At some point in your college career, you must decide what you want to do after graduation—and that includes whether or not to attend graduate school. Here are some pointers to help you make an enlightened decision.

1. **SHOULD I CONSIDER GOING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL?**

Going might be a good idea if you…
- want to be a professor, lawyer, doctor, investment banker or work in any profession that requires a post-baccalaureate education.
- wish to develop additional expertise in a particular subject or maximize future earning potential and career advancement.
- are deeply interested in a particular subject and wish to study it in-depth—AND have the time and financial resources to devote to further education.

Going might not be a good idea if you…
- are trying to delay your entry into the “real world” with real responsibilities and real bills.
- are clueless about your career goals.
- aren’t able to devote time and hard work needed to succeed.
- want to stay in school longer to avoid a poor job market.

2. **IS IT BETTER TO WORK FIRST OR ATTEND GRADUATE SCHOOL IMMEDIATELY AFTER I COMPLETE MY UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE?**

Work first if…
- you want some real-world work experience before investing thousands of dollars in a graduate degree.
- the graduate school of your choice prefers work experience (most MBA and some Ph.D. programs require this).
- you can’t afford graduate school now, and haven’t applied for any scholarships, grants, fellowships or assistantships, which could pay for a great deal of your education.

Go now if…
- you are absolutely sure you want to be a college professor, doctor, lawyer, etc., and need a graduate degree to pursue your dream job.
- you have been awarded grants, fellowships, scholarships or assistantships that will help pay for your education.
- you’re concerned that once you start earning real money, you won’t be able to return to the lifestyle of a “poor” student.
- you worry whether you’ll have the discipline (or motivation) to write papers and study for exams in a few years.

3. **I’M BROKE. HOW WILL I PAY FOR TUITION, BOOKS AND LIVING EXPENSES?**

- **Family:** You’ve likely borrowed from them in the past; maybe you’re lucky enough for it to still be a viable option.
- **Student Loans:** Even if you’ve taken out loans in the past, another loan may be a sound “investment” in your future, depending on your field of study.
- **Fellowships/Scholarships:** A free education is always the best option. The catch is you need a high GPA, good GRE/GMAT/LSAT/MCAT scores and the commitment to search out every possible source of funding.
- **Teaching/Research Assistantships:** Many assistantships include tuition waivers plus a monthly stipend. It’s a great way to get paid for earning an education.
- **Employer Sponsorship:** Did you know that some companies pay for you to continue your education? The catch is they usually expect you to continue working for them after you complete your degree to recoup their investment.

4. **WHAT ARE THE PROS AND CONS OF GOING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL FULL-TIME VS. PART-TIME?**

Benefits of attending graduate school full-time:
- you’re able to complete your degree sooner.
- you can totally commit your intellectual, physical and emotional energy to your education.
- ideal if you want to make a dramatic career change.

Benefits of attending graduate school part-time:
- work income helps pay for your education.
- you can take a very manageable course load.
- you can juggle family responsibilities while completing your degree.
- allows you to work in the function/industry/career of your choice while continuing your education.
- employers may pay for part (or all) of your degree.

5. **ASSUMING I WANT TO GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL IN THE NEAR FUTURE, WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?**

a. Identify your true strengths, interests and values to discover what is right for YOU—not friends or parents.
b. Keep your grades up and sign up (and prepare) to take the required standardized tests.
c. Talk to faculty, friends and family who have gone to graduate school to get their perspective about the differences between undergraduate and graduate life.
d. Talk to faculty, friends and family who are in your targeted profession to get a realistic sense of the career path and the challenges associated with the work they do.
e. Investigate creative ways to finance your education—by planning ahead you may reduce your debt.
f. Research graduate schools to help you find a good match.
g. Investigate the admissions process and the current student body profile of your targeted schools to evaluate your probability for admission.
h. Have faith and APPLY! You can’t get in unless you apply.