Before the First Day of Graduate School

Introduction: Why This Guide?

This document suggests best practices for navigating doctoral education in the humanities and interpretive social sciences as a whole person. It provides a map of the institutional contexts in the university within which individual PhD programs operate, with a focus on North American institutions. Its purpose is to empower all readers (including undergraduates considering graduate school, doctoral students, and faculty) with knowledge about how to make the doctoral experience enriching and humane—despite the structural inequities that characterize higher education and the professional pressures, financial worries, and emotional ups and downs that typically arise through the process. It was written by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) in conversation with colleagues and scholars across the disciplines. We at ACLS are grateful for their thoughtful insights and suggestions, and we encourage readers to consult their own scholarly societies' websites for more information and support. Many societies offer specialized advice on doctoral education.

This guide emerged out of a series of conversations among the ACLS federation of 79 scholarly societies on how best to support scholars at the earliest stages of their careers. It is a living document, which means that it will change over time, as scholarly societies, ACLS, and other organizations continue to gain deeper understanding of how best to support doctoral students and as graduate education (and higher education more broadly) continues to change and adapt. It is written in a spirit of realism and optimism: realism because graduate school is a multistep process over several years, and students need to have clarity about how best to complete those steps; and optimism because although institutions of higher learning are imperfect, they remain key to the larger mission of educating students, working with communities, and producing and disseminating knowledge.

Since 1919, doctoral education has been a key common interest linking ACLS member societies, member institutions, fellows, supporters, and staff. The ACLS community sees the PhD as the future of the academic study, in the form of the people who will carry forward strong scholarly values and skills, and who are often the best inciters of change and transformation in research, teaching, professional culture, and practice.

The 21st Century University

Doctoral programs

Doctoral study provides a distinctive opportunity to develop a range of high-level skills and in-depth knowledge, to immerse oneself in one or more fields of study, and to utilize those skills and knowledge in making valuable contributions to the advancement of scholarly research and the broader understanding of humanity. Graduate programs provide a structure for receiving specialized guidance in the design, development, and completion of a complex, innovative, and original research project; but a successful experience as a graduate student—intellectually, professionally, and individually—entails a good bit more.

During graduate school, most students will progress through a sequence of academic tasks: classes, exams, the dissertation, and the dissertation defense. Beyond these core requirements, there are additional elements: often (though not always) teaching, presenting work at conferences, sending out articles for publication, and perhaps some form of service (such as serving as a graduate student representative, or becoming involved in your discipline). Some programs have added internships that enable students to undertake work inside or outside the university that may better prepare them for jobs outside the classroom after they complete the PhD. Many students have opportunities to engage in collaborative projects, to travel, to work closely with senior scholars, or to work with external organizations. At its best, doctoral study enables students to develop an area of expertise, working closely with a dissertation advisor as well as other faculty and mentors. Through the process of working on a PhD, students will hone their research skills, their capacity for critical thinking, their ability to communicate verbally and in writing, and their ability to organize and manage a complex project. Depending on their program and individual trajectory, they will develop other competencies as well: teaching, presenting, collaborative skills, and the like.

Challenges and contradictions

To our collective benefit, and at times our peril, many of us work and study in institutions whose ways of structuring knowledge, valuing certain kinds of labor, and doing business are tied to much older institutional histories and knowledge organization (Cassuto and Weisbuch, 2021). We are also witnessing increasingly complex pressures—some external, some internal—on institutions of higher education. As a result, many of the tensions that have always been simmering below the surface have amplified and, in some cases, erupted.

More recently, issues of belonging and justice surfaced in the #BlackLivesMatter movement, and they currently take many different forms: anti-racist and decolonial activisms; calls for diversifying faculty and students; curricular and disciplinary shifts; and grassroots and university diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) efforts. As these efforts advance and become more common on many campuses, there are now debates about whether this work can retain its power to remake the university when it becomes institutionalized, or whether this is a necessary step in order to create a different culture. Within institutions, there is increasing attention to meeting the needs of a more diverse student body, both undergraduate and graduate, that includes students who are first generation, who have physical disabilities, who are neurodivergent, who are primary caregivers, and/or who belong to historically marginalized groups. There is also growing wealth and income inequality globally. At the same time, political attacks on DEIJ work

at public institutions, including legal challenges across the U.S. to limit and control the material taught in college classrooms, further complicate matters. The COVID-19 pandemic and its ongoing impacts underscore the crisis in mental health among students and the need for institutions to examine how they provide support and accommodation for all those who study and work within them.

