Questions to ask on a Graduate School Trip

Faculty

*Things to observe: approachability, willingness to answer questions, enthusiasm for work.*

- Where do your graduate students find jobs/post-doctorates after graduate school?
  - Do you take an active role in helping your students find jobs/post-doctorates after graduate school?
- Typical length of graduate education in your group?
- How often are your students allowed to present at National Chemistry Meetings?
- How long is a student typically a teaching assistant in your group?
- How many students do you typically take in your group per year?
- What is the process for choosing a research adviser?
  - When do I need to choose an adviser?
- Do you provide monetary support for the summer months?
- Do you encourage and support students in applying for graduate school fellowships?
- What size is your lab?
  - How is your lab structured?
- Do you have regular group meetings?
  - How are they organized; i.e., large group or small subgroups?
- What percentage of entering doctorate candidates graduate within six years?
- How are the department and your research funded?
  - Is funding for the department stable?
  - Is funding for your research stable?
- Are your students published?
  - How many?
  - In which journals?

Graduate Students

*Things to observe: Do most of the students look happy? Do the students have balance in their lives?*

- What is the first year of graduate school like?
  - How many hours are spent in class and/or studying?
  - Is there collaboration or competition among students in the classes?
  - Are the professors helpful in answering students’ questions?
  - How difficult are the classes compared to undergraduate classes?
  - How many classes will I need to take?
- Are there entrance exams?
  - How many must be passed?
  - If not passed, do I retake the exam or take a class in that area of the exam?
- What are preliminary exams like?
When are they taken?
Are there cums (written tests) to pass?
How many must be passed?
What is the time frame for passing the exams?
What is the preliminary oral exam based on; i.e., original research proposal relating to research or totally independent of research?

Once preliminaries are passed, how many hours do you typically work per week?
What do you do outside of the lab?

Do the graduate students have some balance in their lives?
Are there departmental events that promote community building (i.e. annual picnics, softball, or bowling leagues)?

Do graduate students interact with each other well or is there competition between research groups?

How often are students allowed to present at National Chemistry Meetings?

How long is a student typically a teaching assistant versus a research assistant?

What are the responsibilities of a teaching assistant?
How many hours/week are committed to this responsibility?
Are there clear chains of command in case of problems?

What are the tuition and fees per year for graduate school?
Is the graduate school stipend enough to afford a decent place to live, have fun, pay fees, etc.?
Will I need to take out a loan for basic living expenses?

How is health insurance covered here?
What premium will I pay?
Is the student health center any good?

What do you do for fun?
What cultural experiences are available in the area?
Describe the nightlife.

Is housing affordable in the area surrounding the university?
What is the typical rent for a one- or two-bedroom apartment?
Do most graduate students live with a roommate?
Is there a program through the department that provides help in finding a roommate and/or a place to live?

How safe is the area surrounding the university?
Is it necessary to use the campus escort service after dark?
What is crime like in the city?

Overall, what is the political environment of the department?

Is there a graduate school union?

If you want to know about a specific professor who you might want to work with in the future, here are some questions to ask graduate students:

What is the reputation of the professor?
What is the chain of command in his/her lab?
How many years to receive a doctorate in his/her group?
What is his/her relationship with students in his/her group; e.g., formal or informal?