

Questions for PhD Programs

Below is a list of useful questions to ask about the grad schools you are considering. Figure out what answers you would like to get to these questions. Different people might have different preferences/styles. These questions and possibly more that will occur to you during open houses and later should hopefully help you make an informed decision about grad school.

Program-related questions

Some important questions about the program/school in general.

- What is the advisor matching process?
- How long do students typically take to start doing research?
- What are the program requirements (courses, TAing, quals, etc)?
- Is funding guaranteed? What happens if your advisor runs out of funding?
- How long does it typically take for students to graduate?
- In what ways does the program prepare its students for the (academic/industrial) job market?

Advisor-specific questions

Find out if the professors you want to work with are good advisors (ask their students). It might be hard to get this information out of people and might depend on the student, so use the following questions for guidance:

- How hands on/off is this professor as an advisor? In what way?
- How often do they meet with their students?
- Do they reply to emails?
- Do they work on research directions suggested by the student?
- Do they encourage students to do the following: intern; collaborate with other professors/researchers outside your school. Do they help students get these opportunities?
- How often/for how long do their students take vacations? (Not the main point of grad school, but people need vacations sometimes.)
- Where did their previous students end up?

MOST IMPORTANTLY:

Are the advisors you're thinking of looking for students? **ASK THEM DIRECTLY!**

Location/city/community questions

You might at times find yourself doing things other than research...

- What is life like in the city?
- How affordable is living given the stipend?
- Do students have communities outside of the program? (Religious, hobbies, ethnic, etc.)
- How friendly are students in the department?
- How supportive are students of each other (during success/hardship)?
- How often do students socialize outside of school?