

- Most important questions to ask
 - For each PI
 - Is PI taking students?
 - What is the PI's communication/management style?
 - How much freedom do students have to decide their research?
 - What's the composition & size of your lab?
 - Can I have contact information for recent and current grad students?
 - If not, RED FLAG. A good advisor will be more than happy to provide a list of his past 5-10 grad students. When I applied I emailed the most recent 5 of the lab I ultimately joined with this email:

Hello, my name is Mike Blazanin and I'm currently an undergrad at the University of Minnesota in the Travisano lab. I've been accepted to, have visited, and am strongly considering working with Paul Turner for graduate school, and was wondering if you would mind answering a few questions about your experience working with him in graduate school. I'm hoping to get a more complete picture of what working in the Turner lab is like, and how you feel it has affected your career.

Overall, would you recommend working with him? Did you have a positive and productive experience?

Do you feel your graduate school experience prepared you for success in the academic world after defending?

Did you feel like you had enough time with him? Was he accessible to you?

Does he answer emails?

Does Paul offer constructive feedback? Did you ever disagree with him on the direction of your work or interpretation of results? How did he handle it?

How much guidance does he provide about topics such as project design, paper writing, and presentation preparation?

How long did you take to complete your degree?

Would you consider the lab culture collaborative or competitive?

[Note that I left this last question out if they'd graduated more than 3 years ago, because the lab culture could've changed strongly since they were present]

- What is the typical expectation or standard for publications over the course of a PhD?
- What are the course requirements?
- How does the funding package work?
 - What amount of teaching? Is it guaranteed? Is it tied to your advisor? What is the time commitment for teaching? Does everyone who wants/needs a TA/RA get one? What is the availability of summer funding?
 - What is health care like? Mental health?
- Are there rotations? How do students pick their advisor?
- How much is rent here? What are the living conditions like on the stipend?
- What are your favorite & least favorite things about the program?
- Things to pay attention to
 - Are current grad students happy?
 - Can I survive in that area?
 - Where do I feel at home? Welcome?

- Other important questions to possibly ask
 - City & Life
 - What do you think of the area? Are there events? Arts? Student groups? Intramurals?
 - How much is rent here? What are the living conditions like on the stipend?
 - What is public transit like? Is the campus accessible?
 - Diversity in the city?
 - Program
 - How long does it usually take to complete the degree?
 - What's the attrition rate?
 - Are there rotations? How do students pick their advisor?
 - What are the credit requirements?
 - How does the funding package work?
 - What amount of teaching? Is it guaranteed? Is it tied to your advisor? If there are teaching assistantships, what is the time commitment? Does everyone who wants/needs a TA/RA get one?
 - What are your favorite & least favorite things about the program?
 - What are some of the biggest challenges grad students face?
 - What kind of professional development activities are there? What seminars are there?
 - What are opportunities like to go to conferences?
 - What do students typically do for their summers? Required to stay local? Funding available?
 - PI-specific
 - Tell me what research you're most excited about right now
 - How does coming up with projects work? Do PI's assign?
 - What is your grant funding like?
 - Why do you like this university?
 - What's the composition & size of your lab?
 - What is your communication/management style?
 - How much contact do you have with your PI?
 - How would you describe your PI's management style?
 - What is it like to work with your PI?
 - What is the mentoring system? (Do PI's mentor students or post-docs?)
 - Grad student achievement
 - What/where have recent grads gone on to do?
 - What is the typical expectation or standard for publications over the course of a PhD
 - Can I contact recent and current grad students?
 - What are your expectations from grad students?
 - Etc
 - Why did you choose to come here?
 - What were the other schools you were looking at?
- Questions to expect

- Tell me about yourself
 - Prep 1-2 min answer
 - Assume they've read my app
 - Tell what **intrinsically** motivates/satisfies me
 - Inquisitive mind
 - Problem solver (tie into math, board games?)
 - Learn
 - Achieve goals
 - Competitive
 - Then ask if they'd like addtl info
- They ask about my interests
 - What are my research interests?
 - Why am I interested in pursuing this field of study?
- What other schools did you apply to?
- **Are we your top choice?**
 - A: I really love it here, I'm going to look at all my options but this is definitely one of my top choices
- Previous research
- Career goals
- Reasons for my interest in this school/program
- Why a PhD?
- Things to do/don't do
 - Talking to PI's
 - Read up on faculty's research from website. Have a 1-2 sentence summary of what they work on in mind
 - Don't bring up other schools
 - Also talk about life outside of research (intramurals, biking, tabletop gaming)
 - Mingle sessions (esp w/ grad students) are to make sure I'm not crazy, not to hear about my research. Don't bring it up if they don't
 - Email thank yous: student host, chair of weekend, faculty, people that were helpful
 - Be short and to the point, if there are any follow ups I meant to make, make them now
 - Button up, slacks & good shoes
 - When talking to a committee or anything like that, avoid mentioning specific faculty I'm "applying to work with", seem open to many things
 - Don't ask questions that can be answered w/ a Google
 - Some faculty may expect to be interviewed, bring a lot of questions
- Unimportant questions to ask
 - Is the professor just talking? Are they listening? Open?
 - Are there people I REALLY want to work with (PI's or students)?
 - What's unique about this program?
 - (email to prog coord) When does the program start? Could I start earlier?
 - What is needed to successfully defend?
 - How many labs do I get to choose from?

- What's a typical day for a grad student?
- Do people get along here?
- How often do students work with faculty other than their PI's?
- Are there grants available for grad students to perform research?
- What are important characteristics/skills for incoming grad students?
- Knowing what you do about my previous work and experiences, what would you say my strengths and weaknesses will be compared to other first-year graduate students?
- What makes a candidate a good match?
- Do you have any concerns with my ability to be successful here?
- What's your background?
- What opportunities are there for me to apply for grants/fellowships?
- What makes a student successful here?
- What were some of your pleasant surprises during the first semester? What were some unpleasant surprises?
- What do students typically do for their summers? Required to stay local? Funding available?
- What are the exams (prelims, quals) like?