

Best Sources to Learn about Graduate Programs

Professors

This is your best source. Professors know you, they know which programs favor students from your school, they know the relative quality of graduate programs in their fields, and they even have personal friends at graduate programs where you might like to apply.

Other Students and Alumni

Students and alumni have similar information. Alumni at graduate programs will give you the most honest information about the quality of the program and the faculty.

Peterson's Guides, also in e-form at www.petersons.com

Peterson's guides have every accredited program in the United States. They're a little dense and boring, but if you want to learn about programs there's no other complete resource. All major university libraries have a full set of Peterson's guides.

Specialty Guides

Find specialty guides for your field, for example, *Graduate Programs in Neurosciences*, by asking professors for reference to them, by using the subject search engine at amazon.com, or by using the subject search engine on CD from *Books in Print*, available from your university bookstore. Some associations also print guides to graduate programs. Find out about them by looking up the association's HQ phone number in the *Encyclopedia of Associations*; then just call them and ask them.

Faculty Scholarly Productivity Index (FSPI)

Released in summary form annually in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, this is one of two high-quality ranking systems (the other is the next listing). It's a bit of a blunt instrument, however, mixing dissimilar programs in some categories.

Research-Doctorate Programs in the United States

This is the best source for unbiased, multivariable analysis of graduate programs. It is the result of a National Research Council-funded study, limited to the top programs in 41 major subject areas. This is a much more sophisticated resource than the "beauty pageant" unilinear, ordinal rankings of business magazines (see below). *New version to be released any moment now; avoid the 1995 rankings which are old, old, old.*

Academic Journals in Your Field

Top students should get grad school ideas directly from the academic journals. The best programs generate the best and the most articles, so look in the journals for writing and/or research that interest you. Then find out where the article writer teaches.

Educational Rankings Annual

A compendium of data from other sources. Expensive, but can be useful. Check library.

The Gourman Report

Another ranking book, with methodologies that are never fully explicated. Can be useful.

The Business Magazine Rankings

Business magazines are in the business of selling business magazines. Their editors usually know less about higher education than they know about automobiles, which is not a lot. These "rankings" are not useful *per se*, but you can get ideas to investigate further.

World Wide Web (www)

Online data are voluminous but shallow, and can be downright misleading (for example, some sites list schools in order of having paid a subscription fee). Always use the Web to investigate schools you're already interested in. Also, watch carefully for information on related labs and institutes, which might interest you more than the main department.

Grad Fairs

One of the only places to meet a lot of graduate professionals quickly, but don't fall in love on the first date! Check out other schools.