

# Making Graduate School Decisions



ANTHROPOLOGY  
CAREER READINESS  
NETWORK

## 1. Before You Begin

**Take the time to decide whether grad school is for you. Is it necessary for your career vision? What if you decide not to go?**

### Think about:

- Identifying your career vision
- Why graduate school?
- Link to your career vision
- Required qualifications
- Your Plan B

## 2. Framing Questions

**There are issues which will bound and limit your choices. Identify them now.**

### Think about:

- Time available
- Full-time/part-time
- Cost
- Location
- Small/large
- Online/in-person
- Accommodations

## 3. Program Preferences

**What would make a specific graduate program especially attractive to you?**

### Think about:

- Prestige
- Faculty
- Relevance/focus/specialty
- Graduates' job placement rates
- Anthropology/dual degree
- Cost of living

## 4. Identifying Programs

**Now you are ready to search for programs that might fit your interests and needs.**

### Ways to find out:

Web search	Faculty profiles
Networking	Practitioner profiles
Word of mouth	Known alumni
Disciplinary associations	

## 5. Exploring Top Choices

**Look at each of your top programs in more detail to pick the most appropriate ones for you.**

### Check out:

- Entry requirements
- Facilities/infrastructure
- Funding availability
- Courses
- Course requirements
- Specialties/focus areas
- Strengths and weaknesses
- Faculty specialties
- Potential advisors

### Tip:

Start this process six months out. You'll need more time than you think!

## 6. Making Contact

**Contact programs on your short list (3-6) and investigate each in depth.**

### Get your answers:

- Contact program chair
- Contact potential advisors
- Interview potential advisors
- Visit campus
- Interview students
- Interview alumni

## 7. Applying

**Complete applications for each program that you select. Present yourself to each program in the most effective way possible.**

### Tasks to finalize:

- Transcripts
- Recommendation letters
- Statement of purpose
- Financial aid
- Visas and permissions

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## Additional Considerations for Each Step



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### 1. Before You Begin

- What is your career vision, your long-term goal?
- Why are you considering graduate school?
- How important is a graduate degree for the career you want?
- What degree are you hoping to obtain?
- How does your career vision connect with this degree?
- What will this degree enable you to do in your career (e.g., research, serve as a Subject Matter Expert)?
- Do you have a specific research interest?
- Will you need any other training or certifications?
- If you opt not to attend graduate school, what is your plan for the near term?
- Where will you look for work?
- Will you enroll in any courses or certification programs?

#### Other considerations:

- Are you switching fields from undergrad to graduate?
- How will you build your proficiency in the new field?
- Are you switching programs from Master's to PhD?
- Are you aware that most programs do not accept other programs' credits?

### 2. Framing Questions

- How much time do you have available to devote to graduate coursework?
- Are you planning to attend full-time or part-time?
- To what extent can you afford the costs associated with graduate school?
  - If you do not receive funding (e.g., grants, scholarships) how will you pay for it?
- Are you considering a program that is local or online, or will you need to move?
  - What about a program in a metro area vs. the suburbs?
- Is a large program important to you or one that is smaller?
- Are you interested in a program where you already know people vs. program with new people?
- Are you hoping for a program that will accommodate your needs and home life vs. one without such accommodations (e.g., hybrid or virtual courses, reduced coursework per semester, 9-5 work schedule, physical/mental limitations)?

**Tip:** Conduct some informational interviews to help clarify your goals.

### 3. Program Preferences

- How important is it that the program or university have a global reputation?
- Does it matter to you whether the faculty are well-known scholars?
- Is there a strong alignment between the courses/labs offered and your interests?
- How relevant to you is the job placement rates of graduates?
- Are you seeking coursework that includes Internships/certifications?
- What about other departments or institutes with cross-listed anthropology courses or a dual-degree program?
- Do you require graduate student housing on or near campus?
- How much of a consideration is the cost of living to you?

**Tip:** Rank order how important your questions and preferences are.

### 4. Identifying Programs

- What appealed to you having reviewed the website?
  - What did you learn about the following:
    - Deadline for applications
    - Number and percentage of graduate students admitted annually
    - Funding received annually and for how many years
    - When funding decisions are made
    - Percentage of graduate students continuing to a PhD or dual degree
    - Average time to get a Master's
    - Average time to get a PhD
    - Job placement rate of Master's graduates
    - Job placement rate of PhD graduates
- What was your reaction after reading the faculty profiles?
  - Which faculty members would you consider as your advisor? Why?
- Are any alumni, including practitioners, highlighted on the website?
  - Do you know people from these programs, including those from anthropology associations you belong to?
  - Can you reach out to them for their perspectives?