It is also a moment of increased attention to the inequalities that seem baked into higher education: the hierarchies within academic ranks, the adjunctification of the university labor force, and the decline in number of tenure-track positions. Graduate students, along with part-time faculty (often called "instructors" or "contract faculty" or "contingent faculty"), have unionized at many schools, in some cases resulting in better working conditions as well as increasing tensions. Whether or not you are at one of these institutions, this is the landscape of higher education that you must learn to traverse.

The possibilities of a "new academy"

This is also a moment of excitement and innovation, with plenty more room for growth. Many fields have opened up their scope of analysis, methodologies, and aims; interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work, along with new areas and subfields across the arts and sciences, offer new questions, ways of producing knowledge, and approaches to solving complex problems. We at ACLS, along with many others, are engaged in the work of fostering change in institutional structures and cultures that support a broad range of scholarly work and the flourishing of those doing it: for example, helping to support efforts that expand what counts as scholarship and research that encourages wider consideration for non-traditional publication (including digital projects, publicly engaged work, open access scholarship, and the like).

This guide lays out some of these tensions and constraints. It endeavors to explain what doctoral education is right now while also describing what it can be, as part of what we might think of as a "new academy." Progress is already established or work is underway in many institutions to rethink and reform what we have collectively inherited. These efforts aim to create infrastructures, relationships, and cultures that better serve students and faculty and to address the stresses and inequalities that permeate higher education.

How Universities Work

Most doctoral programs are located in large, complex institutions. The task of examining universities and their organizational dynamics may not seem terribly exciting; it might even feel like the corporate antithesis of why you came to graduate school in the first place. But there are (at least) two reasons to do this: the first is your own success, however you define that; and the second is that most likely, very few people will spend time dissecting the institution with you. We will say that from our experience, most scholars, once they start digging, find institutions more interesting than they first thought!

One of the deepest contradictions of higher education is that many academics have a deep ambivalence about the institutions in which they work. Many people enter the academy believing it to be a refuge from late-stage capitalism, where the currency of the realm is original thinking and the possibility of freedom lies in the unfettered pursuit of creativity-inspired research, only to discover that like all institutions, universities are socially situated and deeply embedded in the same macroeconomic structures as the rest of the world. It's easy to be let down by institutions, to disavow their organizational dynamics, or to see them as beyond rehabilitation—particularly when they cause harm to people and communities, or generate ever-proliferating bureaucratic tasks that demand too much time and attention. It's not a surprise that some academics prefer not to engage with the institution and to define their own success in more conventional academic terms (publications, grants, teaching) instead of faculty governance or administrative leadership. Some may also teach their students a similar strategy, by example and/or omission. But this is a privilege not available to everyone, and one that ultimately does not serve the well-being of anyone in higher education.

The purpose of this section is to make these structures visible and to point out what might be called the "hidden curriculum" of the university. Because these structures are obscured, particularly for students whose families may have spent less time interacting with academia (including first-generation students and students who belong to

historically marginalized and/or economically disadvantaged communities), we approach the work of understanding university with a commitment to equity and access. Ultimately, we suggest that the problem is not critique—which is necessary and important—but the absence of inquiry into the structures we inhabit, which is the reason behind the paucity of serious, practical discussion about action for change. As you know from your coursework, the best critiques emerge from deep understanding. The same is no less true for the university.

The first step, then, is learning where you are and how it works. In this section, we provide you with some of the questions to help make the hidden structures of the university visible. It offers starting points of information gathering and questions to ask. Cultivating a practice of asking questions and independent fact-finding will help you to take charge of your graduate school experience and your life beyond the PhD.

Where you are
Higher education institutions are complex places in which you occupy an integral but specialized position. This is not a commentary on your individual significance, but simply an acknowledgement that you are embedded in a large ecosystem of many moving parts. You are situated in your department, and how your department enables you to work and move through your program is contingent on information relays and systems of support outside the department itself.

One place to start is with your institution's mission statement. These can vary, depending on the type of institution: private, religiously affiliated, public, land grant, and so on. Mission statements are important for understanding the stated values of your university and can affect policies and practices across the institution as well as in your department.

How it works
Here are some additional questions you can begin with to map the structure of your own department:

- Who is your office staff and what are their roles?
- Who is your department chair? What does a department chair do in your institution—what are their responsibilities, and to whom do they answer?
- How long has the current chair been in the department?
- How long have they been chair?

