



Graduate School

Important Questions to Ask (Programs)

- What is the average time to degree completion?
- What are the funding sources (fellowship, TA, RA)? Will I need to TA, and how many semesters?
- How stable is funding for the full length of the program, including summers? What happens if grant or federal funding is disrupted?
- What happens financially if I need extra years to finish the dissertation?
- What is the stipend, and how does it compare to the local cost of living?
- What does the qualifying exam / comprehensive exam / A exam process look like, and how many students don't pass on the first attempt?
- What is the program's completion/retention rate, and what are the most common reasons students leave?
- How are students matched with a faculty advisor or PI? Are there rotations, co-advising options, or a first-year seminar series?
- What is the most important piece of the application? What should I emphasize, and what makes an applicant stand out?
- Do you offer application fee waivers for students from pipeline programs or those facing financial hardship?
- What support exists for international students (visa sponsorship, OPT/CPT guidance, funding eligibility)?
- What conference travel funding is available, and how competitive is it?
- What career outcomes do recent graduates have (not just academic placements, but industry, government, nonprofit, etc.)? How does the program support students pursuing careers outside the professoriate (publishing, museums, policy, industry, etc.)?
- What publishing support exists — writing groups, workshops, connections to journals or university presses?
- How is authorship, credit, or intellectual contribution handled for co-authored or edited volumes?
- What happens if a student's relationship with their advisor doesn't work out? Is there a formal process for switching labs or committees?
- What mental health, wellness, and disability support services are available to graduate students specifically?
- What parental leave, childcare, or family housing support is available to graduate students?

Important Questions to Ask (Current Graduate Students)

- Why did you choose this particular program over others you were considering?
- What are the actual funding sources, and how many semesters of TA/RA work did you end up doing?
- Looking back, what do you wish you had known or asked before you chose this program?
- Given what you know now, what would you have done differently during your application or first year?
- What do you like most and least about this program and this stage of graduate school right now?
- How would you describe the everyday culture of the program, the specific lab, and the department as a whole?
- How has your advisor supported (or hindered) your progress, and how easy is it to get honest, timely feedback?
- How connected do you feel to other students and faculty?
- What does a realistic week look like for you in terms of workload and work-life balance?
- If you had to do it again, would you choose this program? Why or why not?
- What has helped you cope with the stress and uncertainty of graduate school, and how has the program supported (or not supported) your mental health?
- What professional development, career services, or industry-connection opportunities have you used, and were they useful?

Additional Questions for Humanities Applicants

- What language, archive, or fieldwork requirements are there, and is there dedicated funding for archival/research travel?
- How much teaching will I do, and is there formal pedagogy training?