

Graduate Study in the United States

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What is Graduate Study?

- Master's Degree: 2 years beyond the four-year Bachelor's degree
 - MA = Master of Arts
 - MS = Master of Science
 - MBA = Master of Business Administration
- Doctoral Degree: 3-5 years beyond the Master's degree
 - PhD = Doctor of Philosophy

Why Study in the USA?

- Quality: Facilities, resources & faculty are considered the best in the world: accreditation systems and strong financial base ensure high standards.
- Recognition: U.S. universities consistently dominate world university rankings.

Why Study in the USA?

- Power: \$55 billion spent annually on research in U.S. universities. The United States accounts for 40% of total world R&D spending and 38% of patented new technology inventions by the industrialized nations of the OECD, employs 37% of OECD researchers, produces 35% of total world publications, 49% of citations, and 63% of highly cited publications, employs 70% of the world's Nobel Prize winners and 66% of its most-cited individuals.

Rand Corp 2008

Why Study in the USA?

Choice: 1,000 universities offer graduate study to 2.86 million graduate and professional students in different types of institutions, academic and social environments. 297,000 international graduate students. 816,000 graduate degrees awarded annually, including 98,000 to internationals. 67,700 PhDs.

Why Study in the USA?

- Flexibility: Design your own program, work collaboratively with other departments and universities, gain practical experience in your field, attend conferences.
- People: Dynamic, respected, and diverse, with high proportion of international students.
- Personal: Leadership, independence, challenge, experience, networking, relationships, communication skills, collaboration, etc.

Change Your Mindset

- Higher Education is an investment of time, money, and energy
- Define and demand what is best for you
- Admissions decisions are through a process of selection, not elimination
- No cut-off scores or cut-off ranks
- Deadlines and requirements are firm (tests, work experience)

Change Your Mindset

- *“The educational system in the United States espouses values of personal responsibility, critical reflection, independent thinking and decision making, assertion of ideas, interactive learning, leadership skills, and diversity.*
- *You will develop these values and skills through lectures, discussions, observations, practical application, experiential learning and computer-based instruction.”*

• Smithee, Greenblatt & Eland, 2004

Differences between Undergrad & Grad Study

- Graduate study is more intense, more focused.
- You have to be committed and more goal-oriented.
- No one will tell you what to do: you must be disciplined and independent.
- A graduate student's job is to expand frontiers and create new knowledge.
- Your supervisor/professor will be very demanding.
- Standards are high: A's are expected.

Which is Better for You?

MASTER'S

- More practical
- More professional
- For those who want to work at a high professional level

DOCTORATE

- More research-oriented
- For those who want to teach in universities and do research
- More funding is available

PhD Programs in the United States

- Coursework of 1-3 years
- Comprehensive Exams (oral, written)
- Dissertation Research Proposal
- Dissertation Research in US or Zimbabwe
- Dissertation Writing and Revisions
- Oral Defense and Corrections

Step 1: Decide on Your Field of Study

- Major fields: Chemistry, History, Business, etc.
- Specializations: Biochemistry, African History, Finance, etc.
- What are your strengths?
- What motivates you?
- What are your passions?
- What are your career and professional goals?
- What do you want to do by 2020?

Step 2: Research

- Use the EducationUSA advising center and the Internet to find the graduate schools that fit your needs.
- Ask yourself:
 - Are they strong in your field and specialization?
 - Is funding available?
 - Are there research and practical opportunities?
 - What are the admission requirements?
 - Will you meet people who will become lifelong associates?

Step 3: Selection of Programs

- Decide on your field and specialization; define your goals and objectives.
- Get an overview of all the programs in your field, using Peterson's 6-volume guide
- Educate yourself: obtain information from your Educational Advisor, use the Internet to identify professors researching your area of interest.

Define Your Criteria

- Quality, reputation
- Competitiveness
- Admission requirements
- Funding availability
- Class demographics
- Living environment
- Opportunities
- Faculty profiles
- Potential supervisors
- Faculty publications
- Research facilities
- Curriculum structure
- Professional accreditation

Who Are You Going to Work With?

- Your professor/supervisor is the most important element of your graduate study.
- Choose your professor before choosing your school.
- Communicate: They should know you before your application reaches them!

Application Components

- Application forms: biodata, etc.
- Curriculum Vitae
- Transcripts
- Statement of Purpose
- Teachers' Recommendations
- Standardized Test Scores
- Certification of Finances

Make Contact with Professors

- Finding a program/advisor through scholarly journals
- Requesting for names/emails of professors who work in your area of research interest
- Writing to professors who are renowned in your field for advice or to those with links to Zimbabwe
- The Dept should already know you before getting your application!

Planning Your Time

- April-August: think, read, research, select schools and programs. Plan your essays and cultivate your recommenders.
- September-December: take GRE/GMAT/TOEFL, write essays, get transcripts and recommendations, fill out applications, and communicate with professors.
- January 1: Complete and mail all applications.
- April-May: Admissions and funding decisions announced.

What Are They Looking For?

- Complete picture of you:
 - Motivation, focus, goals
 - Academic ability
 - Communication skills: reading, writing, speaking
 - Potential for success
 - Personal qualities: readiness for graduate study, self-discipline, work habits, teamwork, independent study, commitment, originality of ideas, maturity, adaptability, initiative

Essay / Statement of Purpose

- To know you and your interests.
- To assess you and your skills beyond the transcript.
- To compare you with other applicants.
- To determine your likelihood of success as a grad student and a professional.
- To give you a chance to spotlight your motivation, character, potential, etc.

