VISITING THE DEPARTMENT, INTERVIEWS, GOOD QUESTIONS TO ASK

A visit to the department is often an extremely valuable and informative part of the admissions process- both for prospective students and for the faculty. Some faculty members will invite students for a visit and some students will take the initiative and visit if they have the opportunity. In either case, coordinate the visit with a professor so that arrangements can be made for you to talk with various graduate students and faculty.

Interviewing with Faculty
If you visit, keep in mind that you are evaluating the school, department, and laboratory as much as the faculty members are evaluating you. So prepare to ask some questions in addition to answering them.

Sample questions you might receive from a faculty member:
- What is your previous research experience? (It is often OK not to have much.)
- Why are you interested in graduate school?
- Why are you interested in studying ‘X’?
- Would you be interested in studying ‘Y’ instead?
- I don’t have research money to support you, so you will probably be a teaching assistant throughout your graduate career. How would you prioritize classes, teaching and research?

Things you might want to ask a prospective advisor:
- How many graduate students do you have and how similar/diverse are the projects that they work on?
- What is the difference between the M.S. and Ph.D. projects?
- Who generally decides what the research topic will be?
- How could I expect to be funded if I came to work in your lab?
- How long do students in you lab typically take to finish?
- I have some experience studying ‘X’. Is continuing along this line of research compatible with your lab?
- What sort of jobs have your past graduate students gotten after they’ve graduated?

Interviewing with Graduate Students

Things you might want to ask current graduate students:
- What’s the best/worst thing about: being a graduate student, your advisor, the department, the university, the city, etc?
- How long have you been in graduate school and when do you expect to finish?
- What is the teaching load like for a TA in the department?
- Do you recommend ‘Professor X’ as an advisor?
- What is the most difficult part of the graduate student process? What is the most important part?
- What is the cost of housing? Is it easy to find a place to live?
- How’s life in [the location/city]?

Be aware that graduate students might be willing to give more open answers in person than in writing. After all, you are asking them to chat about their supervisor.

Modified from University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Zoology
http://www.zoology.wisc.edu/grad/Prospective.html