

*Human Development and Family Science
North Dakota State University
Information About Graduate School Applications*

Differences Between Undergraduate & Graduate Schools

You mean graduate school is not just like what I've done in my undergraduate program?

*Students frequently begin grad school expecting it to be the same as undergrad. However, this is not the case—while there are similarities there are also important differences. Being prepared for these differences can help you be more successful. Some of these differences are outlined here. It is also a good idea to talk to current graduate students and to your professors.

Key Differences

****Expectations***

-Students are expected to be responsible for their progress through a program. There are a lot of deadlines, forms and requirements. It will be important that you know what these are and keep track of your progress on these.

-Students are expected to do well in their classes and get their work for classes done (and done well).

-Students are also expected to consistently be working on their out-of-class requirements (e.g. thesis or other research). Many major professors see your ability to get this work done without external deadlines as a hallmark of graduate education.

****Types of Learning Experiences***

-Coursework: This is an important component of graduate school. Graduate school is your opportunity to become an expert in an area. Your classes help you meet this goal. They are usually structured considerably differently from undergraduate classes. Graduate classes tend to be more discussion oriented, have considerably heavier workloads (e.g., reading 150

pages a week per class is not uncommon), have a major paper, and essay type exams. Most of your grade will be based on only a few big things. While there are definitely exceptions to this, many of your classes will be like this.

However, coursework is only one way in which you learn during graduate school. Others may include:

- Conducting your own research projects/working with professors on research**
- Reading on your own**
- Clinical Work (if applicable)**
- Assistantship Work (if applicable)**
- Attending and participating in professional conferences**

**Characteristics of Successful Graduate Students*

-Motivated: Graduate school is seen as a privilege, not a right. A student who is accepted to a graduate program should realize that there is often a large amount of competition for these spots. It is also important to recognize that faculty make large investments of time in graduate students. Students show that they are motivated by working hard and seeking out learning opportunities. Students are also expected to be very goal-oriented. They need to be able to identify their own goals and be motivated enough to strive toward them.

-Flexible and Adaptable: You may be asked to do things that are new to you (e.g. design a research study). It is important to not get overwhelmed by these new demands, but to be able to seek out tools you need to help you meet them.

-Creative and Independent Thinkers: Unlike many undergraduate classes, your graduate classes will require you to think deeply and “outside of the box” on many issues. There are often no “right” answers---as researchers, we are always in the process of figuring out what the “best answer based on the current state of knowledge” is. More important than knowing the “right answer” is to be able to think logically and creatively about the information you are encountering, to analyze and be able to defend a position.

-Mature and Professional: Graduate students are expected to be professionals and to demonstrate a great degree of maturity. Being respectful in your interactions with fellow students, with faculty and staff, and with community members you interact with as part of your role as a graduate

student is of critical importance. Part of this maturity is recognizing that you have a great deal to learn.

-Enjoy Learning: You will have the opportunity to learn more than you ever dreamed is possible in an area you (hopefully!) love. Enjoying this process will greatly enrich your graduate education.

*****If you go into it with the right attitude, even though graduate school is a lot of work, it is a LOT of fun!!!*****