

Successfully Navigating Your Graduate Program: Insights from Former Directors of Graduate Studies

Topic: Ever wonder how graduate programs operate and how they impact you, *'the'* graduate student? Here is your chance: attend the second GRAND (Graduate Resiliency Alliance at ND) event and hear directly from Directors of Graduate Studies how to successfully navigate the resources available to you in order to flourish in graduate school.

Q: What are the day-to-day duties of the DGS? What are the least common or salient aspects of the job?

A: The DGS is the lead administrator for graduate programs; official changes to program requirements, admissions, graduation and other university requirements are all overseen by the DGS. This individual also serves as the primary liaison between the students, faculty, and administration. Most seek to get to know their students and to make sure that their students are successful. This can include assistance with conflict resolution as well as access to additional resources.

Q: In addition to research, what should students do to make themselves competitive in the job market?

A: Talk to others inside and outside Notre Dame about what you want to do, i.e., network, network, network. Think about how you can reframe your work and processes to adapt them to other areas. Multiple paths are possible, you need to imagine a broad range of outcomes. You are a young professional from day one of your program, ask yourself what have you done and how can you reframe your work to fit other contexts. There are a lot of resources on campus to help you do this. Examples include the [Kaneb Center](#), [Writing Center](#), [Grad Career Services](#) etc. Notre Dame has a vast alumni network waiting to help you, connect to [Irish Compass](#) and ask alumni for help.

Talk with students ahead of you, they have likely been considering the same issue and may have great guidance on some of the opportunities available here. At the same time you should be talking with faculty and your advisor as they are often a really good place to start a job search.

Q: Things students do that negatively impact their progress toward degree?

A: Remain silent about the issues you are facing — find a way to get the ball rolling. If you wait, it will prevent you from being able to access some of the things that could've helped you early on. Understand getting the help you need is a two-way street. Speak with your advisor, have a conversation with your director of graduate studies, and know what resources are available to you if you need help. Find the [Graduate School Bulletin of Information](#) or your program's handbook. Both of these are designed to provide you with the information you need to help you stay on track.

Q: What are habits of highly successful students in your program?

A: Successful graduate students are proactive and well-organized team players who show a high degree of perseverance and understand that, as a graduate student, they are developing professionals. This means, when appropriate, you want to set meeting agendas, present solutions, communicate with peers, faculty, advisor and the DGS. One common term used throughout industry is “managing up”. Here is a good [Ted Talk](#) about managing up. As for articles, this one from the [Harvard Business Review](#) has great information and this one from [Forbes](#) is good as well.

Successful graduate students have had conversations with their advisers; they know what is expected and how their research will proceed and they recognize that this is an ongoing conversation. They have asked questions like, “here are my goals for this month, semester, year – what are your goals for me this month, this semester, this year?” and “I would like to maximize my time in the laboratory – are you okay with me working late evenings because that is when I am most productive?”

Q: How can graduate students leverage their relationship with their DGS most effectively?

A: Clear and consistent communication is key. Communicating with DGS in a timely fashion was emphasized over and over again by all DGS panel members. Do not wait for problems to become a crisis before you start talking with someone about the issues you are facing.

Q: How can programs most effectively support students during COVID and their job search process?

A: Develop a research portfolio that is as flexible as possible so that you can keep many paths open. Be ready to adapt. You can now access information and other resources digitally more than ever before through online platforms, so take advantage of this new opportunity.

Q: Do you provide workshops that train students in public speaking?

A: Yes, in addition to what programs offer, check out the list of workshops and events available through the [Graduate School's Events](#) portal. Here you will find a complete list of opportunities developed for you by the graduate professional development team of the university. Questions or comments about the listing should be directed to gradprofdev@nd.edu.

Q: What are strategies that the directors (or other faculty) use to help maintain a work-life balance and how can departments encourage students to seek some work-life balance?

A: Work life balance is a personal issue for every individual. We all have different needs and require different things to refresh and renew ourselves. Take care of your physical, mental, emotional, professional self; [Graduate Student Life](#) has a great collection of resources for well-being. There are times when tension will develop and finding balance will be important particularly during these times. This is a good time to intentionally

think about your priorities and strategize to make sure you can maintain progress on both your short- and long-term goals and your total wellness. The key here is the timely communication of your needs with those who have the capacity to help you enact change. Please ask for help when you need it.

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