

Questions to consider asking during your graduate school visit

Diversity and Inclusion in Physics (DIP)

Congratulations on your acceptance! Visiting weekend is a time for you to understand if UC Davis is the right place for you. This is a non-exhaustive list of questions that graduate students came up with based on what they wish they'd known to ask. Please view this list as a starting point for formulating your own questions. Be bold and explore!

Questions to ask faculty (we also recommend you get their students' perspectives on these topics):

1. What kinds of skills do you expect your students to come in with?
2. How do you train your students? Do you start them with a trial project?
3. What is your typical funding situation like/can your students expect to be funded for 0/1/2/3/4 quarters out of the year?
4. Do you consider a student's academic performance in first year classes or the prelim when deciding to work with them?
5. What are your typical interactions with your students? How often? In what format (individually, group meeting, drop in)?
6. Do you have expectations for the number of hours spent in the office per week? (Physically, hours spent on work, specific hours, time off?)
7. What (if any) is the mentoring structure in your group?
8. What have your previous students gone on to do after graduating?
9. How many students have you supervised through their PhD?
10. What are your expectations for the number of papers, authorship, and who does the writing?
11. Do you send students to conferences? At what stage in their research?
12. Do you encourage students to apply for external support? (e.g. fellowship, conference travel, professional development)
13. What is the average number of years it takes your students to finish?
14. Do incoming students work on projects that have already been developed or are they expected to come up with their own?
15. What is your ideal group size and how big is it now?
16. Will your group be accepting students in the next few years? If so, when?
17. How do you identify when a student is struggling with a project and what is your response?
18. What are your strategies for creating an inclusive environment in the department and/or within your own research group?
19. How do you prefer to give and receive feedback?

Questions to ask graduate students:

1. Do you spend time outside of work with people in the department? Your year, research group, anyone else?
2. What was surprising about graduate school once you arrived? If something did surprise you, is there any advice you would give related to that?
3. Why did you choose Davis?
4. What keeps you going in graduate school?
5. What resources have you drawn on in graduate school?
6. Are you happy with your work/life balance? What does that look like? (Do you cook meals? Do you have time for exercise? How many hours do you spend doing physics? First year and other years. Does your advisor approve? Pets? Extracurriculars)
7. What support is there to pursue work outside of academia?
8. Have you encountered administrative barriers? (e.g. reimbursement, paper work...)
9. What has been the hardest part of grad school for you? Easiest?
10. What has been your most rewarding graduate school experience?
11. Is it possible to start a family in this department?
12. What is the make-up of your research group? (undergrad, post-doc, researchers, grad student, under-represented minority, women, LGBTQIASGL2P)
13. Has anyone left your research group? If so, why?
14. In what ways is the department environment inclusive to your/my identity?
15. Is your/my identity represented in the department?
16. Are there faculty members interested in cultivating an inclusive environment?
17. Did your research interests change in graduate school? How easy is it to switch groups or research subfields?
18. How long did it take you to find a research group? What is the process of finding a research group?
19. How easy is it to explore different groups?
20. Are you mentored? By whom?
21. What was your course trajectory? What are the course requirements for your subfield? How flexible is the timeline?
22. What is it like living in Davis? (best, worst?) Where do graduate students live?
23. What was your upfront cost of moving to Davis? How were you reimbursed?
24. What is the security of TA funding? Is your stipend enough to live comfortably? Is Davis affordable in general? Can you save any money?
25. What was your preliminary exam (written; general physics) experience like?
26. What was your qualifying exam (oral; research plan) experience like?