

## Introduction to University: Lecture Four

### **Graduate school**

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Just before you have finished your BA (Honours) or BSc (Honours), you may apply to graduate school. After your Bachelor's, you will do your Masters. You will do an MA (Master of Arts) or an MSc or (Master of Science) or an MBA (Master of Business Administration) or an MFA (Master of Fine Arts). After that, if you wish and you qualify, you will do your PhD (Doctor of Philosophy).

You apply to a graduate school early in the second semester of your fourth year if you wish to begin graduate studies in the coming September. Many programmes have application deadlines as early as February, though some accept applications until April or May. Deadlines for some scholarship applications are even earlier than that, in the preceding November.

Almost without exception, only students who have an honours bachelor's are eligible to apply for graduate school. (This is one difference between graduate school and professional schools.)

Typically, a Master's programme is one year long (the full twelve months), though some schools have a two-year programme. Programmes differ school to school and among disciplines. But usually a Master's programme consists of three or four half-credit courses first semester, three or four half-credit courses second semester, and a thesis written over the summer.

All of your courses are in the discipline in which you are doing your Master's. That is, if you are studying for a Master's in geography, the six or eight half-credits you must earn will all be in geography; if you are studying for a Master's in philosophy, they will all be in philosophy.

Schools that have large graduate programmes are able to offer graduate courses separate from their regular, undergraduate courses. If you go to the University of Toronto to study philosophy, for instance, your courses will be for graduate students only. You will be in classes with between ten and twenty other philosophy graduate students.

At most universities and in most disciplines, however, your graduate courses will run concurrently with upper-level undergraduate courses. You will be with only two or three other graduate students in a class of mainly undergraduate students. The Master's students in such classes will write more or longer papers than the undergraduates and be evaluated against higher standards.

A Master's thesis is to be between 40 and 80 pages. Some universities impose a strict maximum page limit, to make sure thesis writers don't bite off too much. A Master's thesis is written under the supervision of one, sometimes two, professors.

When you have completed your Master's thesis, you submit it to your supervisor. When your supervisor thinks it is good enough, she or he will forward copies to two other professors, one from your university and one from outside your university. Your supervisor and the two other professors become your thesis committee. You will have had some say (or at least a veto) on who is to be on your committee. All three evaluators must judge the thesis worthy for it to pass. One or another evaluator might request revisions before she passes it.

At some universities, students simply submit their Master's theses and then wait to hear from their supervisor what the other readers think. Most universities, though, have Master's candidates defend their theses. Thesis defences are often public, meaning anyone can attend.

A thesis defence usually begins with the candidate describing his or her work and his or her main conclusions. Then each examiner asks questions and engages the candidate in discussion. Often after the examiners are finished, audience members are invited to ask questions and engage the candidate in discussion. Then the committee retires to determine its verdict.

Rarely is a Master's thesis failed. This is because the supervisor will not let a thesis go to the thesis committee unless she or he is fully satisfied it will pass.

The party a candidate's friends throw for her after she successfully defends her thesis is a marvel to behold!

Having successfully defended her thesis, the candidate is awarded the degree of Master of Arts by her university at its next convocation.

Doing a Master's is a very intense experience. Success in a Master's programme takes a high level of maturity and commitment, a level of maturity and commitment even higher than needed for success in a Bachelor's programme. This is especially true if you begin your Master's away from home for the first time. Yet for those who are mature and committed, the year doing a Master's can be one of the most wonderful and joyous times of their lives.

And then, perhaps, doctoral studies. In brief, a doctoral programme consists in something like (there are variations school to school and discipline to discipline) four half-credit courses in the student's discipline, two half-credit courses in another discipline, basic competence in reading a language other than English, comprehensive examinations or area examinations, and a doctoral thesis, usually between one- and two-hundred pages long.

Doctoral programmes are, officially, four years in length. Most students, though, will take five or six years to complete their doctorate, although a rare speedy student will finish in fewer than four years.

People who have earned a doctorate are invariably so scared of the real world that they immediately try to get hired as a professor somewhere.