

# Graduate vs. Undergraduate – What's The Difference?

When discussing advanced education there are two terms you will often hear, graduate degree and undergraduate degree. Understanding the difference between the two is important, particularly to ensure you apply to the right program or school when the time comes.

## Undergraduate

Undergraduate degrees are far more common than graduate degrees and refer to the four-year programs that most people attending a college or university are enrolled in. A pre-requisite to undergraduate programs is having completed secondary education already, with the ultimate outcome of the program being to receive a bachelor's degree.

As part of an undergraduate degree, there are often many course requirements outside the specific scope of study that a student is enrolled in. A business student may be required to take philosophy or math classes in their undergraduate degree in order to provide some more general education in addition to the focus of the degree.

Courses in most undergraduate programs are fairly large (especially in the first years and breadth courses) with as many as several hundred students being in a single course. This typically means very little one-on-one time with professors and students spending most of their time interacting or asking questions of teaching assistants (who are often in a related graduate program).

## Graduate

A graduate degree is less common and in some fields (i.e. accounting) it is almost unheard of as pursuing a professional designation is the next step after completing your undergraduate degree. Graduate

programs vary in length depending on the nature of the program and the outcome expected (i.e. a master's degree or a doctorate), varying from less than a year to several years of additional study and coursework. Executive MBAs are business graduate degrees and often require less than a year to complete with actual coursework packed into several condensed weeks.

A pre-requisite to a graduate degree is having an undergraduate degree already, with the ultimate outcome of the program being a master's or doctorate degree. Enrollment in graduate courses is smaller and provides students with far more one on one time with actual professors and experts in the field of study. Often as part of a master's or doctorate program a student will also have to conduct some form of research or write a report on a concept and further advance research and knowledge in the specific area of expertise their degree is in.

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So for many the decision doesn't come down to pursuing a graduate vs. an undergraduate degree but whether they want to pursue a graduate degree after completing an undergraduate one. In many fields pursuing a graduate degree is very important in terms of the ability to advance or get better work opportunities. This isn't always the case, though, so it's important to look into the specific field of study. While in many fields a graduate degree will result in a higher-paying job, this isn't always the case, particularly if the job would value the extra years of work experience obtained instead of the extra years in school.