Some of this you can find out by asking experienced graduate students, or the office staff themselves. You can and should also talk with your assigned adviser, and if you don't have one, talk with the chair. People are usually glad to describe their department service if you ask questions in a collegial spirit. Many faculty find this service time-consuming and something of a distraction from their teaching and scholarship, so be aware that they may interpret your questions as nascent criticism. Be ready to explain that you are simply trying to figure things out, and that should reassure them. Asking staff and faculty about their roles can help you to determine the depth of institutional knowledge and history each person has, and how this might translate into the level of support they will be able to provide you in the future. What questions might they be able to answer for you? Can they direct you to specific people and resources? This is especially important information to know about your chair and director of graduate studies (DGS).

Remember that asking these questions and learning the answers is a process that will unfold over time. Try not to overwhelm any one person with all of your questions at once.

Questions you may direct to both your chair and your DGS or other faculty member you feel comfortable consulting:

- What is the funding structure of your department per graduate student?
- When will you be eligible for competitive funding?
- What is available for competitive funding? (fellowships and their requirements)
- Where is information housed on how to apply for different types of funding?
- What professional development resources are available and where?
- Who assigns teaching, and how does that process work?

Other questions to establish other department-university network connections are:

- To whom does your chair report; that is, with what dean do they work (humanities, social sciences, arts and humanities, arts and sciences, etc.)?
- Is there a separate graduate school at your institution, or is governance of graduate education woven into one school or college?
- Who are the deans relevant to your school and program, including the dean or vice provost of graduate studies?
- How does your advisor, and other faculty members you work with closely, fit into this hierarchy?

Effectively, you are constructing the organizational chart that is foremost a chain of communication that funnels directly to your department and then to you. Most importantly, you are mapping a community of people as resources who will be able to field questions that emerge as you pass each program milestone. For example, if you have a question concerning funding, taking medical leave, or even professionalization opportunities, this is a useful chain of command to become familiar with.

Beyond the organizational network path, explore adjacent relations of support that help your department run. These could include finding out:

- Who is the ombudsperson for graduate students? Is there a graduate student union?
- Who is responsible for student affairs for graduate students?
- What graduate student organizations are present at your institution? In your department?
- Is there a humanities center in your school? What is its function in your program?

Finally, consider those sources of support within the larger institution:

- Are there affinity groups (such as queer student groups, Black student groups) and/or centers?
- Does your institution offer parental leave? Do you have access to campus childcare?
- As necessary, can you reach out to your institution's accessibility office, office for international students, center for teaching and learning (or equivalent), and/or library?
- If you have moved to a different city/state/country, consider asking about local support systems for new members of the community. Also think about how you will maintain any distant support systems.

Keep a running list of these resources once you discover them. If it doesn't already exist, you might consider creating a shared document with your cohort or other graduate student that each person can refer to as needed (as always, be mindful about what you store in "the cloud"). You could find that you and your peers have similar questions and are in search of the same information. As a system of mutual support, if you all feel comfortable sharing particular experiences, note on this document the problem you encountered and who (and where they are located) helped you to resolve it. Noting the questions you asked and what answers you were given is a means of tracking how policies or procedures (may) change over time and help you update these shared resources accordingly. For the duration of your graduate tenure, a resource such as this could become unwieldy, given the potential for substantial addition and expansion, so be sure to pare it down at intervals so it remains relevant and digestible.

How to Work in the University

The structures, timelines, and shapes of funding at most colleges and universities were designed for a different age and a particular kind of person: someone who is able-bodied, neurotypical, and most likely privileged by their social location (class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language, citizenship, and so on). Certainly, graduate programs were not designed with primary caregivers or single parents in mind. While some institutions have begun to rethink and redesign their programs to reflect this reality, most have not. There is much work to be done. With help from documents like this and from the students, faculty, and staff around you, you will need to figure out how to make the university work for you, even if it wasn't made to work for you. Ask for what you need, but be prepared for answers that may not always provide you with everything you asked for. Most likely, you will encounter some disagreement

and even conflict around the very question of what graduate students need in order to do their work.

Intellectually and structurally, graduate school presents a fundamentally different proposition than undergraduate programs. You are learning how to produce knowledge in your field, and the expectations of your classes and other benchmarks (exams, dissertations, and the like) are more rigorous and intense than in most undergraduate majors. Your program has been designed with certain goals and expectations in mind. You are being asked to channel and control your intellectual passions, though many would suggest (including the authors of this document) that remaining open to new passions and interests is in your long-term interest. After all, one never knows where new ideas may lead.

