A Basic Guide for New and International Students in the College of Arts and Humanities

Prepared by Ioana A. Cionea
Edited and revised by Irina A. Iles
Designed by Paul Gergely
Sponsored by the Department of Communication
The ARHU Graduate Student Handbook

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Table of Contents

04 - 33  You’re Here... Now What?
34 - 37  Surviving Your Graduate Work
38 - 40  Mastering Your Teaching
41 - 44  Enjoying your Life (Yes, you still have one)
45      A Final Word
CHAPTER 01

You’re here... Now what?
Welcome to the Department of Communication and the University of Maryland!

The adventure into your graduate life has just begun. The first weeks may seem like a rollercoaster ride in which you will be busy, excited to meet everyone, bombarded with information, overwhelmed by the amount of things you have to do…Say no more, we know what you are going through!

The following parts of this chapter are meant to give you a helping hand in organizing your life once you have arrived on campus. We don’t pretend to have covered every aspect, but hopefully you will find the information useful in your adjusting to the area and the department. The more you can get done as soon as possible, the better prepared you are for the semester.
When It Comes to Your Personal Life…

Finding Housing

Locating Grocery Stores

Getting Around

Opening a bank account

Getting a credit card

Getting Your Paperwork in Order
  • Submitting your initial paperwork with the department
  • Applying for a social security number
  • Filing your taxes
  • Legal issues

Other Important Things to Keep in Mind
  • Maintaining Your Status
  • Receiving medical care
  • Getting a cell phone
Finding Housing

Hopefully, you already have a place to live. The best time to make arrangements for the Fall semester is during the summer, from June to August, depending on your desired move-in date.

If you are or will be looking for housing, here are some helpful places to start:

- **University of Maryland Off-Campus Housing website**
  www.umd.och101.com
  It has plenty of resources for finding housing as well as roommates. Be careful though. Even though the website provides great resources for finding a house and/or roommates, sometimes what you see is not what you get. Pictures can be misleading, the same way potential roommates’ profiles might be. We would recommend contacting someone from the Department (i.e., other graduate students, for example) to visit the house you are considering and/or talk to some potential roommates. If that is not possible, exchanging several emails and skyping with some of the people in the house is also an option. At least you will get a better idea of who they really are.

- **Craigslist (Washington D.C. area)**
  www.washingtondc.craigslist.org
  A public, free classified website.

- **The University’s off-campus living fairs**
  www.och.umd.edu
  They occur several times during the semesters.
Finding Housing

Word of mouth: there is nothing like talking to your colleagues, friends or other people from your country who may have insights into good living places. For example, the Chinese Student Association or the Indian Student Association have listservs on which members advertise housing.

Before you begin, though, you need to make some decisions about where you want to live. Consider things such as:

- **Type of Housing**
  What place do you want to live in? There are many options to choose from. You may prefer living in an apartment, or in a house, or renting a room in someone else’s house. You may want to live by yourself or you may want to have roommates. Note that on-campus graduate housing is not available for graduate students. The two graduate student apartment complexes, both located close to campus, are Graduate Hills and Graduate Gardens (http://www.graduatehills.com/). Talk to colleagues to find out what people believe are the pros and cons of each housing option and decide what best suits your needs. Just keep in mind that your living space will be your home and you need to be able to sleep, work and prepare your food there.

  One of the persons that helped write this handbook did not seriously consider all the aspects above and ended up living with undergraduate students. They were lovely people, however, living styles for graduate versus undergraduate students are pretty different and they tend to clash sometimes. You can have a social life outside your house, but you may not particularly enjoy it on a daily basis.

- **Cost**
  How much can you afford or are willing to pay for housing? Rent in the area can vary, with $550 - $650 for the College Park area being a reasonable price for rent. Of course, you can find good deals (less than $550). You simply have to decide what you want. The more space you want, the higher the price will be. The less roommates you want, the higher the price as well. Apartments tend to cost more than rooms in a house, but give you more space. Washington D.C. is more expensive than the College Park area.

Campus Gardens is a gated community for both grad and undergrad students. Grad students get a small discount: www.southernmanagement.com/campus-gardens/
Finding Housing

• Transportation
  How do you plan to get to school? If you do not have a car, you may wish to consider living within walking distance from campus, on a shuttle route or near means of public transportation.

• Safety
  How safe is the area where you plan on living? You should talk to colleagues in the department or look up police reports about any incidents in the area. Some areas tend to be safer than others, and you want to take that into account when making a decision.

