Common Questions for ChemE’s

April 15, 2010

Huge congrats on your admission to the department! I know you are probably facing the little problem of deciding where to go among all the top schools you got accepted (hey, let’s be honest, that is indeed a tough call), so please allow me to give a quick run-through of the department.

• How’s the department in general? Stanford ChemE is ranked no.5 nationwide, typical small department compared to MIT and Minnesota, with 12 professors covering most general areas of chemical engineering research topics.

• What’s the typical class size? The typical PhD class size for ChemE is about 15, with a few co-term master students. In some years, the number can go up to low 20’s, but funding is still guaranteed.

• How does funding work in this department? For ChemE, everyone who has been accepted as a PhD student is supported by the department for the first two quarters. Starting from the third quarter, students are provided either by their advisors or external funding, such as NSF and etc.

• What are the course requirements? There are five required courses in ChemE, which people usually finish in their first two quarters. The total course requirement consists of 45 units, all of which have to be graduate level classes including two 400 level ChemE electives.

• What about rotation? In ChemE, rotation is required for the first two quarters. Students may choose whom to rotate with in or outside of the department, and the department will try its best to accommodate all the request for rotation. From past experience, rotation plays an important role in choosing advisor.

• What about TA-requirements? The ChemE department does require everyone to be the teaching assistant for two quarters regardless of the funding situation. People usually finish their TA requirements by their third year and many people TA the same class twice.

• How does qualifying exam work? The ChemE qual consists of two parts - the pre-qualifying exam in March and the qualifying exam in September.
The purpose of the quals is to get people focused on their research, so most people will pass. Please refer to the department pre-qual info session for more details.

- How do people choose their advisers? Students typically started their PhD research with a faculty adviser upon successful completion of the pre-qual. Students may rank up to three faculty members, either in or outside of the department, when deciding who to work for and the choice will not be available to the faculty until pre-qual ends. In many cases, people can get their first or second choice and the department will contact the student if his third choice was the only option. Furthermore, most students are likely to get into a lab that they have rotated in, but this is not the absolute case.

This is just a very coarse overview of things. Please keep your heads up for more information from the department. And if you can make it to the visiting weekend, it’ll be awesome and I am sure you will find more useful information. Finally congratulations again and best wishes for your graduate study at Stanford!