Research and the dissertation

While the end product of a doctoral degree—the dissertation—has remained relatively stable for centuries, this is shifting in some (though not all) fields. Forms of scholarly investigation are shifting and expanding throughout the academy. Some graduate students and scholars are working on a range of scholarly activities, including publicly engaged work, digital scholarship, and scholarship that engages with forms beyond the monograph. (For example, see the Next-Generation Dissertations website, a 2021 project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.) It is also worth noting, as well, that humanistic research takes place in many contexts—in NGOs, the public sector, healthcare, community-based organizations, and corporate settings—as well as within the academy.

These projects are exciting, but they may come with additional challenges; some may view them as risky. Your professors will no doubt have a range of attitudes toward these approaches, and possibly strong views. You may also choose to write a dissertation, still the standard practice; this, too, is an excellent choice. Most important is that you think carefully and strategically about your topic, as well as who you work with: the composition of your committee and most importantly, your advisor. These choices have implications not just for your project but also for your postdoctoral career. Whatever you decide, start from a place of personal and intellectual interest, and work to articulate the significance of your research in the language and values of your discipline.

If newer directions are interesting to you, consider introducing yourself to different ways of approaching and defining scholarly work through the classes you take or the professors you work with. Reach out to scholars doing innovative work. Look for collaborative, publicly or community-engaged projects that are often housed in humanities centers or similar kinds of labs or initiatives. Consult any guidelines made available in your field, which continue to change and are updated to reflect the evolution of scholarship and its forms. For example, the AAA released guidelines for public scholarship in Anthropology in 2017. The AHA released new Guidelines for Broadening the Definition of Historical Scholarship in 2023, which outline the core values underlying a wide array of historical work. As well, the MLA released their Guidelines for Evaluating Publicly Engaged Scholarship in 2021, which provide an overview of both the ethics and approaches to public work that may be of interest to scholars in many fields. Many societies have released guidance on digital scholarship; one example is the MESA Guidelines for Evaluating Digital Scholarship. Guidance in your field will help you understand some of the issues that may apply to graduate work, as well as hiring and evaluation in your field. Consult the society in your field(s) for guidelines or white papers, as well as opportunities to connect with scholars working in emergent subfields or using innovative methodologies and approaches in established areas.

Teaching and other kinds of labor

Your work is not limited to intellectual labor. You may be teaching, ideally with some training or mentorship (though many programs still do not teach graduate students how to teach), or working as a researcher for a professor; you may be working in a lab, an administrative office, or with another collaborative endeavor; you may hold an internship or an externship. There is no question that these kinds of experiences can help prepare you for a range of postdoctoral career pathways. If you are teaching, take advantage of opportunities to learn teaching tools and strategies; use the classroom as a space where you can engage with a range of students and to learn about their needs, experiences, and viewpoints. This will not only make you a better teacher, but also a better writer, researcher, and thinker.

There are other activities that are sometimes framed in terms of "good departmental citizenship"—participation in

department or program colloquiums, conferences, or attending lectures by outside speakers—which are part of the workload of faculty members. They can also be considered part of your work as a graduate student, within reason and given your own time constraints. They provide opportunities for showing up as a member of the community, asking questions, and being a generous participant—all of which can, in turn, further your own learning curve.

Universities are complicated workplaces, and ideas about what constitutes work, and what doesn't, have changed over time. Indeed, there may be tensions at your university about whether activities such as teaching should be solely viewed as labor, or whether they are also part of your training and apprenticeship. Clashing views are likely tied to larger questions about labor, working conditions, and budgets; generational differences may also come into play. Be aware of these differences, talk with other graduate students, and be honest with yourself and others about what you need.

Perhaps graduate students and professors on your campus are unionized, or perhaps not. Perhaps your institution has a history of labor negotiations; perhaps those around you are planning a strike, or engaging in other strategies to compel the institution into conversations about the working conditions of graduate students and non-tenure-track and tenure-track faculty. Learn what is happening and decide how you will engage.

Managing expectations and developing healthy work habits

The rigor of graduate school requires that you hone your skills in organization and task management. The rest of this section suggests ways to organize yourself and focus on learning how to approach work with a sense of how to prioritize and distill larger tasks into smaller ones, as well as to remind you that communication with others is key. Ultimately, organization is not just about getting through your program, or succeeding as a graduate student; it is also about wellness and realism. The core challenge is to manage expectations realistically, both those emanating from outside of you as well as those you have created for yourself.

