



How to Connect with Graduate Students

Connecting with current and past graduate students can be a great way for you to develop insight into whether the graduate program of interest is a good fit for you. You can gain insider tips on:

- What it means to be a graduate student at a particular institution;
- What day-to-day life looks like;
- What it is like to work with different faculty advisors;
- And, what supports and activities are available on- and off-campus.

If you are considering re-locating, current and past grad students can be a useful resource to get to know the location better – whether it is about housing, cost of living, safety, transit options, night life, recreational activities, or useful apps.

Keep in mind that many grad students may be balancing a busy schedule and may prefer to give their advice verbally. Be open to connecting with them for a quick chat over Zoom or connecting with them outside of standard office hours. See the [Informational Interviewing Tip Sheet](#) for additional points of consideration.

Ways to Connect

1. Start with who you know. **Speak with your current TAs and professors** who are already within your academic field of interest. Many academic or research fields/subfields are often more well-connected than we realize, so they may be able to provide you insight or introduce you to people you may be interested in chatting with.
2. Many **academic departments** list their current graduate students in their People Directory. Some may also list the grad student's Faculty Advisor or supervisor, but some may require you to research further or contact the department for contact information.
3. For research-based graduate programs, many professors are the Principal Investigators of their labs and may have a **lab website** with a list of past and current members. Consider using this to determine who you want to connect with, and then use the department directories to search for their contact information.
4. If you receive an opportunity to **visit the campus**, take the chance to speak with people you meet in the department, in the lab, or in meetings.
5. Politely **reach out to your prospective faculty supervisor or academic department** on whether they have a list of graduate students who are willing to speak with prospective students.



6. **Attend a Career Panel** to speak with U of T alumni to gain insight on their career path (some of which may include graduate school) and to ask if they are willing to connect you with past or current graduate students they know. (To attend, please register for events on [CLNx](#).)
7. Reach out to past or current grad students on [LinkedIn](#) or on [Ten Thousand Coffees](#).
8. Engage with grad students on **social media** (like LinkedIn), such as using events and conference hash tags, to develop a relationship. (See below for the Develop Your Academic Network resource to use this method effectively.)

Sample Questions to Ask

About Grad Student Life

- What is a typical week like?
- How intense are classes/exams? How many hours per week does this take up?
- Do you feel there is a collaborative environment with other students? With other labs?
- How many classes are typical per semester? How much time is left for research?
- What kind of electives do students take?
- Would I have time for a part-time job? For extra-curricular activities?
- How much time are we expected to teach each week? Which classes can we TA?
- How often do students attend conferences? What kind and when do they usually occur?
- Do you receive funding? Is it enough to live on?
- How much time do you spend per week applying for funding?
- Do you ever feel under pressure to produce results?
- What does it take to be successful in this program? What sacrifices may be necessary to be successful?
- What do you hope to do after graduating? How prepared do you feel from completing this program?

About the Advisor

- How are the advisors generally? Do most students like working with their advisors? Any you would recommend or avoid?
- Do students ever switch advisors?
- How many students does your advisor supervise? How long do your advisor's students typically take to finish the program?
- How active is your advisor in students' projects?
- How frequently is the advisor available? Are there weekly check-ins or group meetings?
- What is your advisor's supervisory or management style?
- How does your advisor like to give feedback?
- How are decisions made? Do people feel included?



About the Department and the University

- What led you to choosing this program? This university/college? What is unique?
- If you could choose a graduate program again, would you still choose this one?
- What projects or activities are prioritized by the department? By the university?
- Am I expected to come up with my own project or will I be given an existing project?
- Are there opportunities for collaboration between departments? Between institutions? With industry partners?
- What benefits or drawbacks do you see in this department? In this university/college?

About Campus Life and the Community

- Is there a common study space, or do most students work in their offices?
- How is the gym? What athletic facilities are available?
- Have you used the student services on-campus? Are they responsive?
- Is there a graduate student council? What do they do?
- Should I live on residence? How safe is the local area/housing?
- If I have dietary restrictions, do I have on-campus food options?
- How is campus life? Do you enjoy it here? What student clubs are there? Is it easy to make friends?
- How diverse is the student body? What does that look like in your experience?
- What is the surrounding area like? What can I typically do in the community in the evenings and on weekends?

Additional UTM Career Centre Resources

[Learn to Network Workshops](#) and [LinkedIn Workshops](#) are held regularly at the UTM Career Centre synchronously and asynchronously.

See the [Develop Your Academic Network](#) page for external resources, such as tips on how to use social media to extend academic networking, how to network at conferences, and more.

Read tipsheets that provide brief overviews on topics such as: [Networking Strategies](#), [Informational Interviewing](#), [Using LinkedIn](#) and [Social Media](#).

Book an [appointment](#) with a Career Counsellor to plan your approach, or for support when considering graduate school or reviewing graduate school CVs and personal statements.

Access the [Career Centre E-Book collection](#) using the tag “How do I Make Connections” for more resources, such as “Networking for People Who Hate Networking, A Guide for Introverts, the Overwhelmed and Disconnected” by Devora Zack (2019).