

CS Purdue Prospective PhD Student Visit Day Frequently Asked Questions

Computer Science Graduate Student Association

Below is a list of frequently asked questions by prospective students. For any question not answered here, such as personal or opinionated questions, please contact the Computer Science Graduate Student Association (CSGSA) Board at csgsb@purdue.edu.

1. How many classes do you have to take each semester?
 - It depends on courses you have already taken, but it is typically 2-3 courses per semester until the requirements are fulfilled.
2. Would it be wise to go about asking current students for their opinions on particular advisors? If so how?
 - It is a good idea to talk to current students to see whether their advisor's advising/working style might be a good fit for you. If you are interested in a particular faculty member, you can visit their website, look for a list of their students, and contact them directly. Alternatively, you can contact the CSGSA Board and we can try to connect you with a relevant person.
3. Are any of you from larger cities? What was it like moving to a smaller city?
 - Coming from a mid-size city, daily life here is more or less the same. The public transportation options may differ from your city, depending on where you come from, but West Lafayette and Lafayette have a robust bus system (free to students), common ridesharing services (e.g., Uber, Lyft), and an Amtrak train stop. If you want to venture out, larger cities nearby Purdue include Indianapolis (~1 hour drive) and Chicago (~2 hour drive). You can access them by car, shuttle, bus, and/or train. But be warned that as of recently, the Amtrak lines have been significantly reduced.
 - One surprising thing about moving from a large city to the West Lafayette area has been that the cost of things have been relatively similar to what you'd pay in larger city areas. The only difference in the rent prices, as the rent here is relatively cheaper than in larger cities. The further away from the university you are, the cheaper rent will be, and rent near campus is usually more expensive.
4. Is the coursework exciting or does it feel more like a chore?/Are the courses up to date with more or less recent advances?
 - This completely depends on the instructor and the course. Different instructors will teach the same course some times (e.g., the theory instructors will rotate between teaching algorithms). It really depends. Generally, for more up-to-date courses, look out for the relevant graduate seminar courses (CS 592/593 courses).
5. Interested to know about your experience(s) as a Teaching Assistant? Is there any sort of option you to get select the courses?
 - There is an opportunity to rank classes you wish to teach, but there is no guarantee that you will receive your top pick. Giving several top picks increases the department's ability to give you a course you are interested in.

6. What are favourable and cheaper places to stay near Purdue's campus?

- Consider browsing Reddit for current insights. What people define as “cheap” varies person to person, so I'll give just some general recommendations and warnings. You can window shop based on your own needs.

First, let's start with the negatives. Anecdotally: avoid Granite Student Living. There are many horror stories and they've earned this reputation time and time again.

The following are based on insights from the current GSA Board as well as those of friends who are graduate students.

AVOID: Titan Property Management, Distinctive Rental Properties, Crandall, Cole Rentals, BW Parks, Consolidated Property Management, Management Advantage.

Acceptable: River Market, Purdue Research Foundation, Wabash Landing Apartments.

More Favorable: O'Neil Property Management, Hunter Lafayette Properties, Smart Digs, Hislope Property Management

Again, your mileage may vary, so please do your due diligence and look up this information as well.

7. Is the stipend enough for living comfortably in west Lafayette?

- You won't be living like royalty, but you are able to live without too much trouble. Expect to spend anywhere from around 25-50

8. Is it common to work over the summer at Purdue?

- It is common to work at an internship for the summer to get a feel for work after graduation. It is also common for students to stay on campus as GTAs (Graduate Teaching Assistants) or RAs (Research Assistants) in their labs.

9. How does the preliminary exam work?

- After scheduling with your chosen committee and reserving a room, you submit your thesis proposal to the committee. You then schedule a time to present your current and future work, and the committee will ask questions throughout. After you are done, you are dismissed for the committee to discuss your work, and then bring you back to give their assessment. You will also need to work with the CS Grad Office to get the needed permissions to carry out your preliminary exam.

10. Does the university provide you with laptop and desktop for research?

- This is usually handled by your advisor, which will depend on how much funding they have. The same is true for a personal office space.

11. Can we transfer our credit from MS degree so that we do not need to have 6 courses?

- It's possible, but it's unlikely that more than a handful of classes will be eligible for transfer. The transfer standards are very high. The transfer form can be found [here](#).

12. For PhD, how common is it to have your initially assigned academic advisor actually supervise your dissertation? If not, how did y'all choose your supervisor?

- It depends on if you came to Purdue already with an offer/desire to work with a particular professor or not. If you did not, you get assigned an initial advisor who is there to help you get started with courses and on the track to finding an advisor you want to work with. There is a mandatory 8 week course you take during your first Fall semester at Purdue where many professors come and talk about their research, which gives you the opportunity to see the professors and their work. After that (or before if you did your own research), you can contact the professor and ask about working with them/becoming their student.

