

GRAD SCHOOL CRASH COURSE

Jordan Scott, Graduate Student Success Coach

The Graduate Writing Center

The University of Rhode Island

academic_consulting@etal.uri.edu

A FEW GRAD SCHOOL SURVIVAL TIPS

- **Don't lose sight of your goals or why you're here.**
 - Don't get bogged down with teaching, TAing, service roles, etc. if that's not why you're here!
- **“Good is better than perfect.”**
 - You can't do *everything*. Prioritization is the secret key to grad school.
 - Example: Completing 75% of your weekly readings is better than feeling so stressed out about the number of pages you're supposed to read that you don't do any work at all!
- **You are your own best advocate. Ask for help when you need it.**
 - If you believe you're getting behind in your program or not hitting the benchmarks you believe you should be hitting, please champion yourself.
 - Don't be afraid to ask your professors for extensions if you need them.
- **Be patient with yourself and give yourself grace.**
 - Whether you're trying to implement new time management programs, reduce stress in your life, or learn a new skill set, remember that these routines take time to adapt to.
- **Make a life for yourself outside of graduate school.**

ALSO MAKE SURE TO USE THE RESOURCES WE HAVE HERE AT URI

- **Graduate Professional Development**
 - <https://web.uri.edu/graduate-school/professional-development/career-services/>
 - Contact Cara Mitnick, Director of Professional Development — cmitnick@uri.edu
- **URI Graduate Writing Center**
 - <https://web.uri.edu/graduate-writing-center/>
- **Graduate Student Success Coaching**
 - <https://web.uri.edu/graduate-school/graduate-student-success-coaching/> +
academic_consulting@etal.uri.edu
- **Diversity and Inclusion Badge Program**
 - <https://web.uri.edu/graduate-school/professional-development/dibp/>
- **Mental Health and Wellness**
 - <https://web.uri.edu/healthservices/mental-health-and-wellness/>

ONE MAJOR CAVEAT BEFORE WE DIVE IN

- Every university and every department is run differently, and there's no one-size-fits-all rule for the milestones you need to reach
- When in doubt, make sure to visit your department's website and look for information on your "curriculum" and "timeline" and "milestones" or other relevant information for degree expectations
- You may also want to contact your Director of Graduate Studies (if applicable) or the Chair of your department if you're still unsure of how to make progress with your degree

Non-Thesis-Based Master's Degree Map

Semester 1

- Program of Study

Semester 2

- Comprehensive Exam (not all programs require)

Semester 3

Semester 4+

- Nomination for Graduation

Thesis-Based Master's Degree Map

Semester 1

- Program of Study

Semester 2

- Establishment of Committee

Semester 3

- Thesis Proposal Approval

Semester 4+

- Nomination for Graduation
- Request to Schedule Oral Defense
- Thesis Defense Results
- Thesis Final Copies
- Library Rights Statement
- Signature/Approval Page

Ph.D.
Degree Map

Semester 1

- Program of Study

Semester 2

- Establishment of Committee
- Qualifying Exam

Semester 3+

- Request to Schedule Comprehensive Exam
- Comprehensive Exam
- Dissertation Proposal Approval

Semester 4+

- ABD (All But Dissertation Status, 4 semesters allowed)

Last Semester

- Nomination for Graduation
- Request to Schedule Oral Defense
- Dissertation Defense Results
- Dissertation Final Copies
- Library Rights Statement
- Signature/Approval Cover Page

COURSEWORK AT A GLANCE

- The purpose of coursework is to gain advanced knowledge and move beyond your general undergrad studies into someone who is becoming a specialist in your chosen field of study; moving from master's to doctoral studies means becoming even more specialized in a certain area
- There will be core courses that every grad student in your department must take as well as other courses relevant to your specialty interests that you will elect to take
- HINT: If courses aren't being offered relevant to your specialized interest(s), talk to your department about doing an independent study

COURSEWORK AS COMMITTEE PLANNING

- Another, less surface-level component to coursework is you will be closely getting to learn the interests and personalities of faculty in your department
- Consider who you get along with, whose research interests match your own
- As coursework comes to an end, you will be asked to form a committee, and it's important to use your ~2 years of coursework as an opportunity to forge committee connections & find people who advocate for you intellectually
- You will even need to have people on your committee who are outside your department; usually your major professor can recommend people, but also consider taking an elective in another dept if you have credits to spare

FINAL COURSEWORK NOTE

- Even after your coursework is over you will still need to register for classes!
- These are usually classes that indicate you're doing doctoral dissertation research with your major professor
- If you are a Graduate Assistant (or TA or RA), please consult with your department because there may be a different expectation of how many credits you should be registered for!

