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SCHOOL OF GEOGRAPHY AND EARTH SCIENCES

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# GRADUATE SURVIVAL HANDBOOK



*"All the stuff you need to know  
to make it through your first  
year of Grad School"*

**15<sup>th</sup> Edition**

<https://www.science.mcmaster.ca/geo/graduate/policy-manual-guidelines.html>

# Welcome to McMaster!

Congratulations on making your choice to join the School of Geography and Earth Sciences at McMaster. We hope this informative handbook will help make your life somewhat easier, a little less stressful, and a bit more sane (what a concept!). The following pages contain tips, hints and various ways to survive your introduction into our School. We encourage you to use it, make notes in it, whatever... then next year you can give us feedback so that we can continue to produce a better product for each year's new crop of graduate students. With this handbook, it is also advisable to refer to our Policies and Procedures booklet ('Green' book) for more detailed graduate academic information. **It is also to be noted** that the Graduate Calendar (updated and revised by Graduate Studies) takes precedence over SGES' handbook and 'green' book. The Graduate Calendar can be found online at: [http://www.mcmaster.ca/bms/student/pdf/fees\\_grad.pdf](http://www.mcmaster.ca/bms/student/pdf/fees_grad.pdf)

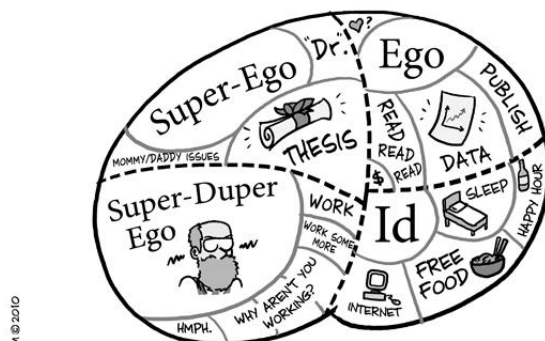
**Another important and extremely resourceful source of current graduate information is the School of Graduate Studies' website:** <https://graduate.mcmaster.ca/>

There are a few caveats that we want to make clear up front. This book is written by and for Geography and Earth Science graduate students. While we recognize and appreciate the support shown by the School, we want to make sure that everyone realizes that the information contained here is the responsibility of us grads only. Any inaccuracies and inconsistencies are ours alone and do not reflect the views of the faculty and staff of the School of Geography and Earth Sciences. Otherwise, peruse the pages. We hope that it makes your life a little easier in the coming year. We like it here at Mac... here's to hoping that you will too!

Original editors: Theresa Garvin and Kathi Wilson

15<sup>th</sup> Edition (2018) revisions: Salomé (Sal) Santos-Blaguski

Thanks to all of those who have contributed over the years!



The Grad Student Brain

JORGEE CHAM © 2010

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"WELL, I SUPPOSE IF I WERE HONEST I'D SAY I CAME TO GRADUATE SCHOOL FOR THE TITLE: 'P.H.D'... 'DOC-TOR'... 'PROFESSOR'..."



"I WAS ATTRACTED TO THE GLAMOUR, THE EXCITEMENT OF BEING A PROFESSOR... THE RESPECT, THE SWOONING WOMEN, THE MONEY..."



"SO, WOULD YOU SAY IT'S BEEN A DISAPPOINTING EXPERIENCE, THEN?"



"W-WHY? Y-YOU... YOU MEAN IT... IT'S NOT TRUE??"