13. Can people switch advisors in the program?
 - Yes. This happens for a number of reasons, including shifts in interests and the advisor not being a good match with the student.
14. Average amount of time to complete your PhD in CS at Purdue?
 - Currently, it's about 6 years.
15. Can you take courses outside of computer science, whether they are undergraduate or graduate?
 - Yes, as long as you qualify for them or get permission to take them. Keep in mind that you also need to manage all of your other responsibilities as well.
16. How does funding change?
 - Funding varies from semester to semester depending on your situation. It is really a conversation with you and your advisor. The department provides TAs (to the best of their ability) for students when they are currently seeking an advisor or the advisor does not currently have funding for them.
17. Can the guaranteed funding offer be extended past 4 years?
 - The guaranteed funding given by the department (through TAs) most certainly can be extended. Often, the department needs to hire TAs outside of CS to fill the demand, so generally obtaining TAs for longer than 4 years is not an issue. The funding offer requires you to make satisfactory academic progress and do well as a TA. As for funding from your advisor (as an RA), this is variable and depends on things like if your advisor has funds available or you are in good standing with your advisor.
18. What's the community like in the department? Is there much socializing outside of classes, etc?
 - There are many opportunities for socialization, including those directly promoted by the department. For example, there is a weekly computer science social hour, where students mingle with each other, faculty, and staff over coffee and various snacks. Moreover, the Computer Science Graduate Student Board hosts many social events throughout the year. Past events include game nights, ice skating, corn mazes, and bar crawls. Personally, the majority of my friends at Purdue are from within the department.
Note that for the past couple of years, many social events have been cancelled due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
19. How much does it take in a bike / bus to get to the University from Lafayette proper?
 - It depends on where you live in Lafayette (it's a small town spread out over a big area). It is recommended to use Google Maps from your potential residencies to check this out.
20. How active (vibrant?) is the academic culture among PhD students in the department? Are there a lot of reading seminars and etc.?
 - Quite vibrant. There are many reading groups that meet on weekly/bi-weekly schedules.
21. How common is it for (PhD candidates) to do internships during their phd duration?
 - It is common, especially during the summer.
22. Is it easy to get a variety of groceries, ingredients, etc?
 - Yes. Near campus (only 500ft away) there's a Target and Asian Market in the Wabash Landing area ($\frac{1}{2}$ mile walk from campus) called "Better World Market". Within about a 3-mile radius (accessible by bus), you can get to the markets that might meet your needs.

23. Information about housing on or near campus?

- Purdue has a website dedicated to off-campus housing (find it [here](#)). Unfortunately, the on-campus housing for graduate students is slowly dwindling and not being replaced at this time. Some more general information about housing in the general area:

	Pros	Cons
West Lafayette	Closer to campus	More expensive on average (especially with new construction)
	City of West Lafayette performs habitability inspections for rental properties	Limit on number of unrelated people living in one unit: 3 unrelated people OR a family plus 2 unrelated people
	Better/more extensive parks and trail systems	Grocery stores are slightly more expensive
	Very good school district and generally more family friendly	Less socioeconomic and ethnic diversity, especially off campus
	More ISP choices (depending on where you live)	
Lafayette	Better “downtown”: walkable, with shops and bars and restaurants	Slightly worse road maintenance
	Fewer undergrads	Less expensive on average (also a pro)
	Closer to shared community gardens, where you can harvest produce for free; also closer to food banks	You must register your dogs with the city and provide shot records and pay a small yearly fee
	No limit on unrelated roommates	Higher crime rate (violent and property crime about 2.5x that of West Lafayette based on 2020 data)

24. What kind of restaurants are near campus and how expensive is the food?

- The restaurants are typically reasonably priced, but some have been experiencing small increases in prices over the years. There is a large variety of international and American food.

25. Is it safe to go back home late at night if you live near campus?

- One thing that Purdue students across identities often agree upon is that they feel safe to walk across campus, even in the dead of night. There also exist programs through PUPD such as SAFEWALK that you can call if you feel unsafe walking around campus. PUPD frequently patrols campus.

26. What is the total miscellaneous cost to attend Purdue for a year?

- There is a breakdown of the miscellaneous costs (Repair and Rehabilitation fee, Student Fitness & Wellness Fee, etc.) stated in the Assistantship Details section of the Offer Letter. Typically it’s \$860 per semester for non-international students, and an additional \$145 international student fee per semester.

27. For someone who has just completed their Master’s at some other university what is the duration within which they can give their comprehensive exams / Qualifying exams?

