The Graduate School Glossary

M.S. - A graduate degree (formally, Master of Science) requiring about 2 years beyond the B.S. or B.A. Some institutions may also offer a M.A (Master of Art) degree. Thesis or non-thesis options may be available.

Ph.D. - A graduate degree (formally, Doctor of Philosophy) requiring about 5 years work beyond the B.S. or B.A. Often a M.S. can be earned "on the way." Requires completion of an original research project, a written thesis, and an oral thesis defense.

M.D. - A graduate degree in medicine, usually requiring about 3 years of work beyond the B.S. or B.A. Required for the practice of medicine.

GRE - Graduate Record Examination. A national exam (operated by the same folks who do the SAT) often required for admission to graduate school. The general test consists of verbal, analytical, and quantitative parts. An advanced subject test is offered in most fields. Some schools may require only the general test, others may require both general and advanced, and some may require neither.

Qualifying examination - (called "quals"; sometimes known as the comprehensive examination or "comps") A comprehensive examination, often consisting of both written and oral components, generally taken in the second or third year of graduate study and required for formal admission into Ph.D. candidacy. The exam is usually based on the core subjects in the discipline.

Research adviser (also known as "major professor") - The faculty member who supervises the research of a M.S. or Ph.D student, selects the research project, provides the facilities and the funding, advises in the preparation of the thesis, and chairs the thesis examination committee. The research adviser is selected by the grad student based on interest in research program.

Thesis (also known as dissertation) – A comprehensive written description of the research project and its context in the field; typically 100-200 pages for the Ph.D.

Thesis defense – An oral examination in which the student describes the thesis project and responds to questions from a committee of faculty, usually chaired by the research adviser.

Postdoc (formally, “postdoctoral research associate”) - A temporary research position (usually 2 years) in a university, government, or industrial laboratory, taken immediately following the Ph.D. Faculty positions at research universities usually require postdoctoral experience; positions at undergraduate colleges usually do not.

Teaching assistantship (known as “TA”; sometimes also “teaching fellow”) – A form of financial aid for graduate students, typically paying $1850- 2000 per month requiring 15-20 hours per week of work, usually in teaching undergraduate labs or grading papers. Often includes a waiver of tuition.

Research assistantship (known as “RA”) – A form of financial aid to graduate students involving research in a faculty member’s lab, usually the same faculty member who serves as the research adviser. RA salaries are usually paid by the research adviser’s grant. Typically salaries are $1850- 2000 per month; usually a tuition waiver is included.