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# Section 1

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Before

You

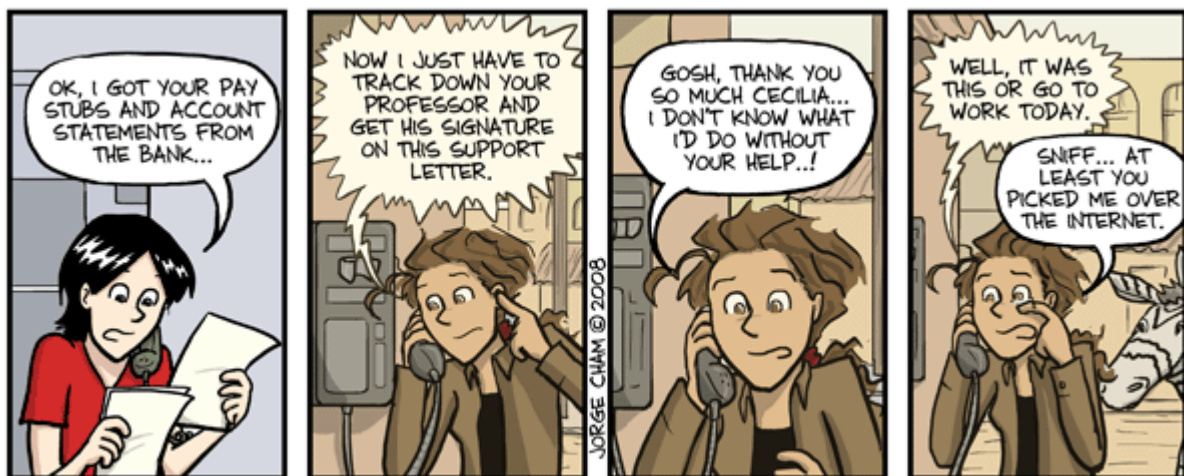
Get

Here . . .

## The Buddy System

Here, in the School of Geography and Earth Sciences, we have a 'Buddy System' in place. Each new incoming graduate student should get to know (if possible) a current grad student who can show you around our School, the McMaster campus and possibly the city of Hamilton. S/he can provide you with advice on almost any aspect of the School (academic or social). When you begin to look for a place to live in Hamilton, your buddy might be able to suggest some of the better areas to live in, and possibly put you up for a few days during your house search. If you are unable to connect with a 'buddy' please contact the Graduate Program Co-ordinator, **Sal Santos** in the School of Geography and Earth Sciences at (905) 525-9140, ext. 23535 or by e-mail at [ssantos@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ssantos@mcmaster.ca). Sal will forward your email to another student (usually the current assigned grad buddies for SGEs – see page 32) and ask him/her to contact you and answer any questions that you may have.

The buddy system is in place to make your transition to McMaster a little easier. Please take advantage of this system and feel free to ask your buddy anything during your academic career. Whether you're looking for something to do with your parents while they're visiting, trying to find a place to buy new shoes, or have questions about how parking works here at Mac, turn to your buddy for answers. That's what they're there for!



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# Money Matters!

You won't get rich (at least materially) being a graduate student, but your pay should be almost enough to survive. Most students have a good idea what their gross income will be when they come to McMaster. However, what you end up taking home is sometimes a bit of a surprise. This part of the guide is intended to give you a rough idea of what your pay and expenses will be, and what opportunities there might be to receive funding from external sources.

## Take home pay, or "How much do I really get?"

Your paycheque consists of some combination of your TA/RA pay, the Departmental Scholarship, and/or any other scholarships or awards you may be receiving that are given through the university (like NSERC, OGS, SSHRC etc.). Please note that if you receive an external scholarship this is in lieu of the departmental scholarship. From that amount, the university deducts tuition, union dues, CPP, taxes, and a bunch of other incidentals. The combination of TA/RA and scholarship money is divided per each three terms throughout the year to ensure that you receive approximately the same amount of money per month (although there is no TA/RA's offered in the spring/summer term). And, it is important to note that in September you are also responsible for paying 'incidental fees' (e.g. student services, HRS, GSA). A financial breakdown of what you will be paid per term (Statement of Earnings) will be sent directly to you directly via email by Payroll in Graduate studies. You will also be able to look at your paystub online via Mosaic. If you have any questions about your paycheque please contact Sal Santos at [ssantos@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ssantos@mcmaster.ca) or Marge Geroux at [geroux@mcmaster.ca](mailto:geroux@mcmaster.ca)

Please also refer <http://www.mcmaster.ca/bms/student/index.htm> for more detailed information.

## Getting Paid, or "How do I get my money?"

Graduate students that are working as TAs (Teaching Assistants) or RAs (Research Assistants) get paid bi-weekly on Thursdays. Whereas scholarship payments are deposited at the beginning of the term in one lump sum and is to help you pay your tuition. The full amount of tuition for the term is to be paid off by the end of the month (September, January, May) before interest is accrued. More information about current tuition costs can be found at: [http://www.mcmaster.ca/bms/student/pdf/fees\\_grad.pdf](http://www.mcmaster.ca/bms/student/pdf/fees_grad.pdf). Although TA/RA pay is treated as income and will be taxed, scholarship funding (both departmental and research) is not taxed. This form is available through the HR Service Centre and should be completed and submitted before or at the **very beginning** of the new term. All pay cheques are distributed using the direct deposit system. So, **in order to get paid, you must complete a form for Direct Deposit and have a valid bank account.** You should also fill out two Personal Tax Credit Returns (i.e., a TD1 and TD1ON). These forms can be accessed via: <http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/hris/employee/teachingassistants/>

