

Questions To Ask Before Applying To Thesis-Based Graduate Studies

Questions To Ask Yourself

- Why am I interested in graduate studies?
- Do I have the basic skill set needed to succeed in my program of choice (ie, language skills, etc)?
- Does the learning model associated with the program I am interested align with my learning strategies?
- How do I like to be managed/supervised by an advisor?
- How will pursuing graduate studies affect my life, my finances, and the lives of those close to me (ie, dependents, spouse, etc)?
- What are my career goals (ie, do I want to pursue a career in academia or pursue a non-academic or alt-academic¹ career)?
- What professional development skills do I want to foster through a graduate degree?
- Are the supports that I need to succeed available at both the program and institutional levels?
- How long will my prospective program last and what types of work/projects will I be expected to complete?
- Is funding available for my degree program and how is it distributed (ie, will I serve as a Teaching or Research Assistant; is funding guaranteed and for how long)?

Questions To Ask a Potential Advisor/Supervisor²

- How do you interact with your graduate students (ie, how do you prefer to manage students, to communicate with them, and to address any conflicts that may arise)?
- What are your expectations for your graduate students (ie, hours of work, frequency of communication, mandatory meetings, authorship and collaboration expectations, requests for time off, etc)?
- Do your research interests/expertise align with what I want to pursue?
- How many graduate students are you currently working with, how many students have completed graduate students under your supervision, and, on average, how long has it taken them to complete their degrees?
- Will you support my potential non-academic or alt-academic professional development and career path plans?
- What funding are you able to offer the graduate students that you work with and what is the duration of that funding?

¹ Alt-academic refers to careers inside universities or the academy but outside the professoriate.

² Setting out clear, shared expectations with an advisor/supervisor, at the outset of the relationship, may help reduce the possibility for future conflict. It is also recommended that you talk with current graduate students working with you your prospective supervisor to learn about their experiences.