Make sure to start each year with a clear sense of the program's expectations of you—important guideposts, tasks, and the like. Keep in mind that certain fixtures of doctoral programs in the past, such as exams, are changing in many fields; for example, a range of exercises may be included under the category "exams." Likewise, professors in individual courses should communicate clear expectations to their students. Meet with your graduate advisor to understand what is expected of you and when, and how your advisor prefers to work together.

Oftentimes, we think of ourselves as disorganized when the reality is that we have become overwhelmed. Thus, we can think of organization as serving two related functions: to establish a system of tracking your progress that, in turn, prevents you from becoming overwhelmed. Everyone arrives at their goals in different ways, but it is still helpful to consider ways to prioritize what you need to feel organized. If you can prioritize your tasks, this also helps you to stave off anxiety and exhaustion by effectively allocating time for rest and regeneration.

Use your progress tracking to observe patterns in to-do list items that never get crossed out. Ask yourself: Why am I not getting around to doing these things? What do these things have in common? Often it is the case that they are "BIG," complicated tasks [does your list include (a) go to the grocery store, and (b) solve world hunger?]. If this is true for you, breaking the BIG tasks down into a series of smaller things can be immensely productive.

Keeping a planner or to-do list is always a good idea. Admittedly, not everyone finds planners and organizers easy to work with; watching a planner fill up or a list lengthen can themselves be overwhelming and anxiety-inducing, which can have the opposite effect on your ability to plan and prioritize. Still, try to develop some sort of system of tracking. Establish your goals early based on your department requirements for degree progression and other commitments you have, such as teaching, other jobs, and/or caregiving. And be prepared to adjust your goals as things shift, but always maintain a plan to work from.

Find your best conditions for work. Before you begin working on your system of tracking and organizing, consider: Where best do you work? Take seriously how your physical environment and comfort help your focus. How do you work? You may need to create a designated workstation at home, with a well-lit area with a comfortable chair and ample desk space that will not get cluttered easily, or you may need to leave home to get work done. Do you work best with groups or solo? If it's the former, begin organizing work groups for writing, grading, or reading with cohort

members. Find work partners who will keep you accountable, but also who will offer you grace when you need it. Writing groups can be particularly helpful when you begin work on your dissertation.

Share your work. When working on a dissertation—indeed, many kinds of intellectual and creative projects—it's tempting to hold on to writing for longer than necessary. Many of us want to make our work just a little bit better and may even feel reluctant to show it to others. Resist this urge toward perfectionism and develop a practice of sharing your work—with members of your writing group or trusted faculty, in addition to your advisor—to get the kind of feedback that will make your work better and will help you become a better writer.

Keep good records. This may seem self-evident, but (too) many tears have been shed over invaluable, lost work; ask any graduate student in your program. How you develop this practice matters. Develop a system of filing and storage, which could be folders by content, term, year, etc. Save the syllabi from your graduate seminars. These can help you plan your own classes, but more importantly, texts from seminar reading lists will most likely end up on bibliographies for comprehensive exams and dissertations. When you are preparing for your exams (if you have exams), revisit these syllabi and start building your reading list. For easier reference, save your seminar papers by topic or theme. Save the syllabi for the classes you teach, so you don't have to start from scratch each semester. You may want to start a shared drive with your cohort members where you can draw on each other's pedagogical strengths when you need to. *Save your documents in multiple places and save your work as you go.* This cannot be overstated. Most likely, your university will offer a cloud server for storage. Use that space in addition to your device storage and free online cloud services that track versions, such as Google or One Drive. Finally, if you teach, save important communications with students. In maintaining your records, be selective and judicious. You don't want to overwhelm yourself with data and information. Outside of your "organized" files, keep an "overflow" file for miscellany.

As you accomplish your tasks and move through to-do lists, celebrate your milestones, whether large or small. Assess your achievements in the contexts of personal and professional goals you have set for yourself. Communicate with your advisor and professors if you are struggling to stay on top of your various commitments.

Maintaining Momentum and Well-Being

One of the central challenges of graduate school (and, to be honest, many other kinds of work) is the question of how you will meet the intensity of particular tasks—papers, conference presentations, grading—while sustaining your energy output over time. Lots of deadlines and the pressure to succeed (which is often both externally imposed and internally generated) can lead us to think that superhuman efforts are the only answer. As well, many of us feel personally and ethically drawn to our work, which can compel us to throw ourselves into it. But being superhuman is neither realistic nor healthy. Over time, most of us will pay the price, and without attention to our quality of life and well-being, exhaustion and stress can erode psychological and physical health. Learn how to draw boundaries, and remember to have fun. The importance of maintaining the capacity for a life outside of graduate school cannot be overstated.

