



Are you a good fit for us?: the key question in picking the right PhD program

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Soon after or just before completing a master's degree, one may start dreaming of a PhD program at a respected university. But wishing for acceptance per se may not be enough to assure future satisfaction in research. The purpose of this paper, addressed to PhD applicants, is to outline a number of warnings and recommendations concerned with choosing a PhD program congruent with your expectations.

What do you need to do before putting together an application? First, after you review the content of your target graduate programs in terms of courses offered and requirements to graduate, your habit of emailing and skyping could come in mighty handy, and the same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for choosing your potential supervisor with whose research interests you should already be familiar. Many professors attach importance to communication skills, and this proactive approach seems to be common and appreciated in US academia so the professor may encourage you to send a research proposal, which would determine your further correspondence. This takes us to the second point, finding a good match.

You can save time by referring to journal articles as a point of departure. You may want to contact academics whose research interests mesh well with yours at least to some extent. At this point, it is definitely not advisable to try getting their opinion about your chance of being accepted. All you can do is to ask them to consider your desired research field and to say whether the research topic sounds interesting enough to excite them and is within the scope of their specialization. The issue of your being a good fit is a *cine-quanon* for ensuring a good supervision service for you, and will play a pivotal role in your motivation and self-actualization while writing your dissertation. Choosing a PhD program based on your potential supervisor may raise a question: "What if I cannot find a suitable program at a top university like Harvard?" I would advise sticking to the supervisor-oriented method, and ask instead: "What if I get acceptance from Harvard but I do not get a supervising service par excellence?" Barres (2013) argues the importance of mentorship along with tips for choosing an excellent mentor. Along similar lines, I would like to give my advice: "Choose your program and possible supervisor, and just let this university be your Harvard!"

The bottom line is that you do not have to be a rocket scientist to choose the right PhD program. What you especially need is to know what you will and can do, *videlicet*, your research interests. It goes without saying that all of the above-mentioned attempts will require a great deal of work, but it is definitely worth it to take your time so as not to regret it in the future. Lastly, these practical tips could be noted by advisors who do not adopt the *let-them-go-and-see-things-for-themselves* philosophy.

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Reference

Barres, B. A. (2013). How to Pick a Graduate Advisor. *Neuron*, 80(2), 275-279. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2013.10.005>