

Undergraduate School and Graduate School: A Contrast

Your decision to pursue graduate study means that you are ready to further develop your expertise and lead in your chosen field. This experience will differ from your study as an undergraduate student in many ways. Several of these distinctions are captured in the chart below.

Characteristics of Undergraduate Study	Characteristics of Graduate Study	Expectations for Graduate Students at UMUC
Coursework focus requires study of information and material in general education courses as well as specialized courses in a particular field.	Coursework focus is on specific field/specialization/narrowed area of information to facilitate the development of expertise in a particular topic.	Becoming a scholar-practitioner
The goal of learning is to become more knowledgeable about information that is already known/has already been developed.	The goal of learning is to contribute to and expand upon existing knowledge, and to identify new thinking, methodologies, perspectives, and practices that can contribute to the field.	Becoming a critical thinker and contributory learner
Post-collegiate goals include entering/joining a particular career field to acquire basic knowledge and understanding of that field.	Post-collegiate goals include leading and mastering a professional career field to bring new enhancements to or advance that field.	Becoming goal-oriented and working as an ethical thought leader
Students' approaches to coursework and learning outcomes are largely framed by instructors. Students rely upon faculty for guidance and instruction (e.g., exam preparation,	The student is expected to be an independent learner. Approaches to coursework and learning are largely framed by the students themselves. Faculty members serve as facilitators of course content and evaluate student performance.	Becoming an independent learner

what to study, how to study, etc.). Students' coursework is evaluated by faculty.	Students may also be involved in the evaluation of peers' performance.	
On average, students are expected to devote 10-15 hours/week to outside study for all courses combined. Similarly, students are encouraged to adopt behaviors that help them strike a balance among their academic and nonacademic pursuits.	Graduate students should expect to devote at least three hours of outside study for every credit in which they are enrolled (e.g., if a course is six credits, students are expected to study at least 18 hours per week). Similarly, there is an expectation that time will be spent outside of assigned coursework to enhance professional development. Additionally, at the graduate level, time management goes beyond working to create balance among needs and interests. Time management requires the creation of clear priorities that align with academic goals. It is likely that decisions will be made to sacrifice certain interests, hobbies, and/or even other important commitments during graduate school.	Becoming an independent and more self-aware learner
Expectations for independent research for a student's major are rare and/or tied to a specific course.	Students are expected to conduct research in their fields independently; a student's commitment to scholarly research and/or participation in outside professional development experiences is central to his or her success.	Becoming an independent learner and critical thinker
Students' academic work is largely the result of their own independent efforts.	Students' academic work is largely the product of team discussion, collaboration, and/or	Working as a team player and effective communicator

In certain types of courses/majors, students may be expected to work on group projects for specific assignments; however, the majority of work is authored by individual students.	consultation with their peers. An important outcome of the graduate student experience is the demonstration of students' ability to work successfully and inclusively across diverse teams.	
Students may continue in coursework, remain enrolled toward degree progress, and graduate from their institutions/complete their majors when their GPAs fall below 3.0.	The minimum GPA for continued enrollment is 3.0. Graduate students who fall below this GPA are immediately placed on academic probation and are at risk for dismissal from their programs.	Becoming an independent learner
Compromises of academic integrity are perceived to have an impact on the individual and the course.	Compromises of academic integrity are perceived to have individual, collegial (peers, course, etc.), and career ramifications, as students are developing work to impact and advance a particular profession.	Becoming an ethical thought leader

For our purposes, the term *ethical thought leader* describes an individual who integrates positive values and moral code into leadership in personal and professional experiences. In the chart above, you will notice that the terms *independent learner* and *critical thinker* are repeatedly mentioned. One of the core learning outcomes of graduate education is the ability to apply advanced and complex analysis and synthesis.