• What’s around
  What type of neighborhood do you want to live in? If you don’t have a car, you may want to live close to a grocery store for easy access. If you are interested in going into the city frequently, you may want to live close to the metro station. If you are a runner, you may be interested in an area with trails or bike paths that you can enjoy. Decide what matters to you when it comes to your personal convenience, amenities and overall lifestyle.

Most places will ask you to sign a lease. We strongly advise you to have a lease for the place where you live so that you are protected against scams or abuse of privileges from unfriendly landlords. Leases can be one-year long, six-months or sometimes month-to-month. Please note that if you sign a one-year lease (e.g., August 2013-August 2014) you will be responsible for rent during the summer months of 2014. Your last paycheck from school comes at the middle/beginning of June (depending on whether you have / have not taken health benefits), so you need to plan in advance for these summer months of rent or consider sub-leasing your place. Some landlords do not like the idea of subleasing, therefore, we strongly advise you to bring this issue to the table before signing the lease. The University’s Legal Aid Office (as well as colleagues in the department) can give you more advice as to what you should look for. It is also customary for landlords to ask for a security deposit for the space (i.e., the equivalent of one month’s rent) and, sometimes, first and last month’s rent when signing the lease.
Locating Grocery Stores

There are quite a few grocery stores close to campus:

- **My Organic Market (MOM’s)**
  www.myorganicmarket.com
  9827 Rhode Island Avenue
  College Park, MD 20740
  UMD Shuttle 110 stops by

- **Giant**
  www.giantfood.com
  6000 Greenbelt Road
  Greenbelt, MD 20770
  UMD 106 Shuttle stops by
  3521 East-West Highway
  Hyattsville, MD 20782
  Metro accessible

- **Safeway**
  www.safeway.com
  7595 Greenbelt Road
  Greenbelt, MD 20770
  Bus accessible
  10101 New Hampshire Avenue
  Silver Spring, MD 20903
  UMD 108 Shuttle stops by
Locating Grocery Stores

If you need things for your new home (furniture, dishes, etc.) you can try a department store. Target has three locations in the area:

- **Target**
  
  www.target.com

  **First Target Location**
  6100 Greenbelt Road
  Greenbelt, MD 20770
  UMD Shuttle 106 stops by

  **Second Target Location**
  3500 East-West Highway
  Hyattsville, MD 20782
  UMD Shuttle 113 stops by

  **Third Target Location**
  12000 Cherry Hill Road
  Silver Spring, MD 20904
  Bus accessible

There is also IKEA, a home furnishings store with reasonable prices:

- **Ikea**
  
  www.ikea.com

  10100 Baltimore Avenue
  College Park, MD 20740
  UMD Shuttle 110 stops by
Locating Grocery Stores

Craigslist usually has good sales for a variety of items. You need to watch the ads constantly and have transportation to pick the items up. Never go alone, though, to someone’s house when picking up items.

For ethnic foods, your best bet is to talk to your colleagues in the department. Those who have been in the area know not only the best ways to get to a store but also what can be found at each store, which will save you a lot of time. If you don’t have a car, no worries, you can always team up with someone to go grocery shopping.

- **MegaMart**
  - *mainly featuring South and Central American specialty foods and baked goods*
  - 2400 University Blvd E., Hyattsville, MD 20783
  - Phone: 240-770-4982

- **H & A Supermarket**
  - *several, Asian products*
  - 1535 University Blvd, Unit A., Langley Park, MD 20783
  - Phone: 301-408-0880

- **Great Wall Supermarket**
  - 700 Hungerford Drive, Rockville, MD 20850
  - Phone: 240-314-0558

Finally, here are some malls in the area. You can shop for clothes, shoes, home furnishings, some electronics, etc. Note that the transportation information may be out of date, so check your direction before heading out: [www.och.umd.edu](http://www.och.umd.edu)

Of course, in the United States, online shopping is pretty popular and many times advantageous in terms of time and money. Here are some safe, reputable clothing websites for your reference: [www.zappos.com](http://www.zappos.com), [www.6pm.com](http://www.6pm.com), [www.asos.com](http://www.asos.com)
Getting Around

If you have a car, things are easy for you. Make sure you visit the Motor Vehicle Administration to get all the required paperwork in order. Make sure you compare rates for your insurance, as they can vary tremendously. Also ask about discounts when asking about price, as you may sometimes receive a discount as you are a state employee (your employer is the University of Maryland).

