Questions to Ask when Considering Graduate School

Many of these questions can be answered by visiting the school’s/program’s web site or by consulting the reference materials in the library. In Wilson Library these materials are housed under the heading “L 901…” or you may look online at www.lib.umn.edu/page.phtml?page_id=691 for helpful resources. You may also scan the biographical information published with articles in professional journals. This will tell you who is interested in the same topics as you are and where they teach. It would then be possible to contact them and ask for information about graduate schools in the field. If you are not able to find the answers to your questions you should attend the Graduate/Professional School Fair and speak to a representative from various schools.*

Should you attend graduate school?

- What are the advantages of a graduate degree in this field?
- What are my objectives and expectations of graduate work? Do I have particular areas of research interest?
- What are my plans after graduate school? How will a graduate degree affect my future career goals?
- Will the benefits of a graduate degree exceed the costs?

When selecting a school or program:

- What is the size of the program? How many are admitted each term? How many in your field of interest?
- Does it have high quality faculty and research facilities?
- Are you applying to work with a specific faculty person? What if he/she leaves while you are in the program? What if you two do not get along?
- Are broad offerings of course work and degree options available?
- What is the intellectual life of the program? Are there a lot of seminars, visiting speakers, student activities, etc.?
- Are students engaged outside of class or do they just go to classes and then leave campus?
- What are the degree requirements? Is there a thesis or creative component?
- Are support services available?
- How are major advisors selected?
- How long might it take to complete my program?
- Are offices or study spaces available for graduate assistants?
- What kinds of placement services are available? What is the program’s placement record?
- What kinds of schools/firms/organizations hire the program’s graduates?
- Will I need to take extra background courses/prerequisites?
When considering community services and environment:

- What parts of the country would you like to live/study in? What parts of the country would you like to avoid?
- What types of housing are available? What are the costs of each type? Will financial aid cover the costs of housing?
- Where are the schools and business districts located in relation to the campus?
- What cultural, civic, athletic, religious activities are important to you? Are these available in the area surrounding the school?
- If you have a family what resources do you need for them and are those available in the area? Child care? Elder care? Medical care?

On financial aid and tuition costs:

- What will be the total cost each term? Are there tuition waivers? What costs are optional?
- Are fellowships or assistantships available? What responsibilities are attached to them?
- What types of financial are available to me? When are the financial aid deadlines?
- Will you receive aid for a number of years (how many)?
- Do students compete against each other for funding each year?
- How many students in the program are supported fully? Partially?

On admission procedures:

- When are the admission deadlines?
- Are standardized tests required before admission? What are their deadlines?
- What other application materials are required?
- Are campus visits required? Recommended?
- What criteria are used for the admission decisions?
- Who makes the admission decisions?
- How and when will I be notified regarding admission?

*Please note: Graduate school representatives may not be able to answer all questions, but they should be able to get you in touch with people/offices that can answer them.