

Questions to ask when considering postdoc positions

Questions for faculty / prospective advisors

- I have read some general information about your work, but I was wondering if you could tell me more about it. (People love to talk about what they do.)
- Where do you see your research heading in the next few years?
- How many students do you currently supervise? How many post-docs?
- Are there openings for new postdocs in your group?
- How much independence do your postdocs typically have to choose or start their own projects?
- What is your philosophy of advising? How do you give feedback and how often?
- What skills or characteristics are important for success in your group? What are your postdocs' responsibilities?
- Do you anticipate taking a sabbatical or retiring or moving in the next few years?

- How many hours per week do you expect your students and postdocs to work? Do you ask people to stay late or come in on weekends?
- What is the funding situation for the group? Do your students typically need to teach for more semesters than their program requires? Where would my funding come from and how long would my appointment be?
- Do postdocs have the opportunity to teach?
- Do your postdocs participate in writing grants? If so, how?
- What is your philosophy when it comes to writing papers and determining authorship? How long does it usually take for a paper to proceed from outline to accepted publication in this group?
- How many conferences do your students and postdocs typically attend every year? Which ones? Do they often present unpublished work?
- How does university housing work? Is there a waiting list?
- What are your former advisees doing now? Do you still serve as a mentor to some of them?
- Can you give me e-mail addresses of any of your current or former students / postdocs that I could get in contact with?

Questions for current graduate students and postdocs

- **General:** Do you like it here? Why did you decide to come here? What surprised you most about being here? What do you like least? What are my responsibilities as a postdoc and as a member of the group?

- **Department:** What's the department like? Are people happy? Relaxed? Do people in different groups collaborate a lot? Which groups do you collaborate with and how did those collaborations start? What kinds of social events does the department organize?

- **Social life:** What do you do when you're not doing physics? Do you have time to do the things you want? Do you like it here? Do you have time to take breaks and eat lunch? Does everybody work every weekend? How are the restaurants? Can I pursue (insert hobbies here)? What about campus safety? What's the weather like? Do postdocs have access to athletic and other university facilities?

- **Work/social balance:** What are the work expectations? Are postdocs able to strike a balance between work and personal life? What opportunities for professional development exist? How supportive and cohesive is the postdoc community? Is there a postdoc organization within the university or department? How many hours per week do you work?

- **Laboratory equipment:** How are the laboratory facilities? Does the shared equipment work? Can you get time on equipment when you want to? Which equipment is most heavily used? How often does the group run out of things like nitrogen gas, pipette tips, Millipore cartridges, etc? Do issues relating to lab infrastructure ever prevent you from making progress? How long does it take from the time you submit an order until the time it arrives?

- **Safety and responsibilities:** Who is in charge of lab safety and cleanliness and what sort of training and cleanup regimens are there? Have there been any safety problems in the group? What responsibilities would I have as a member of this group?

- **Computing:** How are the computing facilities, including shared clusters? Which operating systems, programming languages, and software packages do people use and how often? How much time do people in this group spend writing code? Does the group use version control for coding and/or writing papers? Does the group use LaTeX? Does the group use an online calendar, google docs, a lab wiki, etc? Do people generally use their laptops or lab-provided computers? Is the PI tech-savvy?

- **Money:** Is the salary enough to live on? Is housing expensive? Where do you live? What kind of housing can most postdocs afford? Does the university provide healthcare and is it adequate? Do postdocs ever have trouble finding financial support during their time here? How many years are postdocs funded and is the funding competitive or assured? If postdocs here typically have fellowships, what agencies/institutions do they come from? How does travel funding work?

Questions for group members about advisor and advising style:

- Is your advisor's personality appealing and compatible with your own?
- What is their reputation as an advisor?
- What is the advisor's relationship like with other faculty at the university and in the field?
- How many advisees finish and how quickly?
- Does the group have adequate resources (funding, lab space, office space, etc)? How are lab benches and desks assigned?
- What is the average time to obtain a PhD? How long are postdocs typically here?
- How supportive is the advisor of students' and postdocs' efforts to gain professional breadth?
- What is the advisor's work style? How often and when do they visit the lab?
- What does s/he expect the work style of students and postdocs to be? Is it compatible with your own?
- What skills or characteristics are important for success in this group?
- Does your advisor understand what motivates you? How do they react if you are frustrated with something? How do they try to motivate you?

- What is the type, frequency, and quality of interactions with your advisor? Are you or your advisor the one that initiates these interactions most often?
- How much time does the advisor spend with advisees on their work?
- How quickly and how often does the advisor publish completed work?
- What is it like to write a paper with your advisor? How long does it take? How frequently does s/he give you feedback on drafts? Do you use LaTeX and/or version control? What software do you use to prepare figures?
- How do group meetings work and when are they? Who organizes them? How often do people present and what are the meetings like?
- How many conferences do people go to in a year, and which ones?
- Do you participate in grant writing? What is that experience like with your advisor? How are most of the postdocs funded?
- Does your advisor encourage/permit you to work on projects outside of your official (e.g. funded) responsibilities?
- Was there anything that surprised you about working in this group? What do you like the most and the least about this group?
- What other questions should I be asking? Are there any questions that you wish you had asked before you started here?