Tips on a Good Essay

- Must be clear, concise, specific
- Can substitute for an interview
- Focus on your experiences, conclusions drawn and lessons learned
- Show what you will contribute
- Make your admission compelling
- Neat, original, professional, honest, realistic
- Relevance of your proposal to faculty research areas
- Don't walk alone: use guide books in the advising library and relevant websites

Show Your Personal Side

- Maturity
- Initiative
- Resilience
- Ability to work independently
- Teamwork
- Originality of Ideas
- Motivation
- Assertiveness
- Commitment
- Focus
- Goal-orientation
- Adaptability
- Self-Discipline
- Work Habits

Admissions Committees Look For

“Your personal qualities and contributions — everything about you that makes you who you are — suggests how you see the world and what shaped the perspective you will bring to future classmates.”

~ MBA Admissions Director, Stanford University

Admission Committees Also Look For

- Writing Skills
- Research Experience
- English Mastery, including spoken English
- Evidence of depth and breadth of undergraduate program
- Computer Skills
- Teaching experience
- Knowledge of the program, faculty and their research
- Thorough and up-to-date knowledge of the field of study

Recommendations

- Choose and cultivate them carefully
- Meet with them before requesting recommendation, give them your transcript and statement of purpose to guide them
- Length, level and nature of interaction
- Group with which you are being compared
- Skills assessment: “intellectual vitality”, attitude toward learning, knowledge of field, motivation, work habits, seriousness of purpose, initiative, emotional maturity, teaching/research potential, interactive abilities, ability to handle stress.

Interviews

- Can increase your chances of admission with funding
- Phone
- Skype
- Adobe Connect
- Digital Video Conference (DVC)
- Take the initiative: you'll be glad you did

Funding

- Very competitive, awarded only to top students
- To succeed, you must demonstrate the relevance of your proposal to the professors
- You must research carefully to find the universities that can give you the money you need

Funding Varies by Field

- STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, math): 82% of PhD candidates, 55% of master's candidates are awarded funding
- Humanities, social sciences: 56% of PhD candidates, 41% of master's candidates are awarded funding
- Business (MBA), health, law, communications, and other professions, almost nonexistent: most students funded by loans

Financial Aid Sources

- Fellowships or Tuition Scholarships: awarded by grad school, based on academic merit.
- On-campus jobs: 20 hours/week, low-paying.
- Internships: Off-campus, payment varies, good experience.
- Co-op Programs: Off-campus, full-time, pays well, good experience.

Financial Aid Sources: Assistantships

- Teaching (TA): Awarded by department with concurrence of grad deans. Must demonstrate spoken English and teaching experience.
- Research (RA): Awarded by professors. Contributes to your thesis research.
- Graduate (GA): Awarded by grad school. Administrative, computer work.

Funding Strategies

- Research thoroughly all possible options
- Apply to the programs that have the most funding
- Be prepared to pay for the first semester, so they can see what you can do
- Professors control assistantships: communicate with them and show relevant experience that you can contribute
- Score as high as you can on GRE/GMAT, TOEFL
- The early bird gets the worm: submit completed applications before January 1
- Professional and polished applications
- Apply to at least five programs

Tests

- Don't put the cart before the horse: make your plan before taking tests.
- Tests are important, but not every department requires them, and test scores count about 10% in the admissions process.
- Study hard so that your test score reflects well on you and your university.

Tests: GRE

- Graduate Record Exam:
- 3 sections: Verbal, Quantitative, Analytical Writing Assessment
- Score: 130-170 on objective sections, 1-6 on AWA
- Computer-based (Joberg, Gabarone)
- Paper-based (Harare – limited dates)
- Cost \$190
- Go to www.gre.org for details and study materials

Tests: GMAT

- Graduate Management Admission Test
- 3 sections: Verbal, Quantitative, Analytical Writing Assessment
- Score: 200-800, 1-6 on AWA
- Computer-Based: offered weekly
- Cost \$250
- Study Guides available at Advising Center
- Go to www.mba.com for details

Tests: TOEFL

- Test of English as a Foreign Language
- Some universities will waive TOEFL for students who can demonstrate strong command of English, but high TOEFL score advantageous in competition for funding
- Internet-based: 20 times a year
- Paper-based: 3-4 times a year in Harare
- Cost \$160
- Study guides available online
 - Google: TOEFL "study guide"

Tests: iBT TOEFL

- 4 sections, integrated: speaking, reading, listening, writing
- Score scale 0-120; minimum expected score: 80 (grad students need 100 for funding)
- See www.ets.org/toefl for details

PhD Admissions Process

- Contact departments by email
- Prepare adequately and take required standardized tests (GRE, GMAT, TOEFL)
- Request 3 letters of recommendation
- Request official copies of all university transcripts
- Write strong statement of purpose
- Complete application/assistantship forms
- Get credit card for application fees

\$ Funding \$

- Majority of graduate student funding is from university graduate teaching and research assistantships.
- Rare funding from foundation fellowships (AAUW, Jack Cooke Kent)
- US-gov sponsored Fulbright Programs.
 - <http://www.iie.org/fulbright>

Timeline

- Jan 2014 – June: Research universities
- July-Aug: Request applications and contact professors; Register for standardized tests
- Sept-Dec: Complete application requirements and take standardized tests
- By Jan 1, 2015: Submit completed applications online
- April: Receive acceptance and funding decisions
- May: Notify schools if you are coming
- June-July: Visa, pre-departure preparations
- August 2015: Begin studies

Questions?

Thank you and Best Wishes for Success

Additional Resources:

www.educationusa.info

www.facebook.com/educationusazimbabwe

Twitter: @eduzim