

## Considerations in Selecting a Thesis/Research Advisor for your Graduate Degree

*Some of these questions you can ask the professor or other graduate students in the lab. Some you are better off asking a former member of the lab, i.e. someone who has moved on to another position. (Few people do the latter, but it is really the best advice.)*

Has the professor already had a student graduate earn a PhD, i.e. does he/she have experience training? Or would you be their first graduate student?

If the professor is new, is the laboratory set up and ready to go? It can be exciting to help set up a new lab, but you also need to be cautious. If you are the first graduate student, you do not want to be stuck setting up the lab, being the lab manager, and training everyone else until the lab gets on its feet. You can get many pats on the back for doing so, but it does not get you closer to graduating with a PhD.

What is the professor's training style? Hands on? Report every step you take? Figure it out yourself?

Is the professor available to consult/ask questions? Or is there a postdoctoral fellow (PhD) who serves that purpose? Ask the other students or former students.

How long does a student usually take to complete the PhD? Four years? Five years? Longer? How many publications do they have when they graduate?

Where have former graduate students gone for postdoctoral training?

What is the 'climate' in the lab? Does everyone have to be there at 7 AM? Does everyone have to stay late every night? Do you have to be seen at all times or is it okay to go to the library and read? Does the professor have to leave to pick up his/her children at 4PM? Are there people in the lab with children who have to leave at 4 PM to get them from childcare? (This isn't about whether you have children, but the professor's attitude towards everyone having a life outside the lab.)

Does the professor want you to pursue a project with a high probability of success? Or a project that is exciting and cutting-edge, but with a lot of uncertainty or even a low probability of success? (Yes, you work toward the success of the lab, but, no, you are not solely responsible for the professor's promotion or next grant.)

Do students go home for winter break? Or is everyone supposed to work 356 days out of the year? (You arrange vacation time with your professor. There is no such thing as 'Spring Break' in graduate school.)

Your professor does **NOT** have to be a 'best friend', but you do need to be able to relate/get along for the next 4-5 years. So you may have a GREAT advisor, but your best friend and your social life may be outside the lab.

Reminder – Once you give up your privacy, you cannot get it back. So think about how much personal information you want to have floating around the lab. (I know a student who confided way too much and then was upset when everyone discussed the student's personal life.)