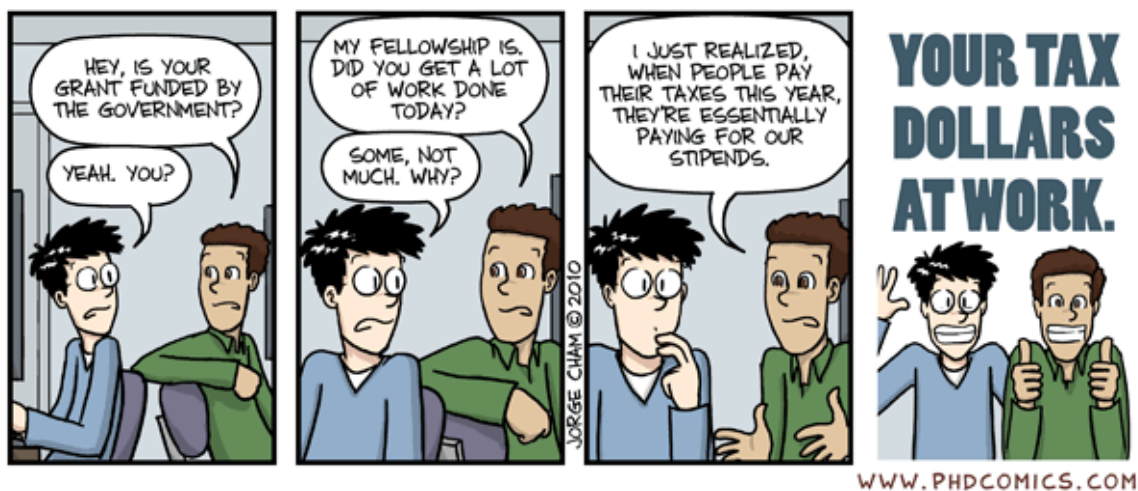
## Special Situations

### Masters Students

For the course of your Master's degree, the School provides a scholarship and the usual TA (Teaching Assistant)/RA (Research Assistant in lieu of Teaching Assistant) pay (as explained in your letter of admission). The same level of term by term funding is maintained by the department for the two years (six terms, including both summers). Students are paid until the end of August of the second year.

### Ph.D. Students

If you're an incoming doctoral student, your income should remain the same for all four years of study, again, paid until August 31<sup>st</sup> of the final year.



### Expenses and cost of living, or “Where did it go?”

The cost of living in Hamilton is not out of line with other parts of Canada. When rent, food, transportation, utilities and other expenses are added into the financial equation, there isn't much money left over from your funding. A Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) Bus pass is included in your tuition fee (you pay around \$170.00 for it during registration) and so every graduate student gets a HSR bus pass, allowing for unlimited travel around the city for the 12 months during which the pass is valid.

### Other Sources of Money

#### Scholarships

There are three scholarships for which most graduate students apply. The most popular is the Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS), which is available for Masters and doctoral students. OGS is valued at \$15,000 a year. The Natural Science and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) has

scholarships for both Masters and Ph.D. students in science. This is valued at \$17,500 for Masters and \$21,000 or \$35,000 for Ph.D. students. There are also Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) scholarships that are available to Masters and Doctoral students in human geography (Masters = \$17,500, Doctoral fellowships range \$20,000 - \$35,000). The deadlines for OGS, NSERC and SSHRC begin in late September until early December. Be prepared to apply for these in September of your first year. Sal Santos will notify all students about these awards via email.

If you receive one of these scholarships, your Departmental Scholarship will be withdrawn, but since these scholarships have higher monetary value, you will end up ahead. When you get an external scholarship, you still qualify for a TA/RA (there are no guarantees for an incoming student). NSERC, OGS, and SSHRC scholarships are paid through the School and income taxes are not levied on most scholarships.

There are of course other scholarships that may be specific to your field of study, stage in your graduate program, and gender. Often your supervisor and other graduate students will know of other opportunities. There is a posting board in the School of Geography and Earth Sciences (located in GSB-2<sup>nd</sup> floor) and you can also check the Graduate calendar to see if there are others for which you may qualify. You can also look on the web, or visit [www.canlearn.ca](http://www.canlearn.ca) to find an online scholarship search engine.