**Tip:** Think about this process as a fieldwork experience, learning as you explore.



## 5. Exploring Top Choices

- Do a “deep dive” into your top programs by verifying any unanswered questions from your website search (See #4. Identifying Programs), conversations with people you know from those programs, and any alumni, practitioners, and anthropology association members you have been in touch with
- Consider creating a spreadsheet with the program features by program
  - Be sure to include any entry requirements, course requirements, specialty or focus areas, certifications, faculty areas of expertise, facilities/ infrastructure, and funding availability
- Consider program strengths and weaknesses by assessing how aligned the program features are with your own interests (e.g., using a five-point scale from low to high alignment)
- Select two potential advisors from each program
- Rank order the programs to identify your top choices

## 6. Making Contact

### Phone or Zoom Interviews

- Email the department chair or program director, and two potential advisors (per program) requesting informational interviews; include your bio or resume
- Set up 15-30-minute interviews with them
- Come prepared with your list of questions and topics for discussion
- Suggested questions appear on the following page; take notes
- Summarize your interviews and send thank you notes
- Repeat the same process for a couple of current students and/or alumni from each program

### Campus Visits

- If feasible, plan to visit your top program(s)
- Set up appointments in advance with the department chair or program director, potential advisors, graduate program director, and students; it is important they know you are coming
- Ensure you are ready to discuss your interests, particularly research interests
- Identify classes/labs you would like to attend and secure permission from the instructor
- Create a schedule and share it with relevant faculty, staff, and students in advance
- Set up appointments with financial aid, housing, and other campus units as appropriate



## Making Contact: Interviewing Potential Advisors

### Alignment between You and Your Potential Advisor

- Explain your current anthropological interests and any overlap with the advisor, noting the advisor's reaction
- Talk about at least one area of research you would like to explore, noting the advisor's reaction
- How did you develop your research interest(s)? What do you find exciting about it?
- How many new graduate students do you take on each year?
- Are students involved in your research? Could I be involved?
- How would you describe your teaching style (e.g., hands-off, collaborative with students)?
- What are key elements of the statement of purpose essay that you look for?
- What are the selection criteria for being admitted to the program? Do you think I meet those criteria?

### Graduate Student Learning

- Can you confirm the coursework expectations and any other requirements for graduate students?
- What do you consider the most valuable aspects of the program for graduate students?
- In this program, how much attention is given to theory? To methods? To practice?
- What skills will I acquire in this program? I am thinking about data analysis, teamwork, verbal communication?
- How much project experience will I get with organizational or community clients?
- How quickly do your students land jobs after graduation? What kinds of jobs?
- Would you send me the names/contact information of a few current students?

### Program Culture

- What aspects of the program's culture appeal to you? What is the best experience you have had here?
- Can you tell me more about the department's activities, labs, resources...?
- How big is the department's entering graduate cohort?
- Do you know the average time it takes to complete a Master's degree? A PhD degree?
- Are there opportunities to be a Teaching Assistant or Research Assistant? What is the selection process like?
- How involved are your alumni with current students? If involved, in what way? If not involved, why not?
- What funding might be available for me?

\*You also may need to ask any unanswered questions after your website review.



## 7. Applying

- Assess your degree of fit with the programs and decide where you will apply.  
**Note application deadlines!**
- If applicable, finalize any visas or permissions
- Arrange for official transcripts, any test scores, and resumes/CVs to be sent to those programs
- Ask at least three individuals to submit letters of recommendation to the programs.
  - Provide a date to submit well in advance of the deadline
  - Follow up to ensure they sent their letters in!
- Prepare the written portions of your application, including a concise statement of purpose.
  - Plan to spend time on these materials
  - Programs typically seek alignment between your interest areas and faculty interests and resources
  - They expect you to identify the research areas and problems that you would like to investigate
  - They also want to understand your “story” and motivation for their program, including why you are interested in their program and why you hope to pursue certain research areas and questions
- Seek advice and editing suggestions on your statement of purpose from faculty you know and/or others familiar with graduate programs
- Submit all required application materials by the deadline
- Clarify timing of program funding decisions

Find universities with anthropology programs:

<https://guide.americananthro.org/39/Degree-Programs>