If you plan on driving to campus, you will need a parking permit. Visit The Department of Transportation Services for information on how to get one.

Even if you do not have a car and you do not plan to get one immediately, you may consider getting a state ID or a driver’s license. If you have a state ID, that ID becomes your identification card, so you do not have to carry around your passport all the time. If you have a driver’s license, when you eventually get a car your insurance will cost less because you have had a U.S. driver’s license for a while.
Getting Around

If you don’t have a car, here are a few options:

- **UMD Shuttle Bus**
  Many buses go to lots of places. And they are free!
  Visit The Department of Transportation Services for complete bus routes, schedules, etc.

- **Public Buses**
  The Washington D.C. area has a good public transportation system (compared to other U.S. cities. Compared to your own country, it may not be that great).
  Visit The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. You can plan your trip based on your departure and arrival addresses. The fare for riding a bus is $1.80, cash.

- **Metro**
  College Park Metro Station is very close to campus. You can walk or take the UMD Shuttle 104. Once there, you can easily get to the city. The fare for riding the metro differs depending on the distance to your destination and the time of the day (you will be charged more during rush hours).

If you will rely on public transportation a lot, we recommend you get a SmarTrip card. You can buy one at the metro station or CVS Pharmacy and it costs $10. The card saves you a bit on buses as opposed to paying cash (.20c) and it allows you to transfer for free from a bus to another for a 3-hour interval.
You will need to open a bank account as soon as possible. You can deposit any cash you have brought with you as well as get a debit card and checks to pay for things.

There are two banks close to campus:

- **Capital One Bank**
  Stamp Student Union OR
  7406 Baltimore Avenue
  College Park, MD 20740

- **Bank of America**
  7370 Baltimore Avenue
  College Park, MD 20740

Make sure you compare what the banks have to offer. Both banks should have a student checking account. Take all your forms with you when trying to open a bank account (passport, I-20, etc.). You may need two forms of identification, in which case you may need to get your student ID before being able to open your account.

Once you have bank account, make sure you complete the direct deposit form with our business office so that your paychecks are deposited directly into your bank account every month.
Getting a Credit Card

There are various types of bank cards. When you open a bank account you will usually receive a debit card, meaning you can use your card to pay with money that already exists in your account. You will be (usually) asked if you are interested in applying for an overdraft which will allow you to write checks or make payments with your debit card even when there is not enough money in the account to cover them (for up to approximately $500, depending on the bank). An overdraft is basically a short term credit and you will have to pay interest for it (therefore, you may want to check the rates with your bank before agreeing to an overdraft).

If you want to apply for a credit card, you may not be able to in the beginning. To receive a credit card you must have a social security number and some history of how you use your money (this doesn’t apply to overdrafts). If you are new to the United States, you may not have such a history, so you will more than likely be denied when trying to obtain a credit card. Some companies may give you a credit card after you have been in the United States for a while and have some sort of record (e.g., having a cell phone bill in your name will help you establish a credit history). If you receive a credit card, beware of cards with high interest rates, annual fees and, overall, beware of spending too much money that you essentially don’t own.
Getting Your Paperwork in Order

Submitting your initial paperwork with the department

During the first week of your arrival here you will be bombarded with forms and applications. You need to fill them out quickly and submit them with our Business Office to ensure you are added to the university system. If you are not in the system you cannot get paid! Forms are available outside the Business Office, on the hallway. If you are unsure how to complete the forms, ask your colleagues or stop by the Business Office during open hours to get assistance.

If you have a fellowship, there are additional forms to fill out, or some forms may require two copies to be submitted. Whenever you receive an additional fellowship you will have to fill out these forms, otherwise the payment process will not be initiated. Be aware that the system does not work as smooth as we would like, therefore, it may take up to 4 months before you will receive your fellowship money. Plan your finances accordingly. Also, taxes will be taken from your fellowship, but you will receive all the money back when you file your taxes in April. You may want to check if your country has a treaty with the United States regarding exemption from taxes. If it does, your income will be exempt from taxes for a certain period of time or up to a certain amount. But again, you need to find these things out, no one will spoon feed all the information to you. To our knowledge, Romanian and Chinese students do benefit from such a treaty.

