

# BEST SOURCES TO LEARN ABOUT GRADUATE PROGRAMS

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## **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, in the reference area of the library, and abbreviated at [www.petersons.com](http://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. Most students just use the online version.

## **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 grad programs.

## **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.

## **National Research Council data on Doctoral Programs (2011 release of 2005 data)**

This study was highly controversial in terms of methodology, and the authors disavowed themselves of their own data, but released them anyway. Then, in spite of the fact that NRC said the data could not be used to create ordinal rankings, phds.org did so anyway. I think it is better than the alternatives, and a decent place to start building a list. See phds.org or a related data product, *A Data-Based Assessment of Research-Doctorate Programs in the United States*.

## **Faculty Scholarly Productivity Index (FSPI)**

Released in summary form a few years ago in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, this analysis is (apparently) no longer being conducted, rendering it pretty useless to prospective students.

## **Educational Rankings Annual**

An occasionally released compendium of other rankings, from the sublime to the ridiculous. Just as an interesting trivia item, it does not come out annually.

## **The University of Illinois Library – Grad School Rankings Page**

<http://www.library.illinois.edu/edx/rankings/rankgrad.html>

## **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 precise, but you can get ideas to investigate further. US News & World Report is the most widely cited ranking system, but is known to have a flawed methodology.

## **Online Searches**

Online data are voluminous but shallow, and can be downright misleading (for example, some portals list schools in order of having paid a subscription fee). Always go online 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.

Adapted from *Graduate Admissions Essays* by Donald Asher (Ten Speed Press)