

Considering Graduate School?

What are the main differences between graduate programs and undergraduate programs?

Most students report that the first difference they notice is that there is no General Education component to graduate programs. All of the courses focus on the student's major field. Another important difference is the expectation for achievement. Undergraduate students are in good standing so long as they maintain a C average. Graduate students must maintain at least a B average to remain in good standing.

How long does it take to earn a master's degree?

On average, 2 academic years. Master's programs average approximately 36 credit hours. 9 hours (usually three classes) is considered a full-time schedule. Some students who take more than 9 hours and/or also take summer school courses have finished in a year and a half. Most programs are also available to part-time students, who take however many courses fit their schedule. Students are permitted to take up to 6 years to complete the degree, and under some circumstances that time may be extended. The Master of Fine Arts programs and some others that include substantial internship or practicum requirements usually take longer. The university also offers Integrated Bachelor's/ Master's programs in some fields, in which students can earn both degrees in 5 years. For specific information about the program that interests you, see the catalog, call or e-mail the Graduate Coordinator of that program.

How long does it take to earn a doctorate?

On average, 6 academic years. Doctoral degrees typically begin with two years of coursework beyond the master's. After that, students research and write a dissertation. That stage varies in length from discipline to discipline and from student to student. In some fields students begin doctoral coursework immediately after the bachelor's degree, without earning a master's first, and in others students complete some form of professional practice rather than writing a dissertation. For specific information about the program that interests you, see the catalog, call or e-mail the Graduate Coordinator of that program.

What is a certificate? Will I be classified as a degree student if I am in a certificate program?

A certificate recognizes completion of a set of courses in a particular specialty, but does not constitute a degree. Certificate students in most areas do not participate in commencement.

Do all graduate programs require the Graduate Record exam (GRE)?

No. Some programs require the GRE, some use other standardized tests such as the GMAT, and some do not require any standardized test score for admission. For those programs that do require test scores, that score is only one component of the application package, and is weighed in the context of undergraduate coursework and GPA, letters of recommendation, and work experience. See the Graduate Catalog for admission requirements for the program that interests you.

What does it cost to go to Graduate School?

Below are the university's estimates of yearly costs. To help put the chart in perspective, keep in mind that you will incur some of these costs (housing, food, miscellaneous) whether or not you attend a university. In addition, the university may be able to assist you with a significant part of your educational expenses.

Many graduate students at Illinois State receive some form of financial assistance. Graduate assistants (GAs) who work in a department or university office receive free tuition as well as a monthly check to assist with their expenses. Stipend amounts vary, but average \$800 for master's students, \$1,000 for doctoral students in their first two years, and \$1,200 for doctoral students in years three and up. The university also provides a number of graduate tuition waivers not attached to assistantships. The Financial Aid office has information about other campus jobs, loans and scholarship programs. If you already have student loans in many cases your payments can be deferred until you finish graduate school. If you plan to work while attending graduate school, ask your employer about tuition or other education benefits. Many employers are willing to reimburse some or all of the costs of graduate courses that are related to the employee's job.

Graduate education is an excellent investment in economic terms as well as in professional and personal satisfaction. The US Census Bureau estimates that over their working lifetimes master's degree holders will earn on average \$400,000 more than workers with a bachelor's. Doctoral degree holders will earn on average \$1.1 million more than those with bachelor's, or \$700,000 more than those with master's.

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/educ-attn.html>

Illinois residents: 2008-09 academic year

Tuition and Fees	\$5,081
Room and Board (estimated)	\$6,694
Books and supplies (estimated)	\$933
Transportation (estimated)	\$2,063
Miscellaneous* (estimated)	\$2,542
Average yearly budget including estimated expenses (resident)	\$17,313

Out-of-State: 2008-09 academic year

Tuition and Fees	\$9,041
Room and Board (estimated)	\$6,694
Books and supplies (estimated)	\$933
Transportation (estimated)	\$2,063
Miscellaneous* (estimated)	\$2,542

Average yearly budget including estimated expenses (non-resident) \$21,274

* miscellaneous expenses include telephone, personal hygiene, recreation, laundry, and other household costs.

I would like to go to Graduate School. Where do I start?

Begin by reading the information on the program that interests you in the Graduate Catalog. Next, contact the Graduate Coordinator of that program to talk over your plans. Check the Admission deadlines and fill out the graduate admission application online. Be certain that you can arrange to take any required tests and have the scores sent to Illinois State before the deadline for receipt of materials. If your program requires letters of recommendation or other items, arrange to have those sent as well. If you are interested in Financial Aid, contact that office. To apply for an assistantship, go to www.jobs.ilstu.edu.

Is there any way to take graduate classes without being admitted to a program?

You may be able to take courses as a Student-at-Large. Be certain to read the rules carefully and talk over the pros and cons with the Graduate Coordinator of the program to which you plan to apply. Not all courses are open to at-large students, and there is no guarantee that courses taken in at-large status will be accepted toward program requirements if you are later admitted. Students at large are not degree students and are ineligible for most forms of financial aid.