



Is a Grad Degree Right for Me? A Pre-Medical Student's Perspective

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***Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this article reflect my own, not those of medical or graduate schools and admissions committees in Canada. It is recommended that you reach out to your respective graduate or medical school directly to obtain the most accurate, up-to-date information.*

Should I pursue a graduate program as a back-up plan to medical school? What types of programs should I apply to? How do I choose a program that's a good fit for me? Hopefully this guide will help to provide you with insight into some things you can consider when deciding if a graduate program is right for you and your pre-med journey!

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1) Your Medical School Timeline

It's important to think about when you want to apply to medical school and how this timeline fits in with your graduate degree. For example, if you are beginning a two-year program, this **limits the number of schools you can apply to in Canada** for the current cycle; however, there are **still some schools who will welcome your application**. If you do not want to limit your options, perhaps you may consider only applying to one-year course-based graduate programs, such as those offered at the University of Guelph, Western, and Queen's.



2) Finding the Right Fit

Arguably one of the most important things to consider is what your **academic interests** are, how you work best, and what type of **graduate supervisor** (if applicable) would best align with your personality and academic goals. When interviewing with potential graduate supervisors, it is very important to also get to know them and their lab values to see if you would work well together. After all, you want to enjoy your program and find it rewarding!

Here are some things you may want to ask yourself:

- What courses did I enjoy in undergrad and what do I want to learn more about?
- If applicable, what does my ideal supervisor look like? Consider both personal and academic qualities. For example, is it important for you to work with someone who is heavily involved with their students' learning, or do you prefer a hands-off advisor? What are your supervisor's lab goals and do they align with yours (e.g. some labs publish more frequently than others)?

Here are questions you could ask a potential supervisor:

- How would you describe your supervisory style?
- What is your lab dynamic like and who else is currently working in the lab?
- What qualities are you looking for in graduate students?

3) Your Goals for the Graduate Program

What are you hoping to get out of the graduate degree to help with your medical school application? Any goals are valid, but they can direct you to different types of programs. For example, a research-intensive stream may be a better fit if you're looking to hammer out publications and earn research-related scholarships/awards. For example, prestigious awards like the Canada Graduate Scholarship (CGS-M) require you to be enrolled in a research-intensive program. However, if you're looking to advance your knowledge in a certain area, or perhaps be pooled into a graduate stream for medical school admissions as early as possible (*school dependent), perhaps a quicker, course-based program is right for you.

4) Your Medical School Back-up Plan

What is your plan B if medical school doesn't work out? Perhaps a graduate degree could help kickstart this back-up plan for you, as you continue to pursue medical school (why not kill two birds with one stone?). For example, if you're also interested in knowledge translation or student affairs, you could explore M.Ed. programs. Additionally, if you're interested in pursuing a career in academia, perhaps a research-intensive Master's level program would be a better fit than a course-based one.

5) Keep your Sup in the Loop!

My last tip, regardless of the program you choose, is to keep your sup(ervisor) in the loop! I think it's incredibly important to have a conversation with your graduate supervisor before beginning the program to let them know of your intentions to apply to medical school, especially if you are intending to apply mid-degree. They are dedicating their time and energy into helping you succeed in graduate school, so I've learned that transparency is key to a healthy working relationship.



Appendix:

Here is a quick summary of a few things I mentioned above, woven into a Decision Tree, to help you think about course vs research based graduate degrees as a pre-medical student.

