

SHOULD I FINISH GRADUATE SCHOOL OR CONTINUE WITH MY CURRENT CAREER?

Summary: Too often, people believe that the path they're on in college is the path they'll continue forever. This just isn't true.



Question: I am a 25-year-old graduate student with very little work experience in my field. I have enjoyed being a bartender for the past six years; however, I feel that I should use my social-work degree at some point. I would enjoy working in both areas but only see using one of these in an international setting, as I am planning to move to Panama. Should I continue my graduate work in social work/public health or just throw caution to the wind and remain a bartender?

Answer: The decision you make today isn't necessarily binding for the rest of your life. The issue seems more a matter of timing than an "either/or" scenario.

One option to consider is working part time and continuing your graduate studies. As enjoyable as bartending is to you at 25, it doesn't tend to remain a lifelong career. As time goes on, considerations such as health insurance and retirement savings will become more important to you and these benefits are likely to be better in a career in social work/public health. Finishing your degree now will offer greater flexibility and security down the road. Be sure to gain some practical hands-on experience in a social-work setting while you are still in graduate school to clarify your interests and make yourself more marketable upon graduation.

On the other hand, if travel to Panama is a priority and a short-term goal, you may decide to "throw caution to the wind" for the next year or so. Move to Panama, work as a bartender, attempt to gain some social-work experience (either volunteering or working part time) and then return for your graduate degree with a clearer picture of your goals and a stronger and more focused desire to attend graduate school.

In any event, possessing both social-work and bartending skills will offer you greater employability and flexibility. Either skill set could be viewed as a part-time or backup career option for the other.