Talking About your Science: Grad School Interviews

PiNBAC Workshop
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Purpose of Grad School Interviews

- For the program, we get to know more about you:
  - How do you “think like a scientist”?
  - What excites you and what is driving you to pursue a PhD in the field?
  - How will you contribute to the program and community?
  - What else is there to learn about you that maybe wasn’t highlighted in the application?

- For you, you get to learn:
  - Is this an environment where I can see myself thriving?
  - Will this program equip me with the training that I need to achieve my professional & personal goals?
  - Do I still like/admire the researchers I thought I might want to work with after meeting them? (Are there other exciting areas of research that I might want to pursue here that weren’t previously on my radar?)

In general, both parties are trying to determine if you and the program are a good “fit” (meaning that you will get what you need to thrive as a scientist from the program, and the program will be enriched by your unique passions, skills, and scientific contributions)
PiN Interview Information (from Chris Harvey)

Intervi
ws

• 30-minute interviews
• Five faculty and one student, based on research interests and requests from the interviewing student
• Scientific conversation
  • We ask about your research experience and interests
  • We tell you about our current research
  • Very casual
Prepping for Interviews: The Science

- For your own research, make sure you understand and can describe the conceptual framework and scientific rationale.
  - What is the biological question you are seeking to answer? Why is it an interesting/important question to answer?
  - What approach are you taking to study the question and why are you using that approach?
  - What are some technical caveats for your experimental approach? How might you work around those?
  - What have you/will you learn? Are there other interpretations to your existing data?
  - In general, how are you thinking about your project?
Prepping for Interviews: The Science

• For your interviewer’s area of research:
  ○ If you are meeting with a faculty member you requested, this means you’re interested in that person’s research and are possibly considering that person as a thesis advisor. As such, you might want to make some effort to get to know their work.
    ■ Go onto the lab website to read about current projects in the lab or skim some recent abstracts from the lab
    ■ Ask questions about the person’s research during the interview
      ● Approach this from a place of **curiosity and interest**, not an “I need to impress this person” place. You are interested in the work for a reason - share what that reason is! Relate your interests to your previous background and experience.
    ■ It is _not_ necessary to read articles from the lab in preparation for your interviews (unless you want to)
  ○ If you are meeting with someone you didn’t request, they are likely a random admissions committee member. While it can be helpful to briefly familiarize yourself with what they study, they likely won’t expect to talk much about their work with you (unless you want to).
Prepping for Interviews: Your Story

- Be prepared to talk about your own journey: what brought you here and what is motivating you for the future (scientifically, personally, and professionally)?
  - It can be helpful to review your application before interviews so you remember what you wrote in your lovely statement of purpose :-)

- It’s ok to not know exactly what you want to study, or to have many ideas! Programs recognize that you can (and likely will) change your mind during your training. The important thing is to be able to articulate why you think this program would be a good place for your scientific training, and to be able to describe some general topics/questions that drive you in neuroscience.
Prepping for Interviews: You’re Interviewing Us, Too!

- Don’t be afraid to ask questions of the program (during interviews and during other parts of the weekend, too) to help you determine whether the program/school will offer adequate support, training, and resources to you as you pursue your goals for yourself.
  - Extensive list of potential questions to ask during interviews [here](#) and [here](#) (“Navigating STEM Grad School Interviews as a Marginalized Trainee”)
Advice from a PiNBAC Adviser :-)
Additional Resources for Grad School Interviews

- How to Ace Your Graduate School Interview: Communicating Your Research Competently and Confidently (Científico Latino)
- Preparing for Graduate School Interviews (NIH OITE, slide deck)
- Preparing for Virtual Graduate School Interviews (NIH OITE, video)
- Tips for Graduate School Interviews (SfN Neuronline)
- 10 Tips for Graduate School Virtual Interviews (SfN Neuronline)
- Navigating STEM Graduate School Interviews as a Marginalized Trainee (Robin Aguilar)
- “To ace your Ph.D. program interviews, prepare to answer—and ask—these key questions” (Science Careers)
- Questions you might want to ask during your PhD interviews