

## SURVIVAL SKILLS IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

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Graduate School requires a great deal of discipline and hard work. However, the rewards of becoming a new scholar are tremendous. Below are strategies to help you excel in graduate school.

**Discuss Expectations:** Speak to your professors, research supervisors and your advisor about what is expected of you as a student, a research assistant, and/or a teaching assistant. How many hours a week are you expected to work? What are you expected to achieve at the end of the semester or academic year---contributions to conference papers, journal articles or research proposals? Ask: *What would you like me to achieve this semester, this year?*

This process goes both ways. Inform your faculty, employer, fellow students about *what you expect from them*. Discuss what type of support you need to become successful in what you do. Ask them if they provide graduate student performance reviews, mentoring, information on resources and jobs, and opportunities for joint publishing, to mention a few.

Study the office/department/lab culture. What are other students doing to be successful?

**Study Groups:** Some courses are impossible to pass if you study alone. For some of your more difficult classes you will need to work in study groups. Group reviews of class lectures help you fill in the gaps in your lecture notes. In addition, when you explain concepts and materials to your classmates, you increase your knowledge of the materials. *Don't wait to be asked or invited to a study group*. Form your own group or ask to be included in an existing group.

**Network with Everyone—Start Conversations and volunteer to help others:** Get to know your professors and classmates well! Scholarships for the following year and internships during the summer months will require that you build strong relationships within your department.

**Seek Meaningful Research/Internship Experiences:** You need to find opportunities that will help you develop research and professional skills. The experience will help you define your research interests for your dissertation or master's paper and consequently, aid in selecting courses and faculty committee members.

**Seek Mentor(s):** You need multiple mentors to get through graduate school. Find people that you can trust. Your mentors should be individuals that can offer thoughtful and honest advice. They should also have excellent listening skills.

*How do you identify good mentors?* Ask other students and staff about faculty they enjoy working with. For current and past classes you have taken, try to identify faculty that you felt comfortable speaking to and that you feel would provide useful advice and information.

**Time Management Skills:** You have moved from having a textbook in an undergraduate class to having 15 books for a class as a graduate student. *How can you survive this transition?* Simple, try to study or work on assignments at least *5 hours a day---35 hours a week!* You need to arrange other activities around your studying and writing hours.

Establish priorities and set small goals for yourself everyday. Also, develop a schedule to work on achieving your goals. At the end of the day, evaluate your accomplishments. What did you achieve? What do you need to do next? How can you use your time better?

**Changing Advisors:** In many cases students are assigned an advisor to work with. In some cases, students select an advisor that matched their research interests. If personality problems emerge between you and your advisor, either try to work out your differences or, search for someone else to work with. The key is finding ways to change your advisor while keeping a working relationship with the prior advisor.

**Seek the Highest Grades:** You must seek top grades in all classes in graduate school. Grades play a major role in obtaining fellowship and research grants throughout your graduate years. A high GPA is even more critical if you decide to seek a Post-Doctoral program.

**Proposal Writing Skills are a Necessity:** You will need to write proposals to fund research or programs throughout your career. Investigate opportunities on campus to take workshops on proposal writing.

**Written and Oral Communication Skills are Critical:** You will present yourself as a scholar through journal articles, books and conference presentations. Seek opportunities to present your work to others. Identify conferences and try to present a paper. You can revise that same conference paper and submit it to a peer review journal.

**Seek Support Programs:** Identify and use resources that are available to help you develop professional skills. Support services can include research/fellowship search services, computer services, technical writing centers, and effective teaching workshops.

**Stay on Top of Academic Requirements:** Read all graduate school guidelines and department requirements literature carefully. We suggest that you pre-register for courses to ensure that you get into key required courses. We also recommend that you identify and complete the necessary forms and procedures needed for graduation.

**Find Balance in Your Life:** To excel in graduate school, you also need to identify and engage in activities that are fun, relaxing and uplifting----jogging, dancing, book clubs, aerobics, basketball, softball, etc.