

Why You Should Hide Out in School to Avoid the Recession

by Donald Asher

Worried about the recession? Maybe it's time to hide out in graduate school. There is a time-honored tradition of sitting out a downturn in a classroom. Let's look at the pros and cons.

There doesn't seem to be any question that this recession is going to be pretty deep, compared to recent, mild recessions. So the ugly truth is that many, many people are going to lose their jobs, and they're going to find it very difficult to replace them. This is only now beginning.

If this recession is short and deep, the upturn will be in full swing when you get out of grad school. If it is long and deep, you will have avoided some of the worst of it, and will reenter the market with advanced skills anyway. But I think the smartest way to use grad school is as 'career insurance.' Under this model you don't decide to go to grad school--you decide to apply. If you lose your job, you can go ahead and show up at the grad program. If the downturn doesn't bite you after all, you can keep your job, forgo grad school, and all it cost you was the trouble of applying. But, most interesting of all, if another September rolls around and you still have a job but you think it continues to be iffy, you can ask for a deferral and buy yourself another year of career insurance. This is how this strategy works most like other forms of insurance.

Calendar management is the key to success with this career strategy. The most elite programs for business, law, and so on, have deadlines in December and January, so you have plenty of time to apply to the top tier *this year* if you get going on this project. This lead time is a critical component of planning for this type of grad option. Deadlines for other, less elite programs run all the way to June. So if you put this off, you'll miss the top tier, but you can still use the technique.

You're one year away from starting a business school or other master's program. Almost one year of lead time plus two years of classes puts you back in the job market in 2011. That's pretty good insurance, since no recession since the great depression has lasted that long. Law school takes three years, putting you back in the market in 2012. A Ph.D. can take anywhere from three years if you already have a master's to five to seven years if you start with a bachelor's, which makes it a pessimistic choice for career insurance, but it may be the right one for those of you who already have an advanced degree. Obviously, medical school would be a huge decision, and should ride on larger issues than career insurance.

You just need to get three letters of recommendation, take the GMAT (for business schools), GRE (for most other master's and Ph.D. programs), LSAT (for law school), write an essay, and turn in your transcripts. Most of the process is online now. Start looking at schools' web sites, or go to petersons.com or gradschools.com to build your initial target list.

If you haven't taken any standardized tests lately, you'll need to buy some study guides and prepare. See the sidebar for test web sites. Register right away for testing, as it is high season for these types of exams.

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The major graduate school examinations:

GRE for master's and doctoral programs

www.gre.org

LSAT for law school

www.lsatsat.org

GMAT for business schools

www.gmac.com

MCAT for medical school

www.aamc.org/mcat

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Cost Estimates

Exam \$140-245 for tests and data services

Application Fees \$50-150 each

Deposit \$100-300 one time

Transcripts: \$3-15 each

Thrive During Recession: Priceless

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Once your apps are in, you wait to get admitted. Then, usually in April, you'll have to let one school know of your intentions to attend, and that will cost you a deposit, usually \$100 to \$300. You have until the first day of classes to request a deferral. Not all grad programs will give you a deferral, but most will. Even the ones that don't will be very likely to admit you if you again if you want to go through the application process again.

One thing I can assure you: politicians are not going to let student lending grind to a halt, because it will exacerbate the unemployment rate. So even if the government has to lend directly to students, they will do so. So you can borrow your way through grad school, and as long as you live prudently, it can pay it off from your increased earnings. There is an old grad school saying however, "If you live like a lawyer when you're in law school, you'll live like a law student when you're a lawyer."

So consider if this is a type of career insurance that makes sense to you. And if it does, get cracking. Those deadlines will be here before you know it.

Link to Asher's article on how to pay for graduate school: [Need Link Here.](#)

BIO:

Donald Asher is the author of *Graduate Admissions Essays*, the best-selling guide to the graduate admissions process (3rd ed., Ten Speed Press, 2008). He speaks at over 100 colleges and universities every year on graduate school and career issues. He welcomes your comments at don@donaldasher.com or visit his web site at www.donaldasher.com. © 2010 Asher Associates.