



Questions to Ask Graduate Programs

From *Graduate Admissions Essays* by Donald Asher

- What is the largest or most typical class size for a graduate class? Are classes restricted to graduate students? To majors?
- How long has this program existed at the University?
- What would be the advantages and disadvantages to going to grad school immediately after completing an undergraduate degree? The advantages and disadvantages of waiting a few years? The best use of the interim time?
- What research is currently being conducted in this department? Are there opportunities for students to participate in research?
- What planned practical experiences are included in the program (e.g., internships)? Ask for examples of internship placements.
- What is the relative importance of admissions test scores, undergraduate grades, recommendations, statements on applications, experience, and other requirements?
- What are the criteria and process for selecting TA's, RA's and Fellows?
- Will I get to develop my own topics, or will I be expected to work on a professor's ongoing research?
- What facilities are available for graduate students? Are there any restrictions on access?
- What is the mean time to complete a) class work, b) research, c) thesis or dissertation? (What is the mean time to complete the Masters or Ph.D.?) Ask about the program as a whole, but perhaps more importantly, by professor.
- What is your attrition rate? Of those who don't finish, what are their reasons?
- What kind of student thrives in your program?
- What is international/national student ratio?
- What are my chances of securing financial aid? How reliable is your financial support year to year? Is the first-year offer always sustained, given attainment of academic goals?
- What are the age ranges, gender balance, ratio of married/single, and geographical origins of graduate students in the program?
- Is it possible to have some bibliographies of recent publications by faculty? Which professors have won awards and grants lately? (These presumably need grad assistants.)
- Can you tell me about your placement rates and types of jobs obtained by recent graduates? (Avoid testimonials and anecdotal evidence – ask for facts and/or reports.)
- May I meet with currently enrolled students? (In person, or later by phone or via email; be sure to ask about their research topics and to take notes on specific professors mentioned.)
- How can I be a strong candidate for a program like this?
- Questions to ask currently enrolled students:
 - Ask about the general atmosphere in the department. Are the people there remote, friendly, highly competitive?
 - Are professors accessible and easy to work with?
 - Ask specific questions about the curriculum and requirements.
 - When something goes wrong, are the administrators accessible?
 - Do they have coffee hours, and if they do, is there conversation between faculty and students, or do faculty members only talk to people they already know?

Note: When visiting graduate programs, it is wise to take multiple copies of your resume or CV and a transcript (unofficial). Professors may be interested and these items may help them remember YOU!

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OHIO NORTHERN UNIVERSITY

PHONE: 419-772-2145 | EMAIL: career@onu.edu | WEB: <https://my.onu.edu/polar-careers>