It is important to note that official transcripts of your grades are required to apply for most scholarships - these can get expensive (at \$15.00 per copy depending on the university), and take 5 to 7 working days to process. McMaster transcripts are available for free and can be obtained from the Registrar's Office, located in Gilmour Hall. <https://registrar.mcmaster.ca>

Please also make sure that Sal has the latest version of your TRANSCRIPTS on file too! (It is important that the transcript shows that you are registered in school for the current year – in other words, even though you will not have any marks showing on your transcript you will need one from McMaster showing that you are registered here). This will help with last minute application submissions.

### **Student Loans**

OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program) loans are available to residents of Ontario. If you are coming from out of province, you must apply for assistance through your home province. If you think you'll need a student loan, apply early to guarantee you get the money in time. Since not all banks handle student loans any more, some banks offer special low-interest loans to graduate students.

More information and updates are available on the website of Financial Services at: <https://sfas.mcmaster.ca/contacts/>

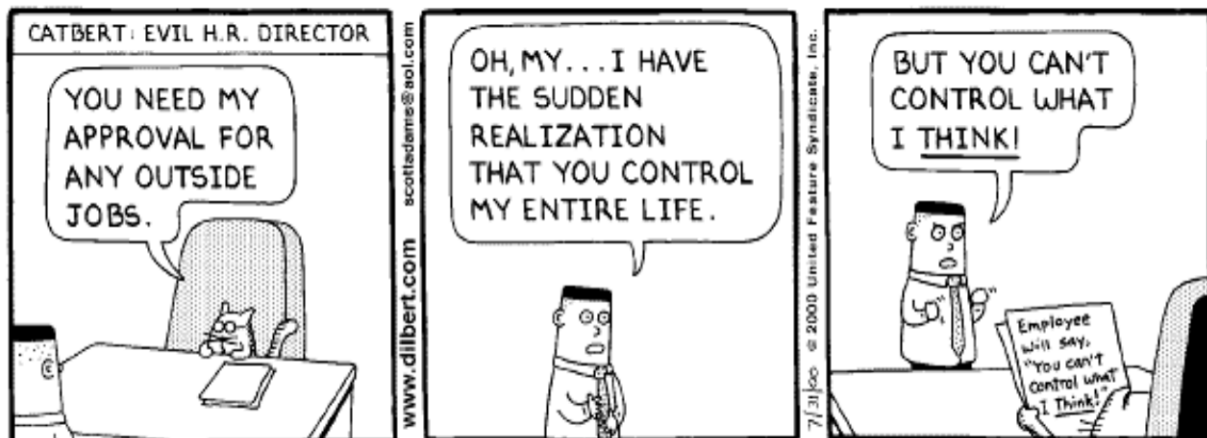


## Working outside your TA/RA hours

At present, university regulations state that full time graduate students are only allowed to work on campus for 10 hours a week, including their TA/RA hours. Grad students must fill out and submit a TA Hours of Work Form at the beginning of each term. The onus is on you as the grad student to take the time to ensure that any work you are doing above your TA/RA duties fall within the guidelines set out by the university and union:

(CUPE 3906: <http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/elr/collective-agreements/cupe-unit1/>).

If you work more than the allowed 505 hours per academic year), you risk losing your full-time student status, and therefore, not only your Departmental Scholarship, but also the high pay rate for TA work.



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### 'Administrative' procedures to get set up for the Academic Year

All graduate students must register for their graduate program in Mosaic ([www.mosaic.ca](http://www.mosaic.ca)) for each new academic year. Students need to register for each individual term in the year (Fall, Winter, Spring/Summer). Registration starts early (before the start of term), and, if missed this during the assigned sessional dates than a late registration fee is applied (see **Sessional Dates:** <http://academiccalendars.romcmaster.ca>). Since you will need to be in contact with the School prior to the start of the academic year and before you can register, it is essential that you activate your MAC ID and email account. Instructions can be found at: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/uts/macid/>. You will need your student number (found in your letter of offer) to be set up. Having your MAC ID and email up and running early will make the administration process a lot easier!

