CHOOSE A PROGRAM

Like any important decision, selecting a graduate program is often complex. If possible, START EARLY to give yourself a year or more to explore and choose.

Identify and research various programs
The following resources will help you identify and sort schools by discipline, region, and program type:

- Peterson’s Guides to Graduate Study (www.petersons.com/graduate)
- The Chronicle Four-Year College Databook
- The Official GRE/CGS Directory of Graduate Programs
- www.gradschools.com
- www.graduateguide.com
- Contact the programs directly for materials/bulletins/catalogs that describe the department and courses in more detail

How to evaluate a program
There is a lot of press in the media about graduate school rankings and how critical it is to be accepted into “top-tier” schools; however, depending on your disciplinary area, goals, and interests, how the school ranks should only be one component of evaluation. Most Occidental students who perform competently should be able to find a quality graduate degree program that is comparable to his or her accomplishments. Ranking takes into consideration endowment, quality of faculty, institutional size, and locale, while your own personal evaluation should include intellectual fit, geographic preference, institutional culture, and access to employment and academic opportunities post graduation. The kind of information you will need to determine the quality or characteristics of the program may or may not be in print. Often visiting a program is the only way to acquire the information you will need.

- Consult resources that review/evaluate programs. Many of these resources are available in both print and electronic formats. Some you might want to consult are:
  - The Gourman Reports
  - National Research Council Research–Doctorate Program Rankings
  - U.S. News and World Report Graduate School Rankings
o Ask your professors and advisors what they think about the programs you are interested in

- **What is the culture of the program?** Is it research or application centered? Are the faculty members active in their field and do they involve students in their professional endeavors (research or application)? How do faculty, staff and students get along with one another? The best way to ascertain answers to questions like these is to visit the campus, speak with both faculty and students, sit in on classes, and observe.

- **What is the quality of the program?** Do some reading in your field. What are the current issues and who is writing about them? Are the programs you are considering active in these areas? Information might include whether the department is accredited by an appropriate entity, if faculty are publishing in your area of interest, and are any of the faculty recognized as members of distinction in their field.

- **How do your qualifications compare with those who are usually admitted?** In other words, what are your chances of being admitted?

- **Cost of the degree?** How much will the degree cost and what forms of assistance are available? Are there assistantships, fellowships, or other forms of institutional awards available that would help meet your expenses?

- **Licensure and certification.** If you are seeking to enter a field where licensure or certification is required or desirable, will completion of the program meet the necessary educational requirements?

- **What are the institutional career resources?** Does the school have a career center? How well does the career center or academic faculty assist you in identifying experiential learning opportunities during the program as well as post degree employment? How and where are recent graduates employed? If you choose to study in a state which is different from where you intend to work, can your institution introduce you to resources or alumni in your ultimate state of interest?

- **Other features of the program that may be important.** This will depend a lot on your situation, but may include length of the program, time classes are offered, size of the entering class, actual class size, and if the program requires a comprehensive examination or thesis/dissertation.