You will also want to check that your information has been entered correctly into the university’s system. There are two places to check:

- Payroll & Human Resources
- Testudo

You need to make sure that all your information is correct (name, address, phone number, email, etc.).
Getting Your Paperwork in Order

Applying for a social security number

As a new international student you more than likely have a temporary social security number (with 00 in the middle). You will need to apply for a permanent social security number. Follow the instructions given to you by the Office of International Affairs and our Business Office. It is important that you apply soon after your arrival, so that you receive your SSN card. You will need to submit copies of this card to our Business Office and have your new SSN on record with Human Resources and the Payroll Office. Long story short, apply for a SSN as soon as possible.

You may find instructions here:
International Student & Scholar Services Page
Getting Your Paperwork in Order

Filing your taxes

When the month of April rolls around you will need to file taxes with the U. S. government for the income received through your assistantship. Taxes can be confusing if you are an international student, as most people (even at local tax preparation offices) are not very familiar with all kinds of filing taxes as a non-resident alien. DO NOT wait until the last minute to start this process as it takes time and is often frustrating. We recommend you get to work as soon as you have all the forms from the university (W-2, 1046-S, etc.). Talk to colleagues or other international students on campus who are from the same country.

As tax season approaches, help with filing taxes will also be available on campus. You will receive several notifications over email about locations and times when assistance is available. Some of our colleagues found the help provided very beneficial. The Office of International Affairs also provides a tax software, Glacier Tax Prep, free-of-charge. For all qualifying non-resident aliens (for tax purposes) who have earned income from University of Maryland College Park during the calendar year. It is easy to use and captures most tax situations for international students. Usually around Mid-March, the Office of International Affairs will include in the emails they sent out a message about how to access and use Glacier Tax Prep.
Getting Your Paperwork in Order

Legal Issues

If for some reason you might need to contact a lawyer or receive legal advice from an authorized person (on issues such as landlord-tenant disputes, traffic tickets, health care), our campus offers such services.

The Legal Aid Office “provides free legal information, consultations, referrals, and brief assistance to individual graduate students on a wide range of both off-campus and university matters.” They also organize a series of workshops throughout the academic year on various topics of interest to graduate students, so keep an eye on those as well, as they will help you better grasp the American system (they are usually advertised via email).
Other Important Things to Keep in Mind

Legal Issues

It is CRUCIAL that you maintain your status as an international student. Make sure that you familiarize yourself with all the rules and regulations regarding your status during the first week of orientation, by visiting the Office of International Affairs website or talking to colleagues in our department. The best advice we have for everyone is to ALWAYS double-check everything that you are being told, even if you obtained the information from the Office of International Affairs, for example. Ask multiple counselors there, colleagues who are from the same country or who have experiences the same problem. Make sure YOU are pro-active about your problems, rather than expect things to happen to you.

At the beginning of each semester (fall and spring), also remember to verify your status as an F-1 student. This step is required by the United States Citizenship & Immigration Services. You will receive reminders from the Office of International Affairs. Be sure to complete this process in August and January of each year.

Go to the SEVIS Verification page and click on “Verify Students.”
Other Important Things to Keep in Mind

Receiving medical care

As soon as you can, choose a health care plan. When completing all your paperwork with the Business Office in our department, you will also receive a brochure with the different plans and options for medical insurance. Read it, talk to your colleagues and make a selection. Some of the options require that you select a doctor as your primary care physician. Do not worry if you cannot make up your mind from the very beginning. Once enrolled, you can select a doctor at any time or change your doctor.

The American medical system may also have some peculiarities as compared to your home country’s medical system. For example, when you go to a doctor you will be expected to pay a co-pay: a fixed amount, which can be $15, $25, etc., depending on the insurance. You should conduct some research and read the medical insurance brochure to find out what your co-pay will be and also how your insurance plan works, what types of services it will cover, and so on. Do not expect your insurance to cover EVERYTHING (especially vision and dental services). Regardless of the insurance company, when you go see a doctor, you will have to pay something.

Do not postpone this step. As an international student, you are required to have medical insurance. In the grand scheme of things, you cannot risk not having medical insurance when you need it.

You can also visit the University of Maryland Health Center. As a registered student you can receive care for a $15 charge/visit. You can also see a Health Center doctor to obtain prescription refills.