- There are no qualifying exams anymore. Just courses and grade requirements, and a preliminary examination that will likely be your thesis proposal. You must pass the core courses with the

required GPA within your first 4 semesters at Purdue. The prelim is usually taken a year before graduation. The time to take your prelim depends on how far you are progressing and when you and your advisor feel ready.

28. Is it common for incoming internationals to live directly off-campus?

- As an international student, I always lived off-campus. I know many other international students that also did. Options are usually cheaper. I didn't have a car for my first three years, and I stayed in off-campus housing in West Lafayette at walking distance from grocery stores and bus stops.

29. Can I ask what's the daily life of a PHD student? Thanks

- It really depends on you, your classes, your advisor, your research, and your workload!

30. How does one get in touch with other incoming graduate students to share housing with for the first year?

- There are a variety of ways to get in touch with people for this. Most frequently, people get in touch via Facebook's "Housing & Subleases" pages. You can also try to find housing through University Residences at Purdue (though the majority of their offerings are targeting undergraduates). Reddit's r/Purdue likely has some sound advice too. If all else fails, find the place you'd like to live, and ask the landlord if they might have any sort of system for roommate matching, or if they know of anybody seeking to sublet all or part of their apartment.

31. Is there like a candidacy exam that one needs to pass before formally beginning PhD?

- There is no candidacy exam per se, but the closest thing would be your preliminary examination, which is usually done 1 year prior to graduation.

32. Would it be feasible, or common, to bring along a spouse for the duration of the PhD?

- Yes, this is common, and can actually help with finances if they are able to work as well. Spouses and other family members of graduate students are also eligible for benefits like "reduced tuition, health insurance, and reduced membership fees at the Purdue Recreational Sport Center (the co-rec). ([source](#)).

33. Does an RAship usually pay more than a TA?

- Their pay is comparable.

34. Is it common for graduate students to receive fellowships? Or is it difficult to come by?

- There are several opportunities for graduate students to receive fellowships (both non-international and international students). Fellowships are usually very competitive and open to student all across the country, so your results may vary, but there are several students in the department with fellowships.

35. Is it common for students to land Research Scientists jobs after a PhD at Purdue?

- Yes.

36. How are meal plans of Purdue? Recommend?

- Graduate students typically don't enroll in meal plans, as it is cheaper to cook your own food. As a former Resident Assistant during my undergrad here, I can tell you that you will likely be overpaying if you enroll in a meal plan. The program is meant to give undergraduates who live on campus a convenient place to get buffet-style meals. Looking at amortized cost, you'd have to go to a dining court for several meals every week for it to make financial sense. If you anticipate going to the dining courts only a few times a week, consider just paying with debit/credit instead,

and otherwise cooking at home. As for the quality, I really enjoyed the dining courts! It's no Michelin star experience, but you can usually find something for everyone. Again, it's buffet style so nobody is going to serve you.

37. How often do people collaborate with people outside Purdue CS (other unis/industry) in Ph.D.

- This occurs often. Sometimes, even as a masters student doing research, you have the opportunity to collaborate with faculty and graduate students from several different institutions. Many roads lead to Purdue, and you'll find that the majority of the faculty have strong ties to other universities.

38. Is life convenient when you don't have a car?

- The buses are very easy to navigate, and go most everywhere you need to go. Uber, Lyft, and rental cars are readily available too. In most cases you can live comfortably. It is pretty manageable but it will depend on where you live. It can suck to have to lug groceries home. Factor this into where you decide to live. If you live at a place that is several miles down US 231 and not near any grocery stores, check public transportation schedules through CityBus. If you are considering bringing a car, it can't hurt (especially in the winters).

39. Is going everywhere with a bicycle feasible/safe?

- Yes, everything across campus can be easily accessed via bike. There are dedicated bike paths throughout campus, much of West Lafayette, and portions of Lafayette.

40. If I quit from the Ph.D. program, could I get a master degree?

- Yes. It is common for students who find that they have a better offer in industry or elsewhere to "Master out". However, you need to be aware that the Master's degree actually can have more course requirements for the PhD! Thankfully, most incoming PhD students will load up on courses during their first couple years, which could allow you to earn a Master's during the completion of your program. But you will need to discuss the situation with the graduate office about your specific case.

41. If I get external funding, will Purdue take away the TA?

- This is not a super common situation. Consult with the Graduate Office on this.

42. Is TAShip (say at least for 1 course), a requirement for PhD?

- No, but it is recommended (especially if you want to be a professor, you need teaching experience).

Changelog

- 02/17/2022: Fixed typos and added language consistent with new information from the department.
- 04/02/2021: creation of this document.