

Graduate School, Professional School, Masters & PhDs

“Graduate school” refers to a wide range of post-bachelor’s degree credential opportunities. To properly consider your options it is useful to have a sense of the variations. The most basic distinction: a bachelors is a first degree, masters is a second, and doctorate is a third degree.

“Professional School” traditionally refers to law, medical fields, education, management (MBA), but can also include policy, divinity, architecture, engineering, library/information, and social work. These are defined in terms of their being a **profession** – a word that has a specific meaning : an occupation that depends on prolonged training, formal qualifications, licensure and/or a body of self-regulating practitioners.

MDIV
MBA MArch
MPP MSW
MIS

Another set of post-graduate programs would fall under the broad **MFA** category of pure and applied arts – art, design, dance, music – where you can get degrees in either performance or teaching.

Alongside these are programs where you can get a masters degree in fields where there are also bachelor’s degrees. Sometimes these are “applied” as in applied sociology. This would usually mean you were learning skills that can be used OUTSIDE the academic pursuit of sociology and the focus is on using research, not doing "pure" research. That distinction is important because you might be doing applied research.

All of the above are potentially TERMINAL degrees which means they are the highest degree you would get on a given track.

In addition to terminal masters there are masters degrees that one gets **MA**, prior to a PhD. Sometimes these are “in course” meaning you are **MSc**, awarded the masters degree when you complete the first part of **MPhil** the doctorate requirements. Other times one might finish a masters at one institution and then pursue a PhD at another institution (or even in another field sometimes).

A doctoral degree – PhD (= philosophy doctor) is the terminal degree for research-oriented fields. It’s the degree you need if you want to be a professor or the lead researcher (called principal investigator) on scientific studies in either academia or industry.

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The doctorate in education is called an EDD. The research degree in ministry is a Doctor of Divinity. You can be a preacher or chaplain with an MDIV (master of divinity), but to teach at a div school you might need a DDIV.

Joint degrees are where you study for two degrees at the same time, usually at the same institution. Common examples are MBA/MPP like we have at Mills, JD/PhD in many fields (usually required to teach at a law school), MBA/PhD (same if you want to teach in a business school).

A note about LAW. The 3 year law degree in the U.S., a JD, *juris doctorate*, is a terminal degree. There is also a 1 or 2 year degree called a Master of Laws (LL.M.) that is considered a second degree in law. It is mostly taken by people who have a law degree from outside the US.

There are, in addition to graduate degrees, numerous kinds of credentials and training – for example, in accounting- that one might pursue post BA.