If you need to fill a prescription, there are several pharmacies in the area. The University Health Care Center has a pharmacy, as does CVS Pharmacy and all major stores (Giant, Shoppers, Target).
Other Important Things to Keep in Mind

Getting a cell phone

You will soon discover that Americans rely on their cell phones a lot. If you wish to get one, you can do so, but there are a few things to keep in mind:

- There are various deals for phones and plans, so shop around;
- Cell phone plans require you to sign a one or two year contract;
- You can get a pre-paid card rather than a monthly plan, but your calls will cost more;
- In the United States, you get charged (or have minutes deducted) for both outgoing and incoming calls;
- If you want to use text messaging, get a text message plan. Just like for calls, you get charged if you send or receive a text message. If you do not want to use text messaging, disable the service for your line, otherwise you will still get charged when people text you. However, there are also plans which, for a slightly higher rate, offer you unlimited calls and/or messages.

Here are the major cell phone carriers:

- **Verizon Wireless**  
  www.verizonwireless.com

- **Sprint**  
  www.sprint.com

- **T-Mobile**  
  www.t-mobile.com

- **AT & T**  
  www.wireless.att.com
When It Comes to Your Academic Life...

Creating a directory ID and password
Setting up your UMD email account
Registering for classes
Getting your student ID
Buying books
Getting to know the library
Departmental computer lab
Internships
Creating a Directory ID and Password

Your directory ID (or UID) and password are of utter importance for accessing all online resources, from forms, applications, library, and computers in the classroom where you teach. Your UID will basically be as important as oxygen for your academic life.

Go to The IT Department New Students Page and follow the instructions. You can choose your own ID (rather than accepting whatever the system defaults you to).
Setting Up Your UMD Email Account

When admitted to UMD, an email account has been automatically created for you. This email address is also the default address in some systems (such as Canvas) and cannot be changed. So, even if you do not wish to use your UMD email address, you need to configure your setting for the account.

Go to The Service Activation page (make sure to add all the security exceptions when prompted). You can have this email forwarded to your preferred email account.
Registering for Classes

Talk to your faculty contact before registering for classes

Talk to your faculty contact before making any decisions, really, when it comes to your academic life. Faculty contacts are here to help you and they can guide you through these first months of learning to navigate the system, from registration to coursework, to teaching.

Some classes outside the department fill up quickly (e.g., EDMS courses - statistics). You want to register as soon as registration opens (literally, the first few days) each semester to ensure you are in the class. Even if you cannot add a course, place yourself on the waitlist. Sometimes the roster shifts in the time between registration and the beginning of the semester.

If you are on the waitlist for a course, make sure you “check-in” once you are told you have been added to the course within 24 hours. You may otherwise be dropped from the course.

For other classes you may need the permission of the department in which the course is offered to register. Contact the faculty member who is teaching the course to ask for permission or the graduate coordinator of that department. You can find this information by going to the respective department’s homepage and browsing their faculty and staff directory.
Registering for Classes

To register for a course you need to obtain the course and section number from: the Schedule of Classes Page

Prior to registering, though, talk to your faculty contact (or your advisor once you have selected an advisor) about what course are required and what course you should take based on your specific area and interests.

Then go to the Schedule Adjustment Page to complete the registration process.

Our department requires that you register for a minimum of 9 credits, but you need to make sure you maintain the required number of units required by your international student status. The number of units associated with courses is available at: The International Student & Scholar Services Page
Getting Your Student ID

Go to the Mitchell Building, first floor to obtain your student ID. You must be registered for at least one course to obtain your ID.

This ID will get you in many places. Once you have it, make sure Lillie activates it for access to the Department’s Computer Lab and main entrance (you need to swipe your ID to get into Skinner during the weekends). Some of the classrooms you teach in may require that you swipe your ID to get in the room. The Scheduling Office usually ensures that your ID is activates before the semester starts, but you always want to check to make sure you can actually use your room the first day of classes.

You need an ID to ride the UMD Shuttle (except the 104: College park Metro Station shuttle) and to check out materials from the library. You can also get discounts at the University Book Store in the Stamp Student Union if you have a graduate ID for certain items (e.g., apparel).

You can also use your ID as a debit card to pay for things at some shops on campus. Activate it in the McKeldin Library, main floor. You can then add money to it and pay at certain restaurants in the Stamp Student Union or the Commons Shop by South Dining Hall. You can also add money to your card online.

Go to The Terrapin Express Inquiry page
Buying Books

One word of advice from the get-go. Books and course materials will be expensive, so plan a chunk of your budget for them at the beginning of each semester.

The books for your courses will be available either in the University Bookstore in the Stamp Student Union or at the Maryland Book Exchange located on Baltimore Avenue. You can look them up based on the course number (e.g., COMM 700) and instructor’s name for course with multiple sections. If your instructor has prepared a course packet for your class, the packet will be available in the basement of the Maryland Book Exchange, at Bel-Jean Printing.