Here are a few suggestions that have helped others during their doctoral work:

1. Maintain perspective. The experience of getting a PhD will transform you. It is a protracted process that very much alters your relationship to time. Milestones to completion are months and years apart, and so it can become challenging to stay focused, interested, energized, and enthusiastic. The sense that you have stalled, doubting yourself and your abilities, or feelings of inadequacy are valid and can make you feel as though you are not worthy of the opportunity you have earned. Acknowledge those feelings—you are not alone—and keep moving forward. Remember that you are making an investment, both in terms of time and resources, in yourself and your future.

2. Prioritize your mental health. Some programs have begun to focus more on the mental health and well-being of graduate students; discussions across institutions have been spearheaded by organizations such as the Council for Graduate Students (CGS), which published a report on graduate student mental health in 2021. Consider sharing these resources with your cohort, faculty, and administrators in your program, particularly if the support you need lags behind what is provided and recommended more broadly. Prioritizing your health and well-being is a long-term

project that requires being aware and mindful of yourself in the present moment, as well as looking past immediate deadlines and pressures to the future.

3. Build relationships. Thinking about the longer term can also help bring into focus the importance of building relationships. While they take time to build, they can provide you with sustenance and support over time. Think in terms of mentors or models, and networks or cohorts. Many scholarly societies have opportunities to sign up for mentoring as well as interest groups and graduate student caucuses that you can join; explore the possibilities. Remember to broaden your view to take in what and who is around you; while focused work has a place in graduate school, so does reaching out.

4. Define your goals. Determine what your goals are relative to your department timelines and milestones. In your planning, as best as possible, lead the direction of your research project. This means choosing a topic about which you will stay curious and motivated. The purpose of your PhD is to refine your research skills. It is, effectively, the beginning of your life as a researcher, not the end. You are not required to do/make something that has never been done before. At the most, you will excel by making an advancement or contribution to something previously established in your field.

Your ability to stay on track and stay motivated relies on several factors:

1. Systems of support

Institutional
When choosing an advisor, look for someone who:

- demonstrates compatibility with you, however you define compatibility. At the very least, find someone you feel comfortable having frank and open conversations with, and who will make the time to talk with you (and not only about your work).
- exhibits ethics in their posture toward work, the way they interact with others, and their respect for you in spite of the power differential.
- demonstrates care and concern for you as a person. You don't have to be best friends, but this person should understand that you are an individual with a whole life beyond the scope of your work relationship.
- shows shared enthusiasm for your work. This will be important when your own enthusiasm wanes.
- is positioned to prepare you for a range of career pathways and is willing to advocate on behalf of your postdoctoral job search, regardless of whether this is in the academy or other settings—nonprofit, government, business, etc.
- has a strong network representative of your areas of interest.
- has a strong record of supervising others, which may mean they keep tabs on their students and have seen many through to successful completion.

Beyond the person you choose to supervise your work, think about diversifying your academic mentor system to include faculty from other departments and academic units on campus. Not all mentors can advise you on everything; think about mentorship in terms of a web of support.

Personal
Making time for people and activities outside of the PhD is vital for long-term success. Maintain contact and relationships with people outside of academia and continue to pursue hobbies and interests not related to your research. These relationships can help you stay grounded and remember that life doesn't begin and end with your academic work. Being reminded that your life is full otherwise helps you not to feel overwhelmed by the day-to-day.

Relationships connected to your academic training can also be vital. Be sure to stay connected with cohort members. Think of different cohorts you belong to, not just people you entered the program with. Think about cohort members in seminars, student organizations, teacher training, etc. Engage with other faculty, particularly from other departments, programs, and schools, when possible. It can be helpful to have other perspectives on how to navigate academic spaces by people who may share other similarities with you: membership in affinity groups or sharing

similar backgrounds, social locations, religious affiliations, domestic situations, etc. Most importantly, don't limit yourself to the people immediately around you.

2. Goal-setting

Sketch out timelines for small projects that lead into large projects. It is vitally important to treat each of these small tasks as *significant* milestones. Moving through checklists of even minor achievements creates the feeling of making progress. That in itself can feed the positive perception that you are accomplishing what you need to in order to move forward.

