Potential questions to ask at a graduate program interview weekend or after receiving an offer

This list is by no means exhaustive, but it is meant to help you as you figure out what you’d like to ask and what’s important to you as you interview and decide on a doctoral program. If you have suggestions to add, let us know at northeastern.pinelab@gmail.com

**Lab Research**

What is the lab working on now that’s most exciting?

Where is the lab trying to go in the future?

What gaps need to be filled in research or expertise in lab?

Where does research funding come from? (Is there funding?)

Are you expected to get some of your own funding?

Do students design and implement smaller independent studies or work collaboratively on one large jointly implemented study?

Do most students do research in one lab or do they collaborate across labs?

Are there existing datasets in the lab that can supplement data collection?

How many research projects do graduate students usually juggle at once in lab?

**PhD Funding**

What’s the funding structure for the PhD?

How many years are you guaranteed funding?

Does your funding come from the department or your advisor?

Does funding include healthcare?

Is funding dependent on teaching assistantships?

Is there dept funding for phd students to travel to conferences?

Are there internal research grants that phd students can apply for?

**Program Inclusivity**

Do students of color, first-gen, and LGBTQ+ students feel safe, respected, and like they belong?

What programs or initiatives are in place to support students from under-represented groups?

Are there gender-neutral bathrooms in the dept?

How does the dept support students with disabilities?

Is there support for parents? What does that look like?

What is the attitude towards students having kids during graduate school?

\*not a question to ask, but note how diverse the current phd student community is during your visit

**Teaching**

What are the teaching opportunities in the PhD?

What do Teaching Assistants do for their courses?

Is there any support for teaching independently?

What are the college undergraduates like?

Can I mentor undergraduate thesis projects?

**PhD Program Structure**

What are the course requirements or department milestones?

Do current students find these requirements helpful for their learning experience?

Do they have quals (qualifying exams)?

If so, do most students pass? What do they look like?

What is the structure of student dissertations (do most in the lab/dept staple together published papers, or not?)

Do students typically graduate in 5 or 6 years (US phds)? If not, why not?

\*What does the statistics training look like in the program?

\*What methods courses are recommended?

What structure do typical graduate classes have?

Is the vibe in the department competitive or collaborative? (this is a big one!!!)

Do students have opportunities to present their research to the dept and get feedback?

What is the research mentoring structure for the program (single PI, rotations, mentoring committee of multiple PIs, other)?

**Working with the PI**

What’s the best thing about working with the PI?

What's the most challenging thing?

\*What’s it like to write a manuscript with the PI? (you will learn so much when you ask this question!)

What’s the PI’s mentoring style?

If “hands-on”: follow up to get clues that they’re supportive and readily available (good) rather than micro-managing (bad)

If “hands-off”: follow up to get clues that they scaffold your independence (good) vs. absent and takes forever to respond to emails/drafts (bad)

How much does the PI take an interest in students’ outside lives, or is it all business?

Does the PI care about creating a lab culture/community?

Are there lab celebrations?

How does the PI foster an inclusive environment in lab?

How does the PI handle lab conflicts?

Does the PI seem to genuinely enjoy mentoring students?

**Housing/Location**

What is most people’s housing situation?

Can grad students afford to live comfortably on the stipend?

What’s it like to live in that specific location?

Do you need a car to get around?

What kinds of recreational things are nearby?

How is the food scene? (Is it affordable for students?)

If you are religious, is there a place of worship for you nearby?

**Program Culture**

Who do the grad students hang out with?

Is there a strong community in the lab/department?

Do they like the people they work with?

What do they do for fun/on the weekends?

How much time do they take off?

Is it normal to take vacations?

How does the university/dept/lab interface with the local community?