You should always check prices at the bookstores on campus and compare them with prices for the same books on websites such as:

- www.amazon.com
- www.half.ebay.com
- www.ecampus.com
- www.cheaptextbooks.com
- www.alibris.com

One trick: look up the ISBN number of a book on the University Bookstore’s website and then search these websites based on the ISBN number so that you ensure you are getting the same edition of a book.
Getting to Know the Library

You are now a scholar, so the library is one of your best friends. Familiarize yourself with its setup. You can look up books, journals, videos, etc. in the “Catalog.” The UMD Library is fantastic as more and more journal articles are available online. You can access them from the convenience of your home by clicking on “Research Port” on the library’s homepage.

We also recommend scheduling an orientation session with one of the librarians, since they will always pull out a magical drawer and share amazing information that only them knew it existed.
Departmental Computer Labs

Our department has a computer lab for the use of graduate students. You gain access into the lab by swiping your student ID, once activated by Lillie. You can use it at all times, weekdays or weekends. Most computers have specialized software that you will use for some of your classes – e.g., SPSS and LISREL. There is also a printer and you can print for free provided you bring your own paper. Be courteous and don’t use other people’s paper. The lab also has a scanner connected to the first computer on the right hand side.

When in the computer lab, please remember a few general policies and courtesy rules:

• Be considerate of other people working in the lab. Don’t talk loudly, take phone calls or listen to music without headphones on;

• Limit your time at a station if other people are waiting to use a computer;

• Always ask before printing, especially if you have long printing jobs (i.e., lots of pages). The printer tends to be very popular before a class when assignments are due, so it helps if you print your stuff in advance;

• Don’t bring food or drinks (other than in spill-proof containers) into the lab;

• Don’t leave your work on the desktops of computers. Too many files slow down the performance of the computers. It’s best to save your files on your own storage media (e.g., USB).
Internships

In case you decide to stick around over the breaks and you feel that maybe working on something else in addition to your research could be beneficial, you might consider getting an internship.

The DC area is excellent in terms of governmental agencies and organizations whose work might be in line with your own research interests.

The Career Center on campus offers great assistance in helping you look for an internship and apply for the one that best suits your interests (i.e., preparing your CV and the application letter, getting ready for the interview), so make sure you pay them a visit beforehand!

Be aware that, as an international student, you will have to follow some additional steps to obtain work authorization known as CPT (i.e., Curricular Practical Training) in order to receive training off-campus (i.e., work as an intern).

You may obtain this authorization via the Office of International Affairs. It is a simple process and people over there are really helpful!
CHAPTER 02

Surviving your graduate work
Surviving Your Graduate Work

Your first and most important obligation as a graduate student is towards the classes you take. There will always be many things going on: papers to grade, service to fulfill, but you should make your studies the priority.

Make sure you have everything you need for the first week of school: your books, readings, notebooks, etc. You will have to start working right away. Actually, don’t be surprised if readings are assigned for the first day of classes. Know where classes are held and be there on time.

As the first week of classes passes, you may feel overwhelmed by the amount of work, assignments, deadlines, due dates and so on. Our best advice is to start a calendar for yourself with deadlines and to map out the semester. You will notice that sometimes there is a little bit of a break between assignments whereas other weeks are hectic, with several things to turn in for your different classes. Be smart about these things. Work on class work when you have a bit of a break rather than waiting until the week before everything is due. If you can manage to get yourself on a schedule, it will help a lot. Working all night before an assignment is due reduces your overall performance: you are tired, behind on other things, behind on your sleep, cranky and stressed out. Our best advice: start planning rather than reacting to assignments.

Learn how to read articles. Seriously, you won’t be able to read everything if you go word by word, page by page. In the beginning, your reading will more than likely be slow. After all, you are reading in a foreign language. With time, though, you will get faster and you will figure out what is important in an article. BUT develop a strategy that allows you to read the articles and be able to discuss them in class while enabling you to remember them months afterwards. Some people found highlighting their articles useful, or taking notes, or outlining the articles. The more you can get done at the time of your reading and the better you become at taking good notes, the better prepared you will be in the future, when comprehensive exams come around (we know that seems like ages from this moment, but it will be present day before you know it).
Another thing that will help you keep on top of your class work is to develop a way of organizing your articles, readings, and coursework materials. Some people have file folders, with articles alphabetized by authors. Other people have their materials color-coded according to courses. You can do whatever you want, but try to make it easy for you to access and find when needed.

