

Thinking about pursuing a Ph.D.? Some Questions and Answers

Why a Ph.D.?

If you plan to go into academia, a Ph.D. is a must for a tenure track or full-time position. A Ph.D. can also help you advance in social services organizations. If you are interested in doing research, a Ph.D. can enhance these skills and add to your appeal as a candidate for research related jobs.

Can I pursue a Ph.D. immediately after graduating with an MSW?

Most doctoral programs in social work require 2-year post-MSW employment, especially if you plan to go into academia. Search Committees for new faculty like to see that you have direct experience in the field as it will enhance both your teaching and research.

What can I do while I'm in my Master's program to better prepare me for a doctoral program?

Working with faculty on their own research projects as a research assistant (RA) is a great way to prepare. Not only will it expand your research skills, but faculty letters of recommendation that emphasize your research and analytic skills are one of the most important parts of the doctoral application. You can email faculty directly in your area of interest to see whether they have any research assistant openings.

Also consider submitting for publication any of your class papers that received an honors grade or a comment from your instructor like "This paper could be published ... or is of publishable quality". If so, touch base with that instructor and ask them about the publication process. Consider submitting such papers for a student paper award at Silberman (guidelines to be announced to graduating students in the Spring semester). The Writing Center will also work with students in preparing papers for submission to a journal.

You can also choose field experiences (and volunteer opportunities) that align with your potential area of interest as a doctoral student. This can demonstrate consistent dedication and interest to a particular social problem or issue, which is also an important part of the doctoral application.

If I am thinking of pursuing a Ph.D. should I request a letter grade?

Yes, many programs rely on grades in assessing applicants (along with GRE scores, written essays/statements, and recommendations)

How do I choose a doctoral program?

Location, cost and area of interest may all influence your decision. Doctoral programs are highly competitive and they usually accept only a handful of students each year. Thus if you are mobile and interested in relocating cast a wide net. If you would like to stay in NYC, there are plenty of excellent doctoral programs locally (Columbia, NYU, Rutgers, SUNY, and our CUNY program). Consider also cost; public programs are less expensive than private universities.

Also consider whether the program has faculty in your area of interest. Go to the program's faculty websites to see what they are working on. Conversely, if you know of and admire certain researchers in your field, find out what institutions they are connected to, and consider applying to that institution's doctoral program. While not an absolute requirement, it's helpful to have a mentor at the doctoral program you attend to guide you in your research and help you make contact with other researchers in the field. Faculty may also be helpful in the admission process. Reach out to faculty to introduce yourself, express interest in working with them on their research, and in applying to their doctoral program. That faculty member can be your "internal advocate" on the doctoral admissions' committee at their school.

Finally, talk to current doctoral students. Several of our faculty teach in the CUNY social welfare doctoral program and they can connect you with students.