

ADVICE AND WISDOM FOR NEW GRADUATE STUDENTS

From Jill Hurst-Wahl's Facebook Friends

September 3, 2015

Question: If you went to grad school, what advice or words or wisdom - do you wish you had received during your first week?

The answers below were received from more than 25 people, who attended a variety of different graduate programs in the U.S. and Canada. Most of the responses are from people with an MSLIS degree. The answers have been minimally edited.

- Work smarter, not harder. Find out where you have blocks of uninterrupted time, and use them most effectively.
- Gain as much practical experience as you can. Network, network, network. Take advantage of conference & association student rates. Don't forget to practice self-care – give yourself a break sometimes, even if you have to actually mark it on your calendar.
- You may well end up as a manager and leader sooner than you think! Take some relevant courses or training in those areas. (I see management as the processes and tools-like budgets, Gantt charts; and leadership as the people side.)
- Be an active learner.
- Your professors are people, usually not that different from you. It's OK to talk to them.
- **Don't over-extend yourself.**
- Buy a parking pass as soon as you can.
- If you're going to grad school for the grades, you're going for the wrong reasons. You get out of grad school what you put into it and the letter grades will reflect on your effort.
- Perseverance is more important than intelligence.
- Embrace group work when you are given the choice. It is great practice for in person and distance collaboration in the professional world. Your LIS classmates are smart people from a variety of interesting and varied backgrounds – they have much to teach you and you have much to share with them.
- Ask questions when you have them. Don't hesitate because people might think you're stupid. You'll never know the answer unless you ask and it could open up a whole new career path.
- Don't just be friends with those people in your field or concentration. One of the greatest experiences as a graduate student and later on as a professional, is that those outside your field or concentration inform your practice in ways you will never expect. Build those relationships now.
- Time management is extremely important. I also treated grad school as my main job every day. Get a life partner who will keep you on track and on task. Take classes and special seminars in intersessions. Seek out internships or part library work.
- Take opportunities to learn from other allied disciplines such as business and technology. Read outside the library and information science field. Most MLIS's end up in management these

(Reproduced with permission.)

days, so learn about budgeting, personnel and HR, advocacy and marketing, planning and evaluation, operations analysis and other business management practices as much as you can.

- Read ahead. Way ahead. Start projects early - as soon as you know about them.
- Professors in higher education do not coordinate their assignment workloads among each other. It is like having three or four separate employers who don't confer, and moreover, don't care if you already have two papers and a project due, or you'd previously agreed to a social event on what you thought was your own time on a weekend.
- Your grad experience will be as rich as the effort you put into it. You are in charge: make this experience a good one that you will value for years to come.
- Do meet one on one with the professor, if possible, even in this online age.
- Visit your professors during their office hours. They are teaching a subject they love to talk about and they wrote the assignments. If you have a question, they have the answers. And they need to know you care about your work.
- You are an information specialist. That means if you do not know something find it out using your search skills.
- Cut out things that exhaust you and waste your time so you can step up and say yes to the opportunities that pop up, academic and professional.
- Be weird, it's awesome.
- Start the networking with your classmates. They'll be your future colleagues at some point. Also, make yourself available for opportunity (easier for students who are on-campus, but it can be done by anyone).
- **Network, don't be shy. Volunteer. Be active in any of the out of classroom activities.**
- Stand your ground. Be honest and true to yourself and your limits.
- Speak candidly and openly with your teachers. Challenge your teachers, they are also continually learning.
- What you start out thinking you want to do in the profession may be very different from where your interests are when you finish. Take classes that pique your curiosity or sound fun, not just the ones you think will be 'most useful.' Find a meetup or group outside your school/info circles. Sometimes those are the most useful connections once you graduate.
- Focus on the learning opportunities and don't agonize about the grades too much. As a grad student, accept that you have proved yourself as a good student already. It's much more valuable to look back and say "I'm so glad I learned about ..." whatever, than to stress over an A vs. an A-.
- Have a learning orientation instead of a grade orientation. It makes a difference and it generally results in better grades, as well.
- Ask for help when you need it. No one wants to see you fail or have any fear of failure.