When setting goals, focus on factors you have control over. Focus on the tasks and work you must do. Worrying about things beyond your control can be anxiety-inducing and can have a negative effect on your ability to stay on task.

Take a break before you arrive at burnout. Time and space away from your work at intervals or when necessary does a lot to help you gain perspective and to realign yourself with your goals. Consider sharing resources about avoiding burnout and protecting one's mental health.

Career Planning and Future Thinking

One of the largest worries for both students and faculty is work after the PhD. Many graduate students enter doctoral programs with the ambition of becoming tenure-track faculty, but it is essential to remain open to using your developing talents as an innovative researcher in a variety of sectors, including nonprofit, government, and business settings, as well as within the academy. Some students opt to expand their consideration of postdoctoral work when entering graduate school, or part-way through their programs. This is not a reflection on the quality of work these graduates produce or their intellectual acumen. Some decide that teaching is not for them and want to do work that is more community-focused, or just move in a different direction altogether. Others reevaluate in light of the contracting faculty job market, the reliance on contingent labor, and declines in institutional and state funding (particularly for the humanities and humanities-adjacent fields). Thus, even before you begin your PhD studies, when selecting a program, gather as much information as you can on their placement history and record. Where do students who graduate from these programs typically end up? Can you get a sense of what alumni networks and supports exist for when you're ready to make your own future moves? Observe employment trends relevant to your program, identify emerging patterns in your field, and find new and interesting ways to communicate your work.

Effective career planning and future thinking requires a certain degree of self-awareness and intentionality. It will be helpful for you to expand your understanding of the different career options that are available to you and to keep options open as you begin to explore and cultivate your professional networks accordingly.

Keep in mind that faculty attitudes toward nonprofit, government, and business fields can vary widely. You may encounter negative attitudes from some faculty members. Others may view a wide array of careers as meaningful, but they may tell you they are unable to help you pursue such prospects, because they themselves have traveled an academic career pathway. This is an opportunity for you to work with your faculty guides and expand their horizons, and to seek out faculty and staff who are better positioned to assist you in your search. (Be aware that some societies have played an active role in supporting PhD programs and faculty members to expand the training and resources they give to their graduate students; one excellent example is MLA's toolkit, Doctoral Student Career Planning.)

Remember that only you can determine what "success" means to you as an individual, and how best to balance your needs for intellectual development and growth with your needs for professionalization, economic security, and well-being, on top of other caregiving responsibilities you may have.

The Society for Classical Studies has an excellent discussion of the differences between professional and intellectual outcomes for graduate students; while written for classicists, it applies more widely. Consult the scholarly society or professional organization for your field or subfield for suggestions about how to think about careers; many associations have excellent resources for graduate students, as well as opportunities for networking and mentoring. For example, the National Council on Public History has an excellent guide with an entire section ("Thriving as Public

History Graduate Students") with suggestions for how to approach course selection and professional development for a wide range of careers; while specific to public historians, many of the suggestions can be adapted to other fields.

To prepare for any job market, be sure to:

- Recognize the difference between a CV and a resume. Also recognize that the canonical version of both of these documents will have to be tailored to specific opportunities when the time comes.
- Update your CV or resume every semester (but save old versions in case "old" details become relevant again).
- For academic settings, attend workshops on how to write your teaching statement, how to develop your teaching portfolio, and how to develop supplemental statements (DEI, etc.).
- Save/begin to collate your student teaching assessments.
- Begin to collect (on a Google Doc, etc.) a portfolio of resources on where to search for jobs when the time comes.
- For nonprofit, government, and business settings, become familiar with the expectations regarding resumes and work samples associated with each, and build your portfolio accordingly.

To gain insights on how to prepare for the academic job market:

- Attend mock job talks that may be hosted for graduates from your department.
- Volunteer to be part of department job search committees to get an idea of what successful application packets look like.
- Review candidates' letters, CVs, teaching portfolios, diversity statements, etc.
- Observe the mechanism of department deliberations, and how job talks are assessed.
- Ask questions about processes that are unclear to you.