Some colleagues found it very useful to study with others. Sometimes you may not understand an article at all (rest assured it has happened to all of us). The important thing is to try and then discuss it with other colleagues. Different people have different strengths and perspectives, so they can help you and you can help them understand class materials. There is not always time in class to cover everything and the worst thing is to leave a classroom with unanswered questions.

Start thinking early on about what you want to study and research throughout the semester and throughout your program. You may already have an idea, which is great. Talk to your temporary faculty contact, your instructors for all classes and get to work. The sooner you can start your research for final papers, the better. That way you have time to edit and fine-tune your papers before the final due dates.

Always aim high. When you work on a project, ask yourself what you can do with it beyond the class for which you’ve submitted it. Check conferences for which you could submit a paper (both regional and national) and student conferences (e.g., the Graduate Research Interaction Day held in April at UMD).

Your professors and your advisor want you to succeed. Talk to them about your work and how you can improve. Don’t be discouraged by grades. Take criticism constructively, not as a personal attack on your value or work, but as a tool for building and strengthening your work. Your writing, for example, won’t be excellent overnight. It takes a lot of practice and a lot of bloody papers from your professors. But if you persevere, you will improve gradually. Take
Surviving Your Graduate Work

advantage of the writing resources on campus. The writing fellows offer one-on-one writing consultation for graduate students (for more information, you should contact gradwritingfellows@umd.edu). In addition, a non-credit graduate writing course will be offered in the fall, covering areas such as writing an article for publication, writing a grant proposal, sentence variation, or paragraphing (you should email hblain@umd.edu for more information). And finally, this October, the UMD libraries and the Graduate School will run a day-long research and writing bootcamp.

More than anything, keep in touch and get support from other students in the program. We have all been in your shoes and we have some insights that may help you. No point in reinventing the wheel. Become involved in departmental activities (or CommGrads) as a great way to stay connected with your colleagues. Also, take part in departmental events. You might think that you do not have time for them or feel uncomfortable attending them. This is your life now and socializing is a big part of it. Getting to know people, making friends, understanding the American culture, and how things are done around here are crucial for a smooth adaptation process. And there is no better way to start than with your PhD fellows.
CHAPTER 03

Mastering your teaching
If this is your first time teaching, you may be afraid of standing in front of American students who are only a few years younger than you. This concern is a legitimate one, but it is no reason to be scared about your teaching. As long as you are prepared and know your material, you will make it.

The first semester is a trial experience. You have never taught before and even if you have, you have not taught the same material before. The orientation sessions you have during the first week will help you a lot, as well as the resources you receive (lesson plans, instructors’ manuals). Throughout the semester, COMM 686 will provide for you an outlet for sharing concerns, ideas and advice with your colleagues. You will learn new teaching techniques and how to best handle assignments, grading, etc. Do not be afraid to voice concerns. No one will judge you. By the second time you teach a course, things will be a whole new experience. You know how the first time went, so you can make changes and adjustments.

Teaching during the first semester will also tend to take over your life. There are so many papers to grade and so many lesson plans to prepare. Remember though that you have other responsibilities besides teaching. Try to set up times for yourself when you work on grading, preparing lessons, responding to emails from students, without allowing these things to take up most of your time.

Some people may suggest you will have problems with your students because you are an international teaching assistant, have an accent, come from a different culture, and so on. Ignore them! You have been admitted to one of the most competitive programs in the country and have passed all your English requirements to get here. Students will try to test all their teaching assistants, regardless of their culture. You will more than likely have a student who tries to argue with you about his or her grade! Be confident in your abilities and be prepared. Set clear standards in your syllabus and abide by what your syllabus says. If you start making exceptions, you open a can of worms for yourself. Stick to your standards and apply them to everyone equally.
Mastering Your Teaching

That’s how you can demonstrate you are a competent teacher.

Talk to your colleagues who have taught the course you are teaching before to find out how they have navigated through it. You will find out that some things work better than others. Your colleagues may also have resources they can share, such as activities for some concepts, exercises, approaches to teaching some units, clips and videos to illustrate some concepts. The pool of COMM 107 instructors is large, so take advantage of your colleagues’ experience when thinking about how to improve your teaching. They can also share an opinion about how they have dealt with students’ concerns, problems, and complaints.