ESTABLISHING YOUR COMMITTEE

- After your coursework has been completed (or while you're finishing it), you will need to actually form your committee
- Talk to your department's chair or the director of graduate studies in your department for advice on how this works for your specific degree and track
- If required, you will need to fill out an "Establishment of a Committee" form with the Graduate School
- (Remember these are the people who will be advocating for you and writing you Rec Letters!)

Major Professor Name: *	
Signature:	
Co-Major Professor Name (If applicable):	
Signature:	
Inside Committee Member Name: *	
Signature:	
Outside Committee Member Name: *	
Signature:	
Additional Committee Member Name: <i>(If applicable)</i>	
Signature:	
Additional Committee Member Name: <i>(If applicable)</i>	
Signature:	

THE COMMITTEE'S ROLE

- *Ideally*, your committee should be pointing you in the right direction about important forms to fill out, deadlines, and benchmarks for your degree
- **However, you are your own best advocate and the best keeper of your own fate, so be sure to keep a calendar about important deadlines and be aware of the suggested timeline to complete tasks with your degree as per your department**
- If you're taking comprehensive exams (comps), your core committee may have a role in creating questions for you or creating other specific tasks to test your knowledge; you may have a wider committee (e.g.: five members) when you move on to your dissertation phase

THESIS STAGE (MASTER'S DEGREE)

- As someone finishing your Master's Degree, usually you will have a final benchmark that comes in the form of a significant Research Project, Thesis, or Portfolio
- After you finish producing this Thesis (or the equivalent in your department), you will present and defend your findings/work in front of your committee
- Once you pass your defense, you are one stop closer to earning your Master's Degree. Talk to your dept/committee about final steps to help get you to the finish line

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS (COMPS)

- Comprehensive exams usually come for doctoral students after their coursework is over (generally around their third year in a program)
- Usually Comps need to be taken within one year of finishing coursework
- Each program handles Comps differently: they usually take on the form of a written exam and an oral exam
- Meet with your faculty to discuss scheduling your exams as well as the scope and format your exams will take

DISS PROPOSAL + A.B.D.

- After you complete your exams, you will probably have to complete some sort of research or dissertation proposal before you move onto the dissertation phase
- Either passing your Comps themselves or having your Diss Proposal approved will result in you being A.B.D.
- That means “All But Dissertation”
- **CONGRATULATIONS!!**—you are no longer a “PhD Student” but are now a “PhD Candidate”!

YOUR DISSERTATION

- Although you now have a lot more freedom, you also have to be a lot more self-directed!
- The dissertation phase of a Ph.D. is a critical and challenging stage in which doctoral candidates...
 - Conduct original research
 - Write a substantial scholarly document
 - And defend their findings before a dissertation committee

WHAT IS A “POST-DOC”?

- A postdoctoral researcher, often referred to simply as a "post-doc," is an individual who holds a doctoral degree and engages in advanced research and scholarly activities under the mentorship or supervision of a senior researcher
- Depending on your field, this might be an opportunity to expound upon your dissertation, conduct more research, publish more scholarly articles, gain additional teaching experience, or prepare for the academic job market (if you're going on it)

OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS TO BEING A COMPETITIVE GRAD STUDENT

- Attend workshops and opportunities for professional development
- Begin working on your resume and/or CV and update it regularly
- Gain teaching experience if it's relevant to your career goals
- Additionally, work on your teaching philosophy, diversity statement, etc.
- Turn your coursework papers into scholarship or conference presentations
- Work toward your scholarship, gain publications
- Apply for grants and fellowships if they are applicable to your career goals
- Practice for the academic job market while you're still in grad school & have support structures (e.g.: committee members who know the ropes)
- Consider taking some service roles, while acknowledging completing your degree comes first & foremost

CV/Resume
Writing
Workshop,
Wed.,
September
27, 12-1pm
250 Pastore
and via
Zoom

WHAT IS “SERVICE”?

- Generally, there are three main areas of academia, and “service” is one of them
- Although it is typically expected of faculty, grad students can get involved too
- These can include:
 - Serving on committees
 - Taking on administrative roles or helping out with social media for your department
 - Working for an academic journal that is centered in your department
 - Organizing a conference or workshop
 - Mentoring other graduate students
 - Acting as a liaison between your dept & other graduate orgs (e.g.: GSA or GAU)

ANY OTHER CRASH COURSE QUESTIONS?



A neon sign is mounted on a dark brick wall. The sign consists of two lines of text. The first line, "THANK YOU", is enclosed in a glowing blue rectangular border. The second line, "FOR COMING", is enclosed in a glowing pink border that has a pointed bottom edge. The text itself is white with a slight glow.

THANK YOU
FOR COMING