

## **Questions to Consider before Choosing a Major Professor**

The following list of questions was created by Dr. Ann Matheny, Center for Naval Analysis, Alexandria, VA, in conjunction with the Central Illinois Chapter of AWIS. (Note: PI stands for Principal Investigator which is comparable to a major professor)

Questions to ask yourself:

1. Where do I want to be in five years? In ten years?
2. What is most important to me - my work or my intellectual interest in a field?
3. Do I need direction and motivation from an advisor, or do I prefer to work independently?
4. Do I need to feel comfortable talking to my advisor?
5. Is the field I choose easily adaptable to other fields?
6. Do I prefer to work in a group or on my own?
7. Do I want to work primarily with computers?
8. Will the project be purely theoretical, experimental, or a combination of both?
9. Do I want to start a family in the next five years?

Questions to ask members of the group or the prospective advisor:

1. How stable is the advisor's funding? (Does the advisor have funding?)
2. Do students get help to write grant proposals?
3. Do I get to choose my own project or do I work on the Principal Investigator's project?
4. How involve is the PI in the research?
5. Does the PI have favorites? Does the PI neglect or give very little attention to some members of the groups?
6. Are students backed by the PI when they run into departmental politics?

7. Does the PI treat male and female students with the same respect as far as their intellectual abilities are concerned?
8. Does the PI promote your work or claim it as hers/his own?
9. Does the PI work with you towards your career or are you on your own?
10. Where have previous students gone?
11. How long does it typically take to get a PhD in the group?
12. Do students publish and attend conferences all along, or only at the end of their research?
13. What kind of work can I expect to find after graduation if I specialize in the PI's area of research?
14. Does the PI give you tools or are you on your own to develop research capabilities?
15. Does the group meet regularly for group meetings or lunches?
16. Are the group members competitive or cooperative?
17. Does the group collaborate with other groups?
18. Will I need to travel to do my research? How will that affect my lifestyle?
19. Does the PI have tenure?
10. What amount of course work is expected/discouraged after joining the group?

Suggestion: Do a literature search of the prospective advisor's publications. Do they seem interesting to you? Also find papers from the group's graduate students.