What to Ask About Grad School

Ask the graduate department
- What are the academic regulations/requirements for graduating?
- What percentages of the students pass the qualifying exams the first time? (How many chances are there?)
- What percentages of the students do not go beyond a masters’ degree?
- What is the average time to obtain a Ph.D.?
- How many students will be in my entering class?
- When (and how) do you choose your advisor? How difficult is it to switch advisors after, say, a year?
- Who selects the dissertation committee?
- Is the support offered in the form of a teaching or a research assistantship? How much is the stipend?
- How many working hours per week is expected for a TA or RA? Is the stipend enough to live on in that area?
- Are you guaranteed support for the entire time, or is it on a year by year basis? If it is year by year, what would disqualify you?
- Is there a teaching requirement? How are teaching assignments made (lottery or choice)?
- What sort of computing facilities do they have? Do they have easy access to electronic mail?
- What are their provisions for housing, day care, health insurance, etc.?

Ask current graduate students
- Do the students have enough time for a social life? Is the type of social life you desire available?
- What are the environs like? Do you like them?
- What is the academic social environment like? For example, do students work together?
- How well does the faculty treat graduate students?
- Do graduate students have access to athletic and other university facilities? Is there a graduate student organization?
- Are the provisions for housing, health insurance, etc. adequate?
- Is the atmosphere highly competitive?
- Do most of the students like working with their research advisor?

Before choosing an advisor
- What is the average time for a student to finish a Ph.D. with that advisor? How frequently is the advisor available?
- How much monetary support is there for research?
- How independent is the research of the students?
- Do the students present their work at national conferences?
- Who pays for attending such conferences?
- Does the advisor take an active role in placing her/his students? Do students go into industry or academia?

Specific issues for women
- Does your advisor give you a thesis problem or do you find your own?
- Is your prospective advisor sensitive to women’s issues?
- It has been said: “Do not go to a place where there are no female faculty.”
- Talk to female graduate students in the department!!
- Do they have women’s support groups? What do they do? Do they have one specific to your field? Is there a women’s center?

Helpful hints
- Choose a research area that you are interested in. However, still choose an advisor with whom you get along!
- Choose an advisor with broad research interests.
- Your advisor should be willing to help you get through in a timely manner, i.e., assist you with meeting the deadlines for preliminary exams, proposal preparation and dissertation
- Attend research seminars offered at your university and annual meetings of professional organizations
- Participate in drafting grant proposals so you will know how to write successful ones
- Make an effort to present your work at departmental, instructional and professional meetings