

## Goals and Survival Skills for Graduate School

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## Goals and Survival Skills for Graduate School

- The shock of graduate school
  - Classes aren't the sum total
    - New things expected of you – often not obvious what they are
    - Decide what's important & focus
  - Everyone is so talented!
    - Not everyone is good at everything
    - Don't constantly compare yourself to your peers
  - Most of what you will learn will come from from your fellow students, not the faculty

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## Goals and Survival Skills for Graduate School

- Utilize the resources in your academic community
  - to grow technically
  - to avoid technical & personal isolation
- Figure out what to get from different people & activities
  - your peers
  - colloquia & talks
  - the faculty

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## Goals and Survival Skills for Graduate School

and the other side of the coin...

- Enable others to get to know you
  - technical & professional opportunities
  - recommendations
- Ways to stand out (other than pure brilliance)
  - ask questions
  - show initiative

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## Goals and Survival Skills for Graduate School

- Try to maintain balance in your life
  - Some don'ts:
    - assume more time spent means more work accomplished
    - derive total self-worth from your graduate school experience (including what your advisor says!)
  - Some do's:
    - put a cap on the amount of schoolwork
    - develop/maintain your other interests
    - take breaks that are really breaks

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## Goals and Survival Skills for Graduate School

- If things go wrong....
  - Failing a course or exam:
    - Recognize that it is not the end of the world
    - Figure out what went wrong, so you can change it
  - Things are not working out with your advisor, or advisor leaves
    - Find mentor to talk with
    - Know that switching advisors is not uncommon
    - Shop around

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## Goals and Survival Skills for Graduate School

- If things go wrong....
  - An illness or other personal issue:
    - Take a leave
    - Formulate a recovery/return plan
    - Try to keep abreast a little
  - Losing confidence
    - Not uncommon
    - Set small, achievable goals to help mark your progress
    - Get support from friends

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## Goals and Survival Skills for Graduate School

- Some practical issues:
  - Masters or PhD???
    - The only way to know if you like research is to try it
    - PhD doesn't only lead to an academic job & life style
    - Pursuing a doctorate gives you flexibility

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## Goals and Survival Skills for Graduate School

- More practical issues:
  - TA'ing
    - Multiple benefits:
      - Forces you to really understand the material
      - Get to know another faculty member or allows your advisor to know you better
      - Gives you speaking experience
    - Decide which topic to TA
    - Take the "how to be a good TA" course
    - Then be a good TA

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## Goals and Survival Skills for Graduate School

- Don't sleep with the faculty
  - If things go well:
    - not a good forum for experiencing & evaluating a relationship
  - If things go badly:
    - uncomfortable at best
    - may color what other faculty think of you
    - the faculty won't leave
    - may compromise your career

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## Goals and Survival Skills for Graduate School

- Graduate school is an individual experience
  - Students have different research interests & develop those interests in different ways
  - Students have different skills & lots of skills are important to be a good researcher & teacher
  - It's not a race to the finish, it's the quality & experience that count

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