Putting your best foot forward: preparing yourself for graduate school interviews

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What do YOU need to accomplish during the interview?

• Present yourself effectively and honestly
• Show that you understand the field you are entering
• Clearly present your current interests in the field knowing they will evolve
• Explain any bumps in your past without making excuses
• Figure out if this is the “right” school and life for you
• Find out if the research being done excites you
During the application process you may communicate with:

- The Director of Graduate Studies
- Program administrators
- Specific faculty in the program
Setting up the interview

• Respond to calls or e-mails promptly
• Read instructions carefully before calling with logistical questions
• Follow directions for planning your visit
• Try to go during the ‘interview weekend’ if that is the format used
• Provide a list of faculty you want to meet with
Preparing for the interview

• Reread material about the school and program
• Reread your application
• Ask for a list of faculty you will meet with; read about their work
• Practice common interview questions
• Prepare questions in advance
• Practice with a mentor
Interview etiquette

- Dress neatly but comfortably
- Bring some casual clothes for social events
- Shake hands and make eye contact when meeting applicants and hosts
- Attend social events; make an effort to get to know current students and potential classmates
- Ask questions, be enthusiastic and engaged throughout the visit
- Don’t treat the interview as a free trip
REMEMBER....

The program is interviewing you..

AND

You are interviewing the program
Questions you might be asked…

• Tell me about your previous research experience
• What do you enjoy most about doing research?
• What do you find frustrating about doing research?
• What type of research do you hope to work on?
• What interested you in our program?
• Why did you do so poorly in __________?
• Why do you want to be a scientist?
• What are your long-term goals?
• What are your strengths? What areas do you need to strengthen?
• How do you deal with people who are different from you?
• What do you think will be hard about grad school?
• Anything I didn’t ask about that you want me to know?
• Do you have any questions for me?
Questions you might want to ask

- What types of positions do students who graduate from this program typically take?
- How many mentors can I choose from?
- What journals do students publish in?
- Do students attend meetings; who pays?
- What is the average time for degree?
- Do many students drop out of the program?
- Are there teaching requirements? Teaching courses?
- Do many students have their own grants? Do they get help writing and submitting grants?
- Do current students feel supported?
- Is the campus welcoming and diverse?
After the interview.....

• Thank the DGS, the program administrator and student host by e-mail

• Acknowledge offers with a prompt thank-you, and find out when the program needs a firm commitment

• Do not hesitate to e-mail or call with any questions you might have

• Do NOT commit before you are ready to; backing-out is terrible and the scientific community is relatively small
Final thoughts

• Minimize stress and distraction during your trip
• Be self-confident but not egotistical
• Be professional at all time. You are being ‘interviewed’ even when you are not in formal interviews
• It is a kiss of death to be asked “Do you have any questions?” and not have any
• Don’t be overly swayed by the opinion of any one person you meet
• Talk with the program director if anyone asks inappropriate questions or if an interview goes poorly
• Take some notes on the way home - your memory will fade