

Tips for First-Years from Current and Former History Graduate Students

Welcome to UD! Created by graduate students, the following list offers new students 10 tips for making the most of graduate study in UD's history department.

1. *Begin work on your big papers earlier than you think is necessary.*
 - The majority of courses culminate in writing essays, either historiographic or primary-source based, which address questions you determine in accordance with the aims of each course. At the end of the semester, you will be much happier if you have started your projects early.
2. *Develop reading and writing strategies that work for you.*
 - Graduate work in history requires a lot of reading! For most students, it will initially seem overwhelming. Your ability to *gut* monographs will be one of the most important departures from undergraduate work. (See Susan Strasser's "How to Read a Book"). There are different ways to approach books and prepare for discussing them, but understanding authors' arguments and how well they argue them is always more important than making sure you read every word. Your growth as a reader will stem from thinking about what questions about the text and subject matter you're left wondering about. When it comes to topics with which you are more familiar, you might think more about historiographic fit and significance.
 - As a graduate student, you will become a better writer. There is an important relationship between the reading and writing you do in the program even when the reading is not directly related to your research or interests. Great reading is great writing, and you should look for it when reading for courses. Such writing can serve as a model for your own prose even when the content has nothing to do with what you write about. You might also want to take advantage of the [Writing Center](#). It's likely people there won't be able to help with content, but the center is a great way to get an extra set of eyes on your writing.
3. *Discuss your needs with your advisor.*
 - Your advisor should serve a role that is helpful to both your academic and professional growth as well as more practical aspects of graduate study. For them to best serve as advisors, you should be clear with them about your needs, which might include child care, routine appointments, family commitments, etc.
4. *Discuss your needs with the people you work with as a TA or GA.*
 - As a TA or GA, you are a worker. The best working environments are those in which there is open dialogue. The people whom you work for will depend on you

for a variety of tasks. As you do with your advisor, clarify your needs with them. It is important not to become overwhelmed with your responsibilities as a TA or GA and neglect your responsibilities as a student.

5. *Use your TAship to develop your teaching.*

- Whether you are leading discussions or primarily working as a grader in a course, TAing provides the opportunity to develop teaching skills with the assistance of experienced faculty. It's best to think of TAing as not only a job, but an opportunity to become comfortable as a teacher and develop pedagogical skills. [The Center for Teaching and Assessment of Learning](#) provides resources and workshops for graduate students who are TAs and instructors.

6. *Get to know people.*

- In many cases, your peers are some of the best resources for navigating the graduate program. Spending time getting to know your cohort often results in support that you can't obtain from anywhere else because the people in your cohort know what you are going through. Other graduate students, often those who are further along in the program, can provide practical advice. You should also enjoy getting to know your peers. Try and work out times outside of class to spend time with classmates. You might find it beneficial to build relationships by joining [organizations](#) and identifying projects in which you might take part.
- Take advantage of your professors' office hours. They are a great opportunity to talk to your professors informally.
- Your time at UD is also a great chance to get to know people beyond other graduate students and the faculty with whom you work. Build your network by reaching out to scholars and professionals in the field.

7. *Imposter syndrome is real, but believe in yourself and the fact that you worked hard to get to graduate school.*

- You may, at times, feel like you are not prepared for graduate study or do not belong. Imposter syndrome is normal, and it is important to remember that many of your peers likely feel the same way that you do. You aren't expected to have all the answers. Seminars are a place you should feel comfortable posing questions and looking for answers.

8. *Take care of your physical and mental health.*

- Go for daily walks or find some form of exercise that best works for you. Take advantage of the [university gym](#), which is free!
- Sleep!!!!

- Eat well. The university's [health clinic](#) may help you identify your nutritional needs and ways to meet them. You might also check out the [nutrition corner](#).
- Try blue light glasses, which help prevent headaches from too much screen time.
- Counseling services are available to you through [Center for Counseling and Student Development](#)
- Keep a schedule. It will help ensure you keep up with your academic needs as well as those that relate to maintaining your wellbeing.

9. *Maintain a supportive and inclusive learning environment.*

- Your seminar etiquette is important. It is your responsibility to come to class prepared to discuss what you have read. Accordingly, you should take notes of questions and comments you are left with from readings. Your job is not to have all the answers, but it is to have questions and think about answers.
- Be mindful of your peers. Make sure there is room for everybody to speak. If you find yourself dominating the conversation, it may not be because you are the only person with something to say. If you are shy, work to overcome your diffidence.
- Assume good intentions. Remember you can and should learn from your peers.

10. *Don't be afraid to make mistakes!*

- A part of learning is making mistakes. While it might not seem like it, graduate programs can be a good place to make mistakes as long as you are willing to learn from them.

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