

Considerations When Choosing a Graduate Program/Thesis Advisor

Questions to Ask Yourself:

- Where do I want to be in five years? In ten years?
- What is most important to me—my work environment or my intellectual interest in the field?
- Do I need direction and motivation from an advisor, or do I prefer to work independently?
- Is it more important to me that I connect with my advisor or mentor over the work, or do I need to connect with them as a person? (That is, think about shared goals and values with a potential mentor!)
- Do I need to feel comfortable talking to my advisor? Or do I thrive in a formal relationship?
- Is the field I choose easily adaptable to other fields?
- What are my professional goals?
- Do I prefer to work in a group or on my own?
- Do I want to work primarily with computers? In a specific research space, like a laboratory, or do I value interactions with people?

Questions You May Wish to Ask a Prospective Thesis Advisor:

- How many spots do you think you will have in your research group this semester?
- Do I have a chance to obtain a spot in your research group?
- How long will you have funding for a new student?
- Have you committed to any new students at this point?
- If rotations are permitted, would you be willing to host me for a quarter or semester?
- What is expected of the students in your group? How long do you expect students to be in the program to earn their degree?
- Does your group collaborate with other research groups?
- What is expected for a normal teaching load for this program?
- How many hours per week do you expect graduate students to be working on research goals?
- Do you have a mentoring contract or syllabus that outlines your expectations of graduate students you mentor?

Questions to Consider Before Choosing a Thesis Advisor:

- Will the project be purely theoretical, experimental, or a combination of both?
- Do students in this group help to write grant proposals?
- Do I get to choose my own project, or do I work on the PI's project?
- Where have previous students in this group gone to work?
- How long does it typically take to get a MS or Ph.D. in the group?



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- What kind of work can I expect to find after graduation if I specialize in this PI's area of research?
- Do students in this group publish and attend conferences all along, or only at the end of their research?
- Does the group meet regularly for group meetings or lunches?
- Are the group members competitive or cooperative?
- Does the group collaborate with other research groups?
- Will I need to travel to do my research?
- What amount of course work is expected/discouraged after joining the group?
- How many publications do you expect of your students? Or what research products are expected?

The questions above are drawn from a list created by Dr. Annette Matheny, Center for Naval Analysis, Alexandria, VA, in conjunction with the Central Illinois Chapter of the Association for Women in Science.