

Grad School Visit Panel Q&A

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STC 136

Grad School Visits

- which schools gave you an open house invite?

- a. For international students, you don't always get an invite
 - i. Try to communicate as much as possible with potential labs (professors and graduate students) via phone, skype, etc.

- describe what the open houses for grad schools were like

- a. Some were large scale (entire SoE), which wasn't very personable
 - i. Try to ask questions specific to the department/program you're applying to
- b. Some were very department-specific
 - i. Questions were more pointed toward research, faculty, community, etc.
- c. Went to open houses to get a sense of who you'd be working with, what the culture of the labs is like, what kind of mentor your advisor is
- d. Don't forget to ask about what other activities are available in the community!
 - i. What's the area like you would be living in?
- e. For people who can't attend open houses:
 - i. Ask professors about teaching style and specific requests of students in their labs
 - ii. Think back to what kind of learning style and research lab vibe you had in undergrad and what did or didn't work well for you
 - iii. Ask graduate students about lab culture and expectations from a student in the lab's perspective

- if you went to multiple open houses, how did each differ from each other?

- a. Some were larger and less personal, some were very targeted

- what are some things you made sure to ask during each visit?

- a. See above

- what were some of the deciding factors for you in ultimately deciding on Tufts?

- a. The Boston area, the size of the school and variation of research, the ease of collaboration with other universities in the area
- b. Talked to the advisor beforehand in detail about the specific research projects/areas, and that was a main factor (also the Boston area)
- c. The ability of graduate students to not just TA courses, but also directly teach courses
 - i. This is particularly important if you want to go into academia
- d. From the perspective of someone who applied as a Master's student: it was cheaper
 - i. Also, the teaching opportunities

- what are some things you wish you had asked while on your visit?

- a. Can you get a Master's degree on the way to the PhD?
- b. What does the curriculum look like?
- c. How important are classes and coursework to the overall degree?

- d. Wanted to know more about the teaching opportunities for both Masters and PhD tracks
- e. If you have specific preferences (for instance, animal testing research), be honest about it early on in conversations
- f. What grants/projects do you have funded now, do you have any new grants you're working on?
- g. What's a typical schedule for a graduate student in the lab you want to work in?
- h. **Make sure the lab(s) you're interested in are hiring when you go**, especially if you are only looking at a school for one lab

To-do's immediately after the visit

- did you do anything to keep in contact with the PIs you visited at the open houses? If so, what were some examples?

- **do you recommend any strategies to help students decide on a school?**

- a. Pros and cons lists with factors of importance
 - i. How friendly are the students/faculty? How interesting is the research? Did this professor respond to my emails? Etc.
- b. Reach out as much as possible to faculty and students
- c. Talk to your current professors, because they know a lot about what's going on at other schools
 - i. They also went to graduate school, and are familiar with processes
- d. Try and make sure the professors you might want to work for will have funding to take on a new graduate student

Closing Remarks

- **what is one takeaway for the students here today to remember on a grad visit, or just for grad school in general?**

Questions from the audience

What do you know about grad student open houses aimed at juniors (like they invite you before you've applied)?

What was the application process like?

- a. It varies from school to school: some schools want 4 rec letters and a diversity statement, some schools want fewer and just a personal statement, some schools are okay with just the GRE
- b. The basics: personal statement, 1-2 page resume, GREs, transcript, and 3 letters of rec
- c. If there's room for additional information, you could include a portfolio of your undergraduate projects

In terms of funding, it is almost always expected that you secure funding for PhDs?

- a. In engineering, your advisor should have funding from external sources
- b. Your first two years, your advisor might have you apply to fellowships
 - i. Good for your resume

What do you mean when you said you were looking for good teaching experiences?

- a. Most programs involve some level of TAing, but some universities also have other opportunities for graduate students to plan and teach courses
 - i. Like GIFT at Tufts, where you apply to co-teach a course with a faculty member, then go through a teaching bootcamp

Is it common to have graduate school open houses for juniors?

- a. Some schools have larger, open invitation graduate school open houses (not just for accepted students)
- b. If a school is willing to pay for you to visit them, and you're interested in the school/program, you should definitely do it!

What are your hours like and what governs those hours?

- a. It's definitely lab-dependent; if you're in a PhD program, you're doing work for your project, so you want to be here getting stuff done
- b. Some advisors like students to be in during business hours
 - i. Going outside of business hours is up to you
- c. "Treat it like a job, because you're no longer a student"
- d. Work at a sustainable pace → some weeks might be 40 hours, some weeks might be 80
 - i. Try not to burn out!
- e. Don't compare yourself to other people, because some people work on entirely different schedules, are at different points in their experiments (modeling, data collection, data analysis, presentation preparation, etc.)
- f. Beware of working outside of business hours and needing help from PI/coworkers/technicians... no one might be available to assist at 10 pm when you're in lab

In terms of the school visits, specifically for when you've been accepted, should you try to set up meetings with professors you're interested in?

- a. Most of the schools will schedule times for you (maybe specific to smaller open houses?)
- b. There's also usually some kind of social, so try to seek out people from the labs you're interested in during those
- c. Also, it's a good idea to put in your application specific profs. you're interested in working with.
- d. Honestly, it would never hurt you to specifically reach out to a faculty member you're interested in and asking about setting up a one on one meeting