## You Just Might Be a Graduate Student If.....

- Everything reminds you of something in your discipline
  
- You find yourself citing sources in conversation
  
- You choose beverages on the basis of caffeine concentration
  
- You find the bibliographies of books more interesting than the actual text
  
- You can tell the time of day by looking at the traffic flow in the library
  
- You consider all papers to be works in progress
  
- You start referring to stories like "Snow White, *et al.*"
  
- You wonder whether APA style allows you to cite talking to yourself as "personal communication"
  
- You look forward to taking time off to do laundry
  
- Free food is the high point of your day
  
- The concept of free time scares you
  
- You rate coffee shops by the availability of outlets for your laptop
  
- People (non-grad students) ask you "Are you going to be done soon?" and you laugh but inside a little part of you dies

# Departmental Support for Graduate Students

As a part of your work, you will find that you need access to basic facilities and support staff. The amount of support offered to graduates varies by department and by supervisor. For the most part, you will find that the amount of support that Mac's School of Geography and Earth Sciences (SGES) offers is quite good.

## Office/WorkSpace

We are fortunate to have enough space in the School to provide each grad with her/his own space in either the General Science Building (GSB) or Burke Science Building (BSB).

In most cases, your "office" is a cubicle or desk in a room that you share with 2-6 other graduates depending on the size of the room. In the non-labs (human geographers), you usually get one or two small desks and some bookshelf space. In the labs (physical geographers and geologists) you generally get a desk and some lab-bench space. At minimum, you get a place to do your work, usually some shelf space and a place to keep your coat and things while working on campus. You also have access to a telephone and voicemail.

Depending on how long you spend in your office, some grads make their offices a "home away from home." Some additional office amenities include coffee makers, microwaves, toasters, radios, filing cabinets, comfy chairs, and wireless internet connections (please contact Alex Poulin, our 'in-house' Technical Support Specialist, GSB 201 x26365 to get your computer set up at: [apoulin@mcmaster.ca](mailto:apoulin@mcmaster.ca)). Not all office areas are equipped with the same additional features. Many grads choose to do all of their work in their office while others prefer to use it only to hold their TA office hours.

A word of warning comes from some grads that the "climate control" in some of the offices leaves much to be desired. BSB is an old building; therefore it can be drafty and downright cold in some offices during the winter months. The summer is generally more comfortable but offices can get hot and humid if the air conditioning isn't working properly.

Office space is often with students within your lab group, so be sure to ask them and your supervisor about available space. Please remember however, that even though this is "home away from home" that it is not a dumping ground/storage space. It should be kept reasonably clean and tidy by you.

## Office Security

All offices have locking doors, but the customs on security vary from office to office. At a minimum, the office door should be locked outside of office hours, and is always locked when the office is empty during the day.

If you own your own computer and would like to keep it in your office, ensure that it's covered under the off-premises clause in your home or tenant's insurance. Numerous thefts have occurred in recent history, so it's always best to be covered and safe. If needed, Mac offers Security Services on campus. For more information you can view: [security.mcmaster.ca](http://security.mcmaster.ca)

### **Bike Storage**

Many of us prefer to bike to school, but do not consider the racks in front of Burke/General Sciences (BSB/GSB) to be particularly safe (even when locked). Locking bikes on racks can be especially problematic at night, particularly when the pubs let out and over enthusiastic undergrads are looking for an outlet. Some recent bike thieves have been particularly resourceful, to the extent of sawing bike racks apart, so *do* be careful but please remember that bikes are NOT allowed into your office space.

Another note for those of you who wheel into campus on inline skates. Inlines (rollerblades) are banned in all buildings at McMaster and this rule is strictly enforced. Be prepared to change into your shoes BEFORE you enter buildings.

For those of you who drive into campus there are numerous parking lots on campus. You are best to contact Parking Services directly ([parking.mcmaster.ca](http://parking.mcmaster.ca)) for information on parking rates and locations of lots. Parking Services can also inform you about 'alternative transportation' on campus (e.g. Go Bus).

## **Computing**

### **University (UTS)**

The literature about McMaster usually says that there is access to campus-wide computing facilities. The reality is that these facilities are under a great deal of pressure and your access to them will probably be limited. If you need to access a lab, please visit: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/uts/servicecatalogue/software.html> for lab times and locations. For BSB, student labs are located in rooms 241, 242, 244, and 249.

### **School and GIS Facilities**

The School of Geography and Earth Sciences has responded to graduate concerns by guaranteeing that all grads have access to word processing, e-mail, and the internet. These arrangements vary by sub-discipline and supervisor—ask your buddy or your supervisor about your computing facilities. Some of these are available in your general office area.

The GIS lab is on the third floor of BSB (331,332). If it is necessary for your work, you can arrange access to this lab with your supervisor (the GIS lab is run on a cost recovery basis, so access costs some money). The GIS lab has GIS and remote sensing specific software, as well as access to e-mail, word-processing, and some other services.