There are great resources outside the department as well. The Center for Teaching Excellence is located next door, in 0405 Marie Mount Hall. They have a variety of workshops for teaching assistants; for example, one on how to prepare a teaching portfolio which is extremely useful for preparing your own portfolio for COMM 686. They also have useful advice for various aspects of your teaching; for example a handbook on grading student papers, regardless of the discipline and a teaching resource guide for the UMD campus.

Finally, consider attending the Lilly-East Conference on College and University Teaching held in April. The CTE has travel grants for this conference. Other conferences (such as the National Communication Association Conference, held in November) have session dedicated to teaching where you can learn a great deal from other teachers in the field.
CHAPTER 04

Enjoying your life
(yes, you still have one)
Enjoying Your Life
(Yes, You Still Have One)

People joke that they have no life once in a Ph.D. program. Although the amount of work is overwhelming at times and you may sometimes feel as if you don’t have a life outside of school, remember that you do and you should celebrate it as such.

Doing something outside of school is a MUST. A lot of us are guilty of not obeying by this rule, and we have experienced its effects on our own skin. No matter how much you love school, how much you want to learn, there comes a time when you need a break. Without breaks and something fun in your life you will quickly burn out and transform into an old grump.

People do all sorts of things for fun. Don’t be fooled by the idea that you need a lot of money to have fun in the D.C. area. For example, a lot of museums are free. Many free events also happen on campus. You will get emails with news about events (FYI emails) or simply look at posters in the library area, the Stamp Student Union, pavement chalking, etc. The Office of International Affairs also organizes some events for international students (e.g., tour of the D.C. monuments or Thanksgiving dinner) that can be a great outlet for meeting other students from various countries. Try to attend some of these activities. You may meet people from your own country and speaking your own language may be a welcome break form everything else.

Some people like to let off steam in the gym. The Campus Recreation Services is well-equipped and has a lot of fitness classes for both men and women. If you swim, the indoor natatorium is open year-around. They also organize inexpensive day trips outside of College Park, going hiking, apple-picking, caving, etc. One of our colleagues said the trip she went on was extremely fun and gave her the opportunity to meet people outside the department.

Other people like to get together with friends. There are events on campus and events in our department that create a relaxing atmosphere. Every other Friday (on pay days, how convenient), the Graduate Student Government organizes a Grad Pub in the Stamp Student Union. It is open to graduate
Enjoying Your Life
(Yes, You Still Have One)

students and offers free food and drinks for very low prices. Our Department’s student association, COMMGrads, organized social outings every month, be it going to a football game, skating, happy-hours or picnics.

If you are looking for more ideas for what to do, check out the suggestions offered by the following:

- **Graduate Student Life Handbook**
  Handbook Page

- **The Office of International Affairs’ list of local attractions**
  Local Attractions Page

- **Living Social** – a unique website that provides information on diverse offerings each day, from weekend excursions to festivals, concerts, dinners, and other similar events.
  www.livingsocial.com

You don’t have to spend your leisure time with people from school. The important part is to remember to do SOMETHING outside of school. Don’t give it up even when times get rough and you are stressed out. There will always be work to do and something will always seem more important than pampering yourself. Stick to a time for yourself religiously and enjoy it to the maximum. It will make you more productive when you return to work, as your mind has had a break and you are more energized.

If you would like to attend a religious service, a variety of churches and places of worship are available in the area. The University’s Memorial Chapel (http://chapel.umd.edu/) is located right next to the Skinner Building. The Office of International Affairs has provided a list of various churches: http://collegeparkmd.areaconnect.com/churches.htm. If you are looking for a particular type of church, check with colleagues who share the same faith and have been here for while. They may be able to direct you to a place.
Enjoying Your Life
(Yes, You Still Have One)

Finally, finding people from your country or another international student in the program can help you not only enjoy talking in your native language and celebrating national events, favorite holidays, etc., but also deal with transitioning into the American culture and adapting to your new world.
CHAPTER 05

A final word
A Final Word
(or an everyday To Do List)

☐ Sleep. It is not a waste of time.

☐ Ask questions. Ask for help. It is okay not to know everything. No one does.

☐ Teaching is challenging. Not just for you, but for everyone.

☐ Take time for yourself. No one is working all the time. Trust me.

☐ Make friends and spend time with them. It’s like including protein in your diet.

☐ Voice your concerns, complaints, doubts. Otherwise, things will not get better overnight.

☐ Love your work. It will make things 10 times easier.

☐ Pat yourself on the back every now and then. And be proud. After all, you are one of the best.
Your UMD career is waiting.

Good luck!