

What You Need to Know About Applying to Graduate School: The Difference Between the Grad and Undergrad Experience

“As an undergraduate, you learn what is already known.
As a graduate student, you will learn to create new
knowledge through the research that you conduct.”

Blogger Bug Girl, on ‘Bug Girl’s Blog’
<http://membracid.wordpress.com/2011/06/26/choosing-a-graduate-program-and-advisor/>

They pay you. In the STEM disciplines, the vast majority of students receive full tuition support plus a stipend from one or multiple funding sources such as teaching assistant or research assistant positions or fellowships. Many fellowships offer stipends in the range of \$30,000 per year.

Your focus will be on research. As an undergraduate, your focus was completing coursework and exams. As a graduate student, you will complete a certain amount of coursework, but your primary focus will be on your own (thesis or dissertation) research project.

You are expected to identify a faculty advisor. Part of the graduate application process is identifying a faculty member whose research interests you, and with whom you would like to work. This faculty member will be your sponsor or advocate during the application process. Although you can switch advisors once you actually enroll, it is not advisable to apply to a program “blind” without having contacted some potential advisors in the department, or without feeling that there are at least a couple of faculty members that you feel are a good match for you.

Class size. As an undergraduate, your classes may have been primarily large lectures. As a graduate student, your classes will likely be small seminars often with discussion and group work.

Independence. As an undergraduate, your schedule may have been dominated by class time. As a graduate student much of your time will be unstructured and it will be up to you to pace yourself, create internal deadlines, complete necessary tasks and initiate communication with your faculty advisor and mentors. Similarly, you will be expected to actively ask for help and seek out support resources when you need them. You are your own best advocate in graduate school!

For more information visit www.pathwaystoscience.org or contact the Institute for Broadening Participation at contactus@ibparticipation.org.

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