### **Supervisor**

Some of you may be fortunate enough to have a computer supplied by your supervisor. In fact, it may not hurt to ask if they have an old one sitting around or to try to convince them to upgrade so you can get their old one. But this usually depends on the supervisor's resources and the number of grad students that they supervise. The bottom line is that it never hurts to ask.

### **Your own computer**

If your supervisor cannot provide you with a dedicated machine, you may want to seriously think about getting one of your own. As we mentioned earlier, access to the University labs is minimal. If you are willing to only write papers after hours (or low seasons, like summertime), you should be fine with the labs, but the only guaranteed way to get unlimited access during office hours is to have your own machine. Ask the other grads about low-interest loans available to graduates through local banks.

Both BSB and GSB provide wireless access to the internet. For access passwords please contact Alex Poulin (page 11).

### **Photocopying**

The School provides a photocopier for graduate students on a cost-recovery basis. The charge is 10¢ per black and white page (17¢ per colour). You are given an account and keypad code (you'll need to set this up with the staff in the main office - GSB 206), which gives you access to the machine at all times. One photocopier is available in BSB 347, and the main photocopier is in room GSB 203 located off the main office to which there is a separate entrance. Please also note that GSB 203 is also the School's mailroom and grad students are asked to check their mail on routine basis.

**DO NOT USE TRANSPARENCIES ON THESE MACHINES!!** All transparencies are to be done through the office staff in GSB 206. Simply ask and someone will show you how to make the transparency for you at no cost. If you don't know how to use the machine, just ask one of the grads or someone in the office to give you a quick lesson. You are asked to practice 'copying courtesy' by removing paper jams that you cause, periodically restocking paper in the feeder, and generally tidying up after yourself. We all have access to the photocopier, so let's keep it clean and tidy!

Course/T.A. and research related photocopying may be done through the office staff on the office copier with the instructor's/supervisor's approval. If you need teaching materials for your tutorial, ask that it be copied at the office (for large photocopying jobs it is best to email [sges@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sges@mcmaster.ca) a few days in advance). For research-related materials, check with your supervisor.

### **Faxing/Scanning**

The photocopier in GSB 203 had faxing/scanning capabilities. You can receive faxes at no charge

and send faxes on a cost-recovery basis. The fax number is (905) 546-0463. You may charge faxes to your supervisor's account but, as always, check with her/him first! You can also use the fax machine for personal reasons. The main office bills us quarterly for the fax and photocopy charges. If you need to use the scanner (free of charge) please ask one of the staff members to help you.

### **Long Distance Phone**

Mac's phone system does not allow you to dial long-distance, unless you bill it to your calling card or use a McMaster PIN number. If you can convince your supervisor that long-distance calls to your significant other are research calls s/he may provide you with a PIN number, which charges the long-distance call to your supervisor. You can also use your own calling card on the university lines. To get an outside line, you dial 9 and then the number. Instructions on how to use the phone for long distance (and other services) can be found at: [telecom.mcmaster.ca](http://telecom.mcmaster.ca)

### **School Van**

The School has a van, which may be used to attend conferences, meeting and seminars. It is expected that groups going to meetings would, wherever possible, mount a display about SGES to provide information about the School that helps attract new students from outside Mac. Unless otherwise approved by the Director, the van is not to be used for research or personal errands.

Anyone who intends to drive the van must have an Ontario G driver's license with no lost demerit points within the past 3 years, as evidenced by a driver's abstract from MTO (see <http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/dandv/driver/record.htm>).

Original driver's abstracts must be submitted annually to Haley Spennato (Educational Support Technician, BSB-317D x23519 [spennahm@mcmaster.ca](mailto:spennahm@mcmaster.ca)), who will keep this information on file.

### **Equipment**

There is field and lab equipment available to be borrowed **ON A SHORT TERM BASIS**. See staff member, Haley Spennato (above) if you need to BORROW equipment.

### **School Support Staff – GSB-206 – Main Office**

The School's office staff can make a substantial difference in your graduate experience. Don't be afraid to ask for help, but remember to respect their expertise. The office staff consists of Marge Geroux (Administrator), Sal Santos-Blaguski (Graduate Program Co-ordinator), Kara Salvador, (Undergrad Academic Program Advisor), Deane Maynard, (Part-Time Office Staff) and Cassandra Lo (Academic Administrative Assistant/Reception).

