

Evaluating Graduate Schools

Program Details:

- When (and how) do you choose your advisor? How difficult is it to switch advisors?
- How many students will be in my entering class?
- Are there pre-requisite courses I need to complete before I start this program?
- What is the faculty-to-student ratio?
- Is the institution/program research-oriented or coursework-oriented?
- Do the research interests of the faculty represent specialties within the discipline? Does the department's strength lie in a particular area or are many of the subspecialties equally strong? Look for the faculty publication list. If this is not in the catalog or online, request it from the department chair.
- If you enroll in a Master's program, will you be able to change to a Ph.D. program easily if your performance is satisfactory? Must you obtain an M.A. or M.S. before you enroll in the Ph.D. program?

Admissions Criteria:

- Does the department prefer applicants immediately out of undergraduate programs or do they prefer applicants with work experience? If they prefer or require experience, what kind of experience are they looking for?
- What is the relative importance of admissions test scores, undergraduate grades, recommendations, statements on applications, experience, and other requirements?
- Ask for the 25th and 75th percentile scores for the last entering class on required admission tests and GPA.

Graduation Requirements:

- How long of a program is it?
- What are the academic regulations/requirements for graduating?
- Does the program require a practicum or experiential learning? How many hours? Do students find their own placement sites?

Finances:

- How do students typically fund their education?
- What is the average debt load for graduates in the program?
- What types of aid are available (loans only, grants/loans, scholarships)?
- If you are offered a scholarship, what are the terms? Is it based on grades or performance?
- What is the median salary for graduates?
- Estimate your total potential debt and monthly payments to pay it off. www.finaid.org

Placement and Opportunities:

- What is the breakdown of where students go from this program?
- Where do students take these jobs?
- What percentage of students are employed by graduation? Nine months after?
- How many states/foreign countries do graduates work in?
- Is there a Career Services Office?

Student Life/Body:

- What is the demographic make-up of the student body?
- How diverse is the student body?
- What are the housing options?
- What is a day in the life of a student like? When are classes schedule/how do students manage their time?

Questions for Current Students/Recent Grads:

- Do students have enough time for a social life?
- What is the academic social environment like (ie: do students work together)?
- Do most students live near campus? What is it like to live in this area as a graduate student (ask to other students)
- How well does the faculty treat graduate students?
- Do graduate students have access to athletic and other university facilities?
- Are the provisions for housing, health insurance, etc. adequate?
- Is the atmosphere highly competitive?