

Graduate School: Choosing a Program

One of the most important aspects of applying to graduate school is selecting the programs that are best suited to your interests and career goals. Avoid choosing programs by institution name-recognition and ranking alone. Consider the strengths of each program, the courses offered, and the work being done by its faculty in light of your own interests.

Ask the following questions to assess your fit with various programs. Consult faculty, current students, and if possible, graduates of the program. Make every effort to visit the schools to get a first-hand perspective on the campus, department, facilities, and people.

General

- How is the program structured in terms of course requirements, secondary fields, language requirements, etc.?
- What characteristics distinguish this program from others in the same field?
- Is your program accredited?
- Does the program lean toward theory or application?
- What theoretical framework does your program follow?
- What planned practical experiences are included in the program?
- When do students typically begin teaching?
- Does the program require a thesis and/or comprehensive exam?
- What resources are available through the University as a whole (ex. library, computing and research facilities, career services)?
- Where do students go on from your program?
- Where do students take these jobs?
- What opportunities are provided to network?

Faculty

- How much interaction with faculty can I expect?
- Are the top faculty teaching and/or conducting research?
- What is the size of the faculty and faculty/student ratio?
- How many faculty are in my subfield(s) of interest?
- When are classes scheduled?
- Are classes restricted to graduates or are undergraduates common in your graduate classes?
- Would I be able to download a syllabus to see how a typical class is constructed?
- What have faculty members published lately?
- Are students expected to work on faculty research or pursue their own?
- How do faculty support students on the dissertation process?
- What is the gender and ethnic representation on the faculty?
- Can I meet with...?

Students

- What does one need to be considered a strong candidate for admission and success in the program?
- What percentage of students matriculates with prior work experience beyond their undergraduate degree?
- What percentages of students in the graduate program are full time/part time?
- What is the average length of time students spend in the program?
- How many degrees are granted each year?
- What is the level of attrition?
- How do students typically manage their time?
- What opportunities are available during summer months?
- Are students engaged with their professional associations?
- What graduate student organizations exist in the department/university?
- How closely do students work together and discuss their work with each other?
- Is there student office space? A student lounge?
- What is the demographic make-up of your student body?
- May I have the names of students enrolled in the program so that I can contact them?

Financial Aid

- How do your students typically fund their education?
- What types of financial aid are offered: assistantships, fellowships, grants, scholarships?
- Is support available for conference travel? Research abroad?
- What is the duration of financial support?
- What criteria are used for choosing recipients?
- How many are awarded each year?
- What are the process and deadlines for applying for the financial aid options?
- What is the cost of living in this area?
- What are your housing options?
- Do students typically live in graduate student housing the entire time?
- What are the process and deadlines for applying for graduate student housing?
- Are students provided with health insurance coverage?
- Is there any additional support for students with partners and/or families?