



The College at Brockport
State University of New York

101 Rakov Center
350 New Campus Drive
Brockport, NY 14420

(585) 395 2159
career@brockport.edu
brockport.edu/career

How Is Graduate School Different From College?

Many students apply to graduate school without really understanding how it differs from their years as an undergraduate. This lack of insight can be costly. Below we describe the main differences between undergraduate and graduate school. Use this to help you decide if graduate school is right for you.

If you have already decided upon graduate school, this chart will provide you with valuable tips to help you make a smooth transition.

Admissions

Undergraduate: Academic achievement is one of the main qualifications for admission.

Graduate: Getting into any graduate school depends on a lot more than just indicators of academic ability (e.g. experiences related to major, past indicators that you will be successful and productive).

Coursework

Undergraduate: Many courses outside the field are required as general education requirements. Undergraduate degrees (especially liberal arts degrees) usually emphasize a broad education in a variety of fields. Classes are the sole means of evaluation for graduation.

Graduate: You complete an in-depth study/specialization of one field. The primary means of evaluation for graduation is a research project, thesis, dissertation, public presentation, teaching experience, or a comprehensive exam.

Research

Undergraduate: You may have the opportunity to participate in some research, but the scope of the project tends to be limited and does not necessarily involve making a real contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

Graduate: Especially at the doctoral level, you are required to contribute an original piece of research that adds to the existing knowledge in a particular area of interest within your academic discipline.

Class Size

- Undergraduate: Most courses at large colleges/universities are very large; with senior-level undergraduate class sizes typically exceed 30 students. Nearly all classes will be based on lectures and textbooks. Involvement with faculty is largely at the initiation of you.
- Graduate: Many courses are small; with nearly all of them are seminars. Involvement with faculty is direct and extensive.

Grade Point Average

- Undergraduate: Students may remain enrolled and continue progress on their degree even if GPA falls below a 3.0.
- Graduate: Minimum GPA for continuing enrollment is a 3.0.

Interpersonal Relationships

- Undergraduate: Many undergraduate students may feel more or less anonymous among the crowd, without ever having significant contact with any of their professors.
- Graduate: You will likely work closely with others (professors and peers) over the course of several years. In many cases, your overall success will depend on how good you are at working with others and being part of a team.

Finances

- Undergraduate: Students finance their own education.
- Graduate: Students can receive tuition support and stipends or apply for graduate assistantships or fellowships that pay all or most of the cost of their education.

Accomplishments

- Undergraduate: Students are expected to work independently and produce high quality results, as measured by a GPA.
- Graduate: Students are expected to work independently and produce high quality results, as measured by research, publication, and presentations judged by faculty and peers.

Learning

- Undergraduate: You learn what is already known (*consumer* of knowledge).
- Graduate: You learn to create new knowledge (*producer* of knowledge).



Level of Stress

Undergraduate: The emphasis is on knowing the answers, and getting answers right on tests. This makes the level of stress not as high since you can find the answers if you prepare and study.

Graduate: You don't know the answers, no one knows the answers. To a student that's been trained for 4 years as an undergraduate to regurgitate the "right answer" on exams, this transition to not knowing can be really difficult.

Time Commitment

Undergraduate: Undergraduate school is considered "school."

Graduate: Graduate school is considered a full-time job. Most graduate programs require that you take initiative for your learning and demonstrate commitment to your career.

