LIFE AS A RESEARCH GRADUATE STUDENT: THRIVING IN GRAD SCHOOL

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Grad School Success

- Make a plan
- Be flexible and adventurous
- Communicate
- Take advantage of resources
What's your plan?

Assess skills, values, interests

Develop goals and write the plan

Discuss plan with mentors

Execute your plan

Revise and Review

Make a plan

Source: https://grad.wisc.edu/pd/idp/
### Year 1
- **Getting Started**
- **Literature Review**
- **Proposal**
- **Ethics**
- **Writing**
- **Annual Review**

### Year 2
- **XX**
- **XX**
- **Writing**

### Year 3
- **Writing**
- **Final Revisions**
- **Submit**

Create an Individual Development Plan

- https://myidp.sciencecareers.org
- http://www.imaginephd.com
- https://research-tools.mun.ca/rpm/process/plan-project-execution/plan-data-management/
Be Flexible

What people think it looks like  
What it really looks like

Source: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/motivational-series-how-turn-failure-success-dorian-tang
Be Adventurous

Source: http://www.333photo.com/new-prints-online/
Communicate
With your supervisor

The role of supervisors and supervisory committees, as well as the relationship between students and their supervisors, are key components affecting the success of research-stream students in their programs.
Communicating with your supervisor

1. Within a month of arrival on campus schedule a first meeting with your academic advisor to introduce yourself, ask questions about the program, and get a feel for program and departmental expectations.

2. Initiate an ‘expectations conversation’ with your advisor—consider a mentoring agreement.

3. Take notes and share them after each meeting.

4. When in doubt – ask for help! This is a sign of strength, not weakness.
Communicating with your supervisor

1. Meet regularly
2. Discuss expectations, roles and responsibilities
3. Become familiar with all appropriate deadline dates and regulations
4. Discuss research/scholarship ideas and ask for guidance
5. Keep apprised of professional development opportunities (weekly email).
6. Discuss and uphold standards of academic integrity
7. Clarify issues of intellectual property, data management, and authorship
What can I expect from a supervisor?

1. Expertise in your subject area
2. Regular supervisory meetings
3. Feedback on work in progress
4. Advice and support
5. Mediation and representation
6. Planning your project and setting milestones
What can I NOT expect from a supervisor?

1. Unlimited attention
2. To tell you what to do
3. To be your best friend
4. To be superhuman
5. To provide professional development outside of the discipline
Graduate Student Academic Journey Map

**Application to Admission**
1. Submit application online
2. Department reviews application and makes a recommendation
3. Graduate School finalizes decision and posts letter in application portal; email alert sent to student and department
4. Funding offer, if applicable, is sent separately by academic department
5. Complete **Reply to Offer** in application portal to accept admission

**Admission to First Semester**
6. Create PID
7. Submit Immunization History Form online to Schiffert Health Center
8. Complete **Sexual Assault Prevention for Graduates** online module
9. Participate in GTA workshop (if applicable)
10. Participate in orientation (optional)
11. Submit final transcript showing degree conferral after arrival for 1st semester

**Academic Progress**
12. Enroll in credit hours in your academic program according to continuous enrollment and doctoral residency requirements
13. Form a committee and submit a Plan of Study
14. Participate in a co-op experience (optional)
15. Pass qualifying exam (if applicable) (doctoral only; department process)
16. Pass prelim exam (doctoral only; Graduate School process)
17. Complete I&D and Ethics requirements

**Final Semester**
18. Enroll in at least 3 credit hours or in SSDE
19. Submit application for degree (degree or certificate conferral request) in Hokie SPA
20. Submit final exam / evaluation request
22. Submit ETD (if applicable)
23. Participate in commencement (optional)
24. Receive diploma in the mail

https://graduateschool.vt.edu/content/dam/graduateschool_vt_edu/process/Grad_Journey_Map.pdf
Other advice

1. Eat right
2. Get proper sleep
3. Create community and support networks
4. Maintain mental and physical health
The hidden curriculum

There’s a hidden curriculum in the academic, social, cultural, and funding environment of the university/ department/ field/ lab/ group/ dyad

**EXAMPLES OF THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM IN GRADUATE SCHOOL**

- Finding mentors
- Building social networks and community
- Time management
- Understanding academic and disciplinary jargon
- Publishing and presenting
- Navigating the job market
- Knowing departmental expectations and milestones
Academic hidden curricula

You must find out:

1. the conventions of the discipline and
2. the practices of the department.