To gain insights on how to prepare for nonprofit, government, and business job markets:

- Identify graduates of your program who have pursued careers in nonprofit, government, and business sectors with whom you can network. They have all been where you are now, and will generally be quite generous with their time and insights.
- Also identify people who started in your program and then changed their plans. They have also been where you are now, and networking with them can help you develop adaptive coping tactics.
- Seek out fellowships that may be offered by your university in university research centers, teaching centers, university libraries, university art galleries, writing centers, and multicultural centers.
- Seek out internship opportunities that may be offered with local organizations, cultural institutions, businesses, and the like.
- Consider volunteer work as a way to gain experience. For example, working with nonprofits can help you gain leadership and program management skills.

Communicate your needs with your advisor and committee members as they arise—be honest, and be prepared to have an informed conversation. Do your research on potential fields of interest. The point in having this conversation is to express your need for support in your decisions and to find out the ways your advisor may be able to help you to pursue this. Can they help you to expand your network? Can they put you in touch with past graduates who have taken similar paths? If they don't know anyone, can they connect you to someone who does? Are they at all interested in learning what you are likely to find out?

It's OK to change your future goals as your knowledge about what is possible shifts! Just craft and follow a blueprint. Above all, trust yourself and your instincts as you travel your own path and make decisions about which way to go when you come to a crossroads.

Best wishes!

We welcome feedback and suggestions from all readers. Contact us at president@acls.org.

Appendix: Resources

General
Cassuto, Leonard and Robert Weisbuch, *The New PhD: How to Build a Better Graduate Education*, Johns Hopkins UP, 2021.

Graduate school
Koenigsknecht, Theresa et al., *The Public History Navigator: How to Choose and Thrive in a Graduate Public History Program*, National Council on Public History (2015, 2018): https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Public-History-Navigator-2015-Web.pdf

Lorentz ii, Kevin G., et al., Editors*. Strategies for Navigating Graduate School and Beyond*. American Political Science Association (2002): https://apsanet.org/gradschool

Paulas, John, "Introduction," *Careers for Classicists: Graduate Student Edition*, Society for Classical Studies (2018): https://classicalstudies.org/book/careers-classicists-graduate-student-edition/general-introduction

Mental health
Council of Graduate Schools, *Supporting Graduate Student Mental Health and Well-being: Evidence-Informed Recommendations for the Graduate Community* (2021): https://legacy.cgsnet.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/CGS_JED_Grad%20Student%20Mental%20Health%20Report.pdf

PhD research and the dissertation
*Next-Generation Dissertations: New approaches to humanities scholarshi*p: https://nextgendiss.hcommons.org/

Public scholarship
American Anthropological Association, "Guidelines for Tenure and Promotion Review: Communicating Public Scholarship in Anthropology," (May 1, 2017): AAA Guidelines TP Communicating Forms of Public Anthropology.pdf

American Historical Association, "Guidelines for Broadening the Definition of Historical Scholarship" (Jan. 25, 2023): https://www.historians.org/definitions

Modern Language Association, "Guidelines for Evaluating Publicly Engaged Humanities Scholarship in Language and Literature Programs" (Aug. 2022), https://www.mla.org/content/download/187094/file/Guidelines-Evaluating-Public-Humanities.pdf

Digital scholarship
Middle East Studies Association, "Guidelines for Evaluating Digital Scholarship": https://mesana.org/resources-and-opportunities/guidelines-for-evaluating-digital-scholarship

Ossom-Williamson, Pease and Kenton Rambsy, *The Data Notebook*, Mavs Open Press, https://uta.pressbooks.pub/datanotebook/

Career
American Council of Learned Societies, "Beyond the Academy: Pathways to Non-Academic Careers for PhDs" (May 17, 2022): https://www.acls.org/resources/beyond-the-academy-pathways-to-non-academic-careers-for-phds/

Modern Language Association/Connected Academics, "Doctoral Student Career Planning" (May 2018): https://connect.mla.hcommons.org/files/2017/05/Doctoral-Student-Career-Planning-May-2018.pdf

About ACLS

The American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) was founded in 1919 by representatives of 10 academic societies to represent the United States in a new international federation that aimed to strengthen humanistic scholarship. Today, ACLS remains committed to its original mission to strengthen and advance humanistic scholarship and uphold the core belief that knowledge is a public good.

Over the past century, ACLS has fulfilled that mission in various ways: by providing financial support to thousands of outstanding scholars in the form of fellowships and grants; by convening working groups and commissions around emerging fields, from African studies in the 1930s to digital humanities in the early 2000s and today; and by establishing networks and programs that strengthen the administrative infrastructure of the humanities and interpretive social sciences, such as the 42-member Research University Consortium and the Mellon Foundation-funded Leadership Institute for a New Academy in 2022.

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