

What kind of DOCTOR will you be?

inspire

Getting a Ph.D. is more than just a few years in school. It has a real impact on the lives of real people. From the first years of your intellectual enrichment, to writing a dissertation that changes our understanding of how nature works, to teaching and researching what matters to you, becoming a doctor means you can actively shape the future. This brochure contains answers to some frequently asked questions about graduate school and important information and links to look into if you are interested in pursuing a Ph.D.

"In graduate school, I have the opportunity to explore my professional interests, to make real contributions to science, and to have a flexible lifestyle.

— Beverly Flood,
Ph.D. Candidate in Marine Biology



WHY GRADUATE SCHOOL?

Though you may be a freshman or sophomore, you're likely thinking already about what you'll do after you graduate from USC. While options like law school, business school, or medical school may sound familiar, a possibility you may not have thought about is earning a Ph.D. Perhaps you've taken a course that you really loved, worked on a research project that sparked your interest, or would like to make a career of studying and teaching in a field of your choice – if so, earning a doctorate degree may be for you.

What kind of EXPERIENCE will you have?

community



No matter what your professional goals and research interests, there is likely to be a group of like-minded intellectuals with whom you can share your thoughts.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

Graduate schools want you to take your time, but they also want you to start your career. Most programs take about 5-7 years.

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT EACH YEAR?

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| 1ST | The primary focus for most students is finding out what you want to study. In some fields, you will perform a series of laboratory rotations to determine the area of research you find most interesting. |
| 2ND | You will take courses, perform research, and work with your advisor to develop your dissertation project. |
| 3RD | You will take your qualifying examination no later than this year, and almost all of your time will be devoted to research on your dissertation topic. |
| 4TH | Throughout your graduate career, you will attend local, national, and international scientific meetings. As you continue to do research, you will likely be presenting your work at these conferences, and writing up your work for publication in peer-reviewed journals. |
| 5TH | By this time, you've taught a few classes, published some of your research, and are writing your dissertation. You're almost done and you're ready to explore the job and postdoctoral fellowship market. |

What kind of OPPORTUNITIES will be available?

explore

WHAT DO PEOPLE STUDY IN GRAD SCHOOL?

If you're wondering what sorts of things people study in graduate school, here are some sample dissertation topics from current USC graduate students in the natural sciences:

- *Breathing rocks: the influence of bacteria on mineral formation.* Earth Sciences
- *Improved thermodynamics of dense solar plasma.* Physics and Astronomy
- *The relationship between nitrogen fixation and the phosphorous cycle.* Marine Environmental Biology
- *Using chemical probes to image biological processes.* Chemistry
- *Stochastic equations in geophysical fluid dynamics.* Mathematics
- *Neurophysiological mechanism predictive of adolescents' addictive behaviors.* Neuroscience

HOW WILL I PAY FOR GRAD SCHOOL?

Many prospective Ph.D. students are unaware that **graduate school pays!** Graduate school will be your life's work for 5-7 years, and you can earn a salary as a graduate student. Most doctoral programs offer competitive funding packages that cover the cost of tuition as well as provide students a stipend for living expenses while in graduate school. These funding packages commonly consist of fellowships, teaching assistantships, and/or research assistantships, which enable you to both pay for graduate school and make a living as a grad student. Additionally, most include health care!

You can also apply for fellowships and other outside funding. There are a number of national fellowships geared towards graduate students from underrepresented groups. For a listing of these programs, visit www.usc.edu/schools/GraduateSchool/fellowships.html.