The office has a formal workload chart posted in the mailroom (GSB 206) and you can ask one of the office staff who is responsible for what and they will assist you. They can assist you with computing, travel expenses and photocopying for coursework, but it is advisable to give plenty of lead-time. For example, don't ask to have photocopies made for a class/lab that starts in 15

minutes (the office is operational Mon – Fri, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm and closes for lunch daily from noon to 1:00 pm). If you have to send a fax or make a long-distance call that is to be charged to the School, ask a member of staff for the appropriate procedure. Remember, grads are not assigned to a member of the office staff who is being nice by helping you. *Appreciate their assistance, and remember that coffee/tea offers always help!*

Haley Spennato also provides technical support for the School. You should approach Haley for use of the undergraduate teaching lab, as well as for information on developing slides and photos (and conversions thereof), booking the School van, health and safety issues, and carts/trolleys for moving stuff (great for moving into your office).

Booking of presentation equipment (projector, laptop) and meeting rooms can be done through the reception desk in the main office. You can also send your request via [sges@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sges@mcmaster.ca) which is checked throughout the day by the office staff. Should your request not be available from the main office, contact the audio visual department: [library.mcmaster.ca/cavs](http://library.mcmaster.ca/cavs) x22761.

Pat Deluca (GIS Lab) does graphics and charts. If you need some slides, overheads or posters for a conference or a major presentation, talk to him. He is in BSB-331A, ext. 27786. If getting posters printed, try and provide a full week's notice or inquire if a shorter turnaround period is possible.

For SGES' website enquiries your contact is Alex Poulin (see page 11 for contact information).

### **Thesis "Library"**

If you want to see what a thesis looks like, the School of Geography and Earth Sciences has a complete set of Masters and Ph.D. theses going back to the beginning of time. Visit the main office of the School of Geography and Earth Sciences (GSB-206) to find out where they are, and to sign-out a copy if needed. These are particularly useful for figuring out what your supervisor's requirements are and what other students have done in your area in the 'somewhat' recent (all current theses are now submitted and viewed online) and not-so-recent past. Ask in the main office about signing these out. They may be signed out up to a maximum of one month at a time. To view all submitted theses, please go online and visit MacSphere (<https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca>)

# Employee Benefits for Graduate Students in the School of Geography and Earth Sciences

The benefits offered at Mac seem very confusing until you realize that the dental and medical plans are completely separate and have absolutely nothing to do with each other. The Medical Plan, run by the Graduate Student Association (GSA), covers all graduate students, while the Dental Plan, run by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), covers all full-time teaching assistants (260 hours of work). For both medical and dental plans you can opt out if you can prove that you have equivalent coverage under another plan. However, you must opt out of each plan separately, because they are run by different organizations (see opting out procedures below).

Details can be found regarding CUPE information at: <https://cupe3906.org> (KTH B111) and for GSA information at: <https://gsamcmaster.org>.

## Dental Plan

You are eligible for up to \$1,000.00 every year (Jan. 1 - Dec. 31). You must have your dental certificate number (student number) to make a claim. We recommend you get an estimate for any extensive work. If you have dental coverage questions, please don't hesitate to contact [administrator@cupe3906.org](mailto:administrator@cupe3906.org). If you have more specific questions, please contact Equitable Life of Canada at 1-800-722-6615/ [www.equitable.ca](http://www.equitable.ca). Our policy number is 97528 (Division #1).

### Opting Out

If you can prove that you already have equivalent coverage (by a parent or partner) you are permitted to opt out of the union's coverage. To do this, you must provide the union with a letter (and/or insurance ID card) from your existing insurance company stating the nature and extent of your existing coverage. THIS MUST BE DONE BY SEPTEMBER 30<sup>th</sup>. If you miss this window, you must pay for the union plan for the whole year. If you already have coverage, make sure that you bring a letter from your insurance company when classes start in September. The Union is not responsible for the Opt Out/Change of Status deadline. This is an administrative decision by the School of Graduate Studies. Information on the Opt Out/Change of Status form will also be included in your Grad Package handed out on SGEs' 'Grad Orientation Day' in early September.

### Additional Coverage

You can choose to pay for additional coverage for your partner and/or children under the union's dental plan. The cost of a family plan \$514.28 (the single yearly plan costs \$115.56) so it is usually prohibitive if you only want to cover a partner/spouse. However if you have kids, the extra payment might be worth it. You may want to try to estimate annual dental costs with and without the additional monthly premium to see if you'll come out ahead.



