

Should you go to Grad School?

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Dave Pitman – Masters in Comp Sci
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This is going to be a Q&A with the panel:

Other Fields Peers went into:

Law

Ultra Runner

Don't go to grad school because that is the next step, make sure you want to go....

Q: How to pick a focus, what to apply for, or can you switch your focus?

C: I didn't get into grad school my first time, I took time off, I knew I wanted to do astronomy but wasn't sure what focus, and changed my focus a lot, it was easy to change

D: Your master's program should be there to help you decide your focus, you should work on 3-4 different projects, but don't go in completely open ended – make sure you want to go – it's not glamorous

Q: BS/MS program?

D: BS/MS is a really great option if you want to go into industry – you do a lot of interesting projects

Q: Can you go from a Master's program to a PhD program?

D: It depends on the program, some schools want you to start from scratch in their program

C: at CU some of the classes transfer but usually you would need an extra year to complete the PhD program

E: Some places will take one year off the 2-yr pre-thesis portion of the program

Q: Does BS/MS help in applications for PhD programs?

D: It couldn't hurt – there are a lot of people who go to grad school and are wild cards, it would show potential advisors that you have been in grad classes previously and can handle it – so it could only help

Q: PhD vs Masters in careers?

D: Something like Comp Sci – it's not applicable in industry – My research advisor was pre-tenure so I would have been working towards her tenure and I thought I had a minor role in my research, so it was a career choice not to get a PhD

E: People always have different stories about advisors – people will leave or change advisors because they don't like the one they were paired with

C: Choosing an advisor is more important than choosing a school

Q: Is it difficult to change advisors?

C: Advisors and advisees have responsibilities – if you change advisors it may set you back some time

D: My research straddled 3 different depts. And so I couldn't really change advisors – in engineering you pick your advisor earlier on

Q: What careers would you get a PhD vs Master's for?

C: It depends on the field – engineers can do anything on any level – Astronomers pretty much need a PhD

D: There is more \$ with higher degrees and more knowledge on a very specific topic- master's students get jobs but often aren't recognized as knowing specifics

E: If you want to work in industry a PhD might equal lost time (lost \$), some people in industry require PhD's, some industry positions don't require PhD's so PhD's aren't hired for those positions

D: PI positions require PhD's but you may be managing instead of researching in those positions

Q: Time – is age a factor?

C: I was 30 when I got a PhD it didn't matter - now I am having trouble finding a Prof position since I have been a Post Doc for so long

D: Older students are more efficient and life experience only adds it doesn't take away anything

E: Older students tend to thrive in grad school

C: You probably have more of an idea of what you want to do – for everyone else: this is the last chance you have to go somewhere or take time off

Q: What if you do take time off?

E: if you are finishing college and want to take time off – apply first when you have taken the GRE(s) and defer for a year or however long that particular program allows, you could also teach or work in industry so you don't forget everything

C: Make sure you keep in touch with people who can write you referrals if you take time off

D: I taught myself different fields related to Comp Sci while I took a couple years off

E: If you find what you are doing in your time off is more appealing – do that instead of going back to school

Q: Practical Skills vs Master's?

C: My understanding is that the higher up you go the less hands on you get

Q: Do grad schools cost money?

E: Grad schools in STEM – you get paid to go – they give you a tuition waiver and pay you a stipend, the amount of the stipend depends on where you go

Q: Back up plans?

C: getting out of a PhD is easy, most master's programs should be easy to continue on to a PhD

D: Bad ideas to leave: (1) for a 3 yr program don't leave between yrs 2-3, (2) for a a PhD program don't leave between yrs 4-5

E: Leaving my reflect badly on applications

Q: Astro track here – can I go to grad school?

There are astro programs that do not require the Phys GRE (Denver University for one), but the GRE score isn't everything, take the GRE and if you do poorly don't send the score in to the school