Academic questions to ask

- Who holds the knowledge? Who does the paperwork and keeps track of deadlines/requirements?
  - Get to know your graduate coordinator.
  - Find the handbook and read it!
- What are the milestones and when should you complete them?
- What is the currency (publications, grades, research, teaching, mentoring, conferences)? How is “excellence” measured?
- What is expected in terms of contributing to the lab/team/relationships? What to say yes or no to?
Social/cultural questions to ask

- What kind of formal and informal support networks exist in the department, the graduate school, and the university?
- Posture, dress, accent, word choices, eating, drinking, etc.
- Nonverbals.
- Expectations around self-advocacy, i.e., individual development plans, setting your own goals, how much to speak up.
- Multiple mentors, lines of research/scholarship, encouraged, discouraged, neutral?
Funding questions to ask

- Where is my funding coming from?
- What is the plan for funding for the entirety of my program?
- Is there summer funding?
- Which fellowships should I be applying for?
- Is there support for me to attend conferences?
Communicate

- With the broader community…. look around!

- Peers
- Graduate School
- Communities in and beyond campus
- Take advantage of opportunities!
8 motivational tips if you need additional encouragement to write your dissertation in these trying times (opinion)

Advice for how to get (and stay) motivated to write your dissertation
Elisa Modolo offers some help if you need additional encouragement to write your dissertation in these trying times.

Thread

Tanentzapf Lab @TanentzapfLab · Aug 29
2. Be friendly, grateful, courteous, professional w/ the support stuff. The heart of science is the janitorial staff, secretaries, admin staff, stores & the workshop, building ops, media cooks, bldg. security. I cannot begin to tell you how many times they bailed me out of jams.

2:50 PM · Aug 29, 2020 · Twitter Web App

43 Retweets 12 Quote Tweets 882 Likes

Tanentzapf Lab @TanentzapfLab · Aug 29
3. It's totally OK to not know things. You will meet many people who will know more stuff than you, this shouldn't make you feel intimidated, realise the opportunity! they can teach you new things. You WANT to be in an environment where people know things you don't.

2 Retweets 36 Quote Tweets 635 Likes

Tanentzapf Lab @TanentzapfLab · Aug 29
4. Be brave & throw yourself into learning new techniques & tools. As the cliched saying goes "Choose to do things not because they are easy, but because they are hard". If you think "I'm terrible at this particular technique" you will never get better at it if you don't practice.

1 Retweet 27 Quote Tweets 502 Likes

Tanentzapf Lab @TanentzapfLab · Aug 29
6. Figure out when to quit things & learn when to let go, w/ your supervisor set general timelines & if things are not working by a certain point decide on alternative options. Time passes remarkably fast in grad school, at a blink of an eye you've spent 4 yrs on a failed project.

4 Retweets 35 Quote Tweets 506 Likes
Some specific advice

- Treat graduate school like a job
- If you don’t have anything to do…

YOU’RE DOING IT WRONG
Remember that you are not expected to face the challenges of graduate school alone.

Source: http://berkeleysciencereview.com/article/mind-grad-school/
Other Resources

- https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/expectations/expectations-for-graduate-education-overview.html
- https://lib.vt.edu/find-borrow/grad-student.html
- https://www.training.nih.gov/wellbeing/
- https://gradresources.org
- http://www.phd2published.com
- https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IFbHIN5OAO0gz-VfCU9nEx4-x6CfArj1-d8yIA2vsU/edit
- https://first-gen-guide.com/resources/
- https://pfforphds.com/blog/
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