

## **Yale-specific PhD Program Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Can I be a competitive candidate without a master's degree?**

My impression is that lacking a master's is not an inhibition to competitive candidacy in and of itself. Rather, any additional research experience (whether it's working as a technician, getting a master's degree, or anything else) really helps the application. Typically, about half of each incoming cohort does not have a master's degree. I applied directly out of undergrad. Much more important is to have some solid research experiences. Many students who are admitted have done at least a year or two of research, across undergrad and post-grad experiences, and many have more than that (e.g. research as an undergrad in addition to a year or more as a technician, getting a master's degree, etc).

### **How many courses does each grad student TA while at Yale?**

We're required to TA 3 semesters, 1 course each semester. One of those three is a course that only meets for half the semester, but in all courses you're expected to spend about 15 hours/wk on your teaching duties. Typically all three of these semesters are done in the first two years you're a graduate student. Then, depending on funding availability at the department-level and by your advisor, you may have to teach another semester in your fifth and sixth year each. However, this is not very common. Among the EEB grad programs I applied to or are familiar with in the US, this was one of the lowest teaching loads around.

### **What's the first year of grad school at Yale like?**

In the first year, life largely consists of taking classes, participating in research rotation projects, and just generally learning & reading.

Graduate programs in the US in EEB vary a lot in their course requirements. Of the ones I'm familiar with or applied to, Yale has among the lowest course requirements. In our first two semesters we are required to take a once-weekly 2 hour class where largely you meet the faculty in the department and do required ethics trainings. In addition to that, we are simply required to take 3 graduate level courses (in any subject) and receive A's for them. This is much lower than many of the other programs I had applied to and considered. Beyond that minimum, how many courses one actually takes is largely a matter of personal preference.

In terms of research, students come into the program generally with an adviser in mind (for me, Paul Turner). In the first year we rotate for 1 semester with each of two different faculty members, then officially commit to a lab.

### **Do you enjoy living in New Haven? Do you find it affordable on the Yale stipend?**

I definitely enjoy New Haven! I've made quite a good set of friends in several different spheres and I at least so far feel like there are options when I want to do things. NYC and Boston are

both very accessible when needed. Financially its very good. The stipend is around \$36k a year (as of 2020-2021), and living costs are not very high. I tend to fall on the frugal side of the spectrum of grad students, but I personally pay around \$600 in rent a month plus about \$100/mo in utilities. Groceries are like \$150 or \$200 a month, so after living expenses I still have quite a bit for going out and saving up. Most grad students I know pay in the range of \$700 to \$800/mo, depending on how much space they want, how close to campus they are, and whether they're living with a partner. Of all the grad programs I looked at, Yale was one of the best financially.

**What is the overall culture of the department like? How do they fare on equity, diversity, and inclusion?**

The culture of the department is currently undergoing huge shifts and growth. When I arrived, the department culture was pretty dead/empty feeling, with people not really socializing much. Since then we've made a lot of changes, like making the department retreat an overnight trip off campus, adding a grad student specific retreat, adding happy hours after Friday afternoon grad student talks, and so on. I think now the department culture is quite good, given the size of the department (we only have about 30-35 grad students), although there's still room for improvement.

As far as equity/inclusion/diversity, at the faculty level our department doesn't look too good and actually has a bit of a negative reputation, but since I've been here the new department chair (Tom Near) has been moving strongly to improve on all of those aspects. For instance, when I interviewed there was 1 female faculty member (vs 12 male faculty) and only 2 faculty of color. In the last few years, though, we've hired three female faculty and two people of color (four hires in total), in addition to ongoing efforts to continue recruiting increased diversity into the department. We're kind of at a time where the demographics and make-up of the department faculty are shifting really rapidly, and I think we're moving forward strongly. To attest to this even further, the department has recently established a standing Diversity and Climate Committee tasked with continuing to work on the these issues at all levels of the department.

On the grad student side, the equity/inclusion/diversity issues are, in my opinion, much better. The grad students have been pushing for increased diversity and inclusion at all levels of the department since I arrived, it's really one of the things we all agree on and try to push for. For instance, we successfully lobbied to have the GRE removed from department admission considerations, in part because of its biases against underrepresented groups. The grad students in the department are also much more diverse than the faculty. We're usually evenly split gender-wise, about 25-40% international students, and have historically had really high representation of LGBTQ students (currently around 25%).