

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?