 5
Tuition (in state or out of state)					
Cost per credit hour (or a different model)					
Fees assessed by this program					
Funding opportunities Example: grants, scholarships, fellowships, assistantships Is the funding full or partial? Is it guaranteed for the duration of the program? Need-based or merit-based?					

Admission requirements

Even among programs with similar admissions requirements, not all programs define a successful applicant the same way. Research those programs interesting to you and see how your background aligns with the profile of a typically accepted student. Refer to the program website first and be prepared to reach out to the program if you cannot find the information online.

Components	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3	Program 4	Program 5
Standardized test(s) (Required or optional?) Example: GRE (Graduate Records Exam), GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test), LSAT (Law School Admissions Test), etc.					
Test scores: Minimum score or range of competitive scores?					
Undergrad GPA (Grade Point Average) (Is there a minimum grade or range of competitive grades?)					
Recommendations (how many, and from whom)					
Personal statement or Statement of purpose					
Related experience (years, type of experience, publications)					
Interview (Required or optional?) What is the purpose? • Determine my career goals • Determine fit with the program					

Program preference

Stretch, Target, or Safety option*	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3	Program 4	Program 5

*After you have learned more about each program, consider identifying it as a Stretch, Target, or Safety option. To increase your chances of admission, aim for an application to at least one program from each category.

Stretch = your credentials fall in the lower end (or below) the Accepted Student Profile, making you a less competitive candidate (but if it's your dream school, apply!)

Target = your credentials fall well within the Accepted Student Profile, making you a competitive candidate

Safety = your credentials meet or exceed the Accepted Student Profile, making you a highly competitive candidate