



Rensselaer

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Navigating Campus Visits: a Roadmap to Success

Office of Graduate Admissions | Fall 2018

Did you know...

- Many institutions have funds to cover student visits- fully funded and partially funded visits!
- Some websites tell you how to request a funded visits and while others may not specifically say it, if you ask they can provide you with the information.



Things to know

Tip 1: Reach out to faculty and graduate students before applying for feedback on the institution atmosphere. Faculty members review applications, not admission professionals.

Tip 2: Don't just ask for a campus visit, you should ask about a funded visit- especially if you are applying for a PhD

Tip 3: Have several options for possible dates that you can visit. The more flexible you can be the easier it will be to make the visit possible.





Understand your WHY!



- To avoid getting upset and believing you were misled about what to expect when you become a part of an institution's community consider how you came to decide to join that institution. Poor answers include:
 - • "My parents went here."
 - • "You're ranked in the top 5."
 - • "You're the Ivy League."

Did you...

- Go to visit the institutions before applying?
- Contact current students and recent graduates?
- Complete some research about the institution on the Web?
- Thoroughly review information on the curriculum and faculty?
- Spend time thinking about what you really wanted out of your grad school experience?

Poor decisions are made very quickly about where a student will apply, and the criteria are either word of mouth or graduate school rankings.

This is an important RELATIONSHIP

Evaluate the department/program

Areas of specialization

Research compatibility

Student and advisor pairings

Interdisciplinary study/research

Essentially, what do they have to offer you?





The Purpose of the Campus Visit

Campus visits can give the faculty a stronger sense of who you are as a person, beyond what they'll glean from your application.

Prepare a list of what are essential qualities in a grad school—anything from student culture to support structures to on-campus eateries. Search for these things when you are on campus.

For conversations with faculty, be respectful of time. If at all possible, enter the conversation well aware of the professor's area of research, and having read some recent publications (articles or books) so you can ask about them, and share your specific professional and academic interests with them on their own terms.

From the utilitarian—is there a grocery store that meets your needs?—to the frivolous—does the local movie theater offer a decent student discount?—spend time getting answers to questions that will affect your quality of life as a resident of the local community.

Dress comfortably for a possible walking campus tour and be prepared with a small umbrella in case it rains.

Prepare a list of questions beforehand and keep a notebook with you. During your visit, you'll be bombarded with information. If you have a list of questions with you, then you are less likely to forget to ask important questions. Have questions ready for the tour, for talking with other students, faculty, and the admissions advisor.



Funded Visits

A funded visit allows you to talk one-on-one with faculty you are interested in working with, eat lunch with students who are currently in the program, see labs you are interested in working in, as well as see the local community.

All of these factors are important as you decide your next place of study.

Questions to ask on a visit

Motivation

- What was the motivation for attending graduate school?
- Why choose Ph.D. over a Master's?
- What are the differences between going to graduate school straight from undergrad or taking time off to work before graduate school?
- What was your journey to figuring out you wanted to pursue your degree?

Academics

- What is the balance between coursework and independent research in graduate school?
- What are qualifier exams?

Graduate School Application Process Questions

- What made you pick RPI over another institution?
- How did you prepare for graduate school?
- How early did you start preparing your applications?
- What are some misconceptions that you or other students had about graduate school?



Research

- How did you find your advisor?
- How do you know if your idea/project is unique/hasn't been done?
- Can I get a Master's during my PhD process?
- If you come up with an idea that is patentable, will the school own it?
- How do you get on a publication as an undergraduate?
- Where should we publish (if we can) as an undergraduate?
- What do you do if you are given a project that you don't like by your advisor?
- How important is prior research experience for graduate school?

Life During Graduate School

- What is the graduate experience like for you?
- What kind of support programs (academic, social, etc.) are available to minority graduate students?
- Are there opportunities to serve the surrounding communities?
- How was the transition from undergrad to grad? Do you feel busier/more overwhelmed since you do research and classes now or as if there is a disconnect between you and campus life?
- What is the social aspect like in your department?

Life After Graduate School

- Can you be overqualified with a Ph.D.?
- What career options will be open to you with your graduate degree?

Diversity in Graduate Studies

The DIGS program at Rensselaer is an opportunity to make a paid campus visit to:

- Meet Faculty
- Meet Current Students
- Visit Laboratories
- Understand the Campus Culture/Environment

<https://admissions.rpi.edu/graduate/diversity-recruitment-initiatives>



Evaluating your campus visit

On your trip home, take out that list you created with your essential grad school qualities, and compare it with what you've learned. How does the school measure up? If a few elements are sorely lacking, does the school make up for it in other ways that are equally as important to you?

What did you learn new?

In what ways did this visit meet your expectations? In what ways were you disappointed?

How interested are you in exploring this academic program further?

Evaluating the campus visit...cont.

What values, skills, and interests of do you have that fit—or don't fit—with the degree, department, university, or student culture?

What are your next steps from here?

Your campus visit isn't the only way to answer these questions, but it should give you an invaluable in-person sense of the school, the culture of the students and faculty, and the state of its facilities, while also raising further questions you may want to have answered.

Campus visits allow you to get your own perspective on what you can expect from certain graduate schools. You can visit graduate schools: before applying, after being admitted, or before enrollment. It's never too early, and it's never too late.

NOTE: You may have to be prepared to receive a reimbursement, even on a funded visit an Uber or Lyft may be necessary, at some point.



Questions





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