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## Back to the books?

**Recession,  
unemployment,  
frozen salaries –  
is it a good time  
to go to grad  
school?**

**T**here are as many reasons to pursue an advanced degree as there are accredited graduate programs. Perhaps a graduate degree is required for advancement in your profession, or maybe you simply want to increase your understanding of your field. Or perhaps you are just trying to avoid the inevitable 9-to-5 grind.

See GRAD SCHOOL, inside

# GRAD SCHOOL

Continued from cover

Graduate school is an expensive way to avoid working, and not one that is recommended, at least for that reason. But in today's troubled economy, is it a good time to go back to school regardless of your motivation?

Margaret Weber, Ph.D., dean of The Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University, Los Angeles, believes it is.

"Historically, graduate school has always been a popular option during times of economic turmoil,"



**Weber**

Weber says. "The silver lining in a situation like this is that one has the opportunity to reevaluate his or her position, and determine whether the goal is to retool his or her skill set to advance in a current career, provide added value, and assure job security; or to develop a brand new career centered on a lifelong hobby or passion. In the latter case, graduate school is especially useful for getting a foot in the door in an untied field."

Robert S. Sullivan, founding dean of The University of California, San Diego's Rady School of

Management agrees.



**Sullivan**

But experts caution prospective students from jumping into grad school without analyzing how it will affect their career, or if it is even necessary.

"While graduate school might be an option, it also has to be the 'right' or appropriate option for an individual's future career," says Louis Lamorte, Director of Career Services at La Salle University in Philadelphia. "For many careers, a graduate degree is more of a bonus, 'icing on the cake' so to speak. The value-added that a grad degree brings is dependent upon the field or industry, as well as the individual employer or department."

## Do your homework

To help you make your decision on whether or not to go back to school, it is important to do thorough research on your field. Find out whether or not an advanced degree is necessary, or if it is a potential waste of time and money. For example, a graduate degree is not required for most business sales positions, but if a pharmaceutical sales rep is interested in moving into management, then an MBA in management would be beneficial, Lamorte explains.

Potential students should also analyze where they are in their career. "Pursuing an MBA can help those with some functional experience in a business area to step up into management roles. At a later career stage, it can be enormously helpful for managers moving into more senior leadership roles," Sullivan says.

"Graduate school is particularly important and helpful for individuals at the point of career change as well," he says. An example is an engineer who aspires for a management position."

To discover which grad program is in line with your career goals, interview other professionals in your field, especially those who have the kind of position that you want. Find out if they went to grad school, and if so what they studied. These answers will help you decide what is best for you.

Weber advises potential students to contact an admissions manager who can provide counseling on the programs that may best suit for their situation and interests.

"This is important whether one is sure of the field he or she wants to pursue, or if one is simply exploring options," she says.

Sullivan also recommends taking a close look at your interests and asking yourself some important question.

"What are you hoping to gain from an [advanced degree]? What are the most important areas for you to develop and enhance? In what kind of learning environment will you thrive and grow? If you can answer these questions," he says. "You'll be in a good place for looking at programs and completing applications."

If you believe this is the right path, and you have honed in on a particular program or university, be sure to weigh the particular pros and cons.

"One should consider the value of the degree title; education, school affiliation, student, faculty, and alumni network; and experience itself," Weber says. "One should also consider his or her financial and personal commitments, ability to relocate, long-term goals, and trends in the marketplace."

Keep in mind, though, graduate school provides a far different experience than your undergrad education. It allows you to network with others in your profession, which is priceless for most employees.

"Graduate school provides a platform for students to network as colleagues," Weber says. "Students have often already had some professional experience, and so everyone has something individual to bring to the table."

"In [Pepperdine's] programs, students can work alongside their professors as partners in research, and can collaborate on projects that extend beyond the classroom," she asserts. "Ultimately, graduate school is as much about building relationships as it is about building knowledge."

—Valerie Anderson, Tribune Media Services

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