Dr Brian Todd's advice on finding the right grad advisor

Finding the right graduate advisor is probably the most important part of graduate school. These days it is incredibly easy to find information about potential graduate advisors over the internet. However, additional information you should obtain and consider when searching for a potential advisor include:

- Determine what kind of research and questions interest you.
- Examine the types of research and manuscripts that your potential advisor conducts and publishes.
- Look at potential labs to determine how big or small they are. If the lab is immense, will you be overlooked as a student and will you struggle to compete for attention and mentorship from your advisor? If the lab is small, is it because the advisor does not work well with students, is limited by current funding levels, or is the professor simply starting a new research program or settling into a new university? If the latter, this may be an ideal time to join the lab as you will likely have greater accesses to resources, input, and insights from the advisor.
- How do the current students and lab members feel about the lab? Often you will want to visit a potential advisor before deciding definitively to enroll in a graduate program. A visit to any potential lab should include frank and cordial discussions with the current students in the lab.
- How much freedom will you have to pursue your own line of research in the lab? This question is particularly important to PhD students, for whom there is a greater burden on producing a substantive and novel body of work on which you may often begin a career. Depending on the source of funding for your position in the lab, an advisor may rightfully expect your research to be a major contribution to her or his ongoing work. In other circumstances, for example, when students have fellowships, students can expect to have more
latitude in the type of research they conduct. For MS students, it may be more useful to find an advisor conducting interesting ongoing research that can rapidly accommodate new questions and additional work on which to base a thesis.

- Visit the campus, visit the lab, and make sure to interact with the potential advisor, her or his students, and other faculty and students in the program.