

What You Should Know About Graduate School

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1. **Make yourself competitive starting now!** As times become more difficult and money becomes tighter across universities you need to make yourself as competitive as possible. Before I entered Grad School, I wished that I had taken the time to learn LaTeX and Beamer on my own. It makes you really stand out at conferences and often many journals require you to submit your work in LaTeX form (at least in the social sciences).
2. **If you need a minor field, figure that out before you get to graduate school** - don't waste time thinking about what you may be interested in and wasting classes. Mine is African American and African Diaspora Studies because it overlaps with my research and has allowed for me to branch out of my department with other prominent faculty members that bring something different than what my discipline "brings to the table."
3. **Make a valid use of summers, don't just waste them not making progress towards your degree.** If you are in the social sciences or want exposure to coding, look into programs such as ICPSR (quantitative) that is held at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor or IQMR (qualitative) that is held at Syracuse University. The programs offer competitive scholarships and sometimes you can request your department for money too. I went to ICPSR last summer and received a diversity scholarship through the ICPSR program.
4. **The cost of living is really important too.** Bloomington costs about \$450 shared-\$900 single with utilities per apartment within walking distance. In addition, the city and university buses are free with a student ID (so you don't really need a car if you are living downtown). They also have a bus that goes direct from the center of campus to Indianapolis airport everyday all day long (and it costs about \$25 to take each way) or you can make friends with people who have cars and throw them a little gas money.
5. **Look and see if you can apply for FREE campus visits before applying.** Indiana University Bloomington offers this via application for diverse students for both fall and spring semesters. I am an affiliated emissary representing them and I can tell you, when you come for a visit, it's awesome!
6. **Don't just apply for MA Degrees, apply for PhDs too.** In my program, if you are on a PhD track and you decide it's not for you or want to switch to a different PhD programs], you can leave after year 2 with a Masters degree. Often times if you do MA Degrees alone, you have to pay out of pocket which isn't fun. But if you decide to switch to another PhD program, you have to reset the clock so you would have invested 2 years into a MA at one school, then add another 5 years for a PhD at another school.
7. **Make connections/friends with people outside of your department.** If you make friends with other people who aren't in competition with you, they just want to help you excel yourself and can give you feedback in ways your department can't. You will hear of more opportunities this way too.
8. **Join writing groups and organizations that will help you excel yourself and network.** I am an affiliate for the Center for Research on Race and Ethnicity in Society (CRRES) on campus and this is an organization that participates in not only doing research pertaining to racial equality but bringing established and prominent research

Professionals to campus for speaker series events that are open to the public. They also host free cultural events and give out free food sometimes too! In addition, as I mentioned previously, I am an Emissary so I try to retain PhD students here at IU by hosting events and helping students maneuver grad school.

9. **Only go to conferences if you can get money to go for FREE (or at least 75% paid for).** Most times, you can request money from the department you are in, directly to the conference itself for money to travel, or organizations you are affiliated with (CRRES which I am a part of provides conference travel money). When you are determining which university is a best fit for you, ask them if they have money to send graduate students to conferences and how much that would be and if you could apply for it every year. This is really important! Graduate students don't make much money to begin with so always apply for additional money and keep applying!
10. **Apply for additional grants and fellowships after your first year.** It is really annoying but continue to apply for more money and contact the graduate school to see if they have any additional funding opportunities starting each September (mark it on your calendar). And excess money you get you can keep and put into a savings account for a later use in case you don't have money later on or if your computer crashes (trust me, this happens a lot to students, happened to me once in my first year and 2 others in my cohort last year, so always back up to google drive or somewhere on the internet).
11. **Your family and friends who do not take this track with you may come to feel a little distant, especially since you are investing so much time into doing this.** You tend to miss out on a lot of family time. One of the things that was really difficult to hear the first day that I stepped into the program was another graduate student saying that "Life on the outside is going to continue onwards, people in your life are going to talk to you less, and people you know will die (her mother died in the beginning of her fourth year unexpectedly)." But remember, it's only temporary and once you finish you will have a secure salary and health benefits and it will be worth it.
12. **Ask departments about job placements before you commit and keep your options open to jobs outside of academia.** Unfortunately because of the hiring freeze for the next couple of years, the graduate candidates who are currently on the market are going to back up into the hiring for candidates who come on the market next year (so there's this constant backlog of people not getting jobs for a couple years). I would recommend you go do a Post-Doc after to make yourself more competitive if you can to keep from being unemployed after you finish. In other words, apply for jobs and apply for post-docs when you come on the market. Don't forget when you start a tenure track job, you start the 5 year publication clock all over again!

Remember, stay positive and try not to stress. Everything will eventually fall into place.

And lastly, if I can help in any way or if you have any questions, feel free to contact me:

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