**Using the Dental Plan:**

Discuss with your dental office staff about payment options. Two possible are as follows:

**1. Electronic Claim Submission**

After you have received your treatment, the dentist submits your claim electronically and bills the insurance company directly. You will need to provide your dentist with your student number, the group policy number (97528-01) and the name of the insurance company (Equitable Life of Canada). Some dentists require that you pay at the time of your appointment even if they can submit the claim electronically. In this case, the insurance company will send you a cheque to reimburse you for your dental work.

**2. Pre- Payment (Direct Payment)**

In this system you pay for your treatment at the time of your appointment and then submit a dental claim form for reimbursement which is available for download:

<https://cupe3906.org/files/2016/07/Equitable-Dental-Form.pdf>.

The insurance company will then mail you a cheque to your home address.

## Child Care Plan

A child care plan is also offered as part of the TA benefits by CUPE. You are eligible for \$300.00 per year for child care. Go to the CUPE office with your original receipt and fill out a claim form.

## UHIP Rebate

If you are an international student and a TA working 130 hours or more you are eligible for a \$200.00 per year rebate. Go to the CUPE office with your UHIP card and fill out a claim form.

**NOTE:** All forms are also available on the CUPE website under the "Benefits and Forms" link from the main page (<http://cupe3906.org/>).

## Extended Medical Coverage

As a graduate student, you automatically get extended medical coverage under a plan sponsored by the Graduate Student Association (GSA). Currently, medical coverage is through the Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada (Sun Life). Coverage is automatic once you are registered and is included as part of the GSA membership fee and is deducted from your paycheque. This includes International students studying at McMaster and paying McMaster fees, as well as students on exchange. The GSA health plan is designed to fill in the gaps left by the provincial health care and/or private health coverage. It provides services and covers expenses not covered by your basic health-care plan (i.e., OHIP or UHIP). It must be remembered that this insurance is a supplement to the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) and is not a replacement for the provincial plan.

### What's covered?

The policy year is from September 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>. The plan covers prescription drugs, travel, health coverage, chiropractor, physiotherapist, massage therapist, psychologist, medical equipment, vaccinations, and more... You need a referral by a medical doctor to be covered for visits to a psychologist, physiotherapist, chiropractor and massage therapist. For questions about your GSA plan please contact <http://www.ihaveaplan.ca> or call 1-866-358-4434.

### What if you already have health coverage?

If you are covered by another extended plan (i.e. parent or spouse's employee benefit plan), you can combine both plans to maximize your overall coverage and reduce or eliminate out-of-pocket costs. By doing so, you may be able to claim deductibles or co-payments that you would otherwise have had to pay.

### Opting Out

Alternately, students with other coverage may choose to opt out during the Change-of-Coverage Period. After your opt out is completed, and shortly after the end of the Change-of-Coverage Period, a cheque for the amount of the Plan will be mailed to you by Studentcare.

All opt outs must be completed within the Change-of-Coverage period. For students starting in September this is between September 5 and 29<sup>th</sup>, for students starting in January this period is between January 4 and 31<sup>st</sup>.

You can opt out online at: <http://www.studentcare.ca>. Choose GSA McMaster, click on "Change of Coverage" and then on "Opt Out Online" and follow the on-screen instructions. If this is your first time opting out of the GSA Health Plan, you must provide proof of other equivalent health coverage. Note: OHIP or UHIP are not considered equivalent coverage. You may submit your proof of coverage by uploading the necessary proof of coverage documents. Studentcare does not accept any opt-out requests by mail, fax, email, or telephone. Information on the Opt Out/Change of Status form will also be included in your Grad Package handed out on SGES' 'Grad Orientation Day' in early September.

**Can I enroll my spouse or dependants?**

Yes, students have the option of enrolling their spouse and/or dependants each year by completing an enrolment form and paying an additional fee, over and above their fee as a member of the GSA. Common law and same sex couples are eligible. Visit [www.studentcare.ca](http://www.studentcare.ca) to complete an enrolment form. Enrolments can only be processed within the Change-of-Coverage Period.

**Additional Coverage**

As with the Dental Plan, additional coverage for your partner and/or children is available. The cost is an additional approximate \$186.00 per year for a spouse or one child, or \$372 for a spouse and an unlimited number of children.

**Using the Extended Medical Plan**

To make a claim under the medical plan you generally first pay for all expenses out of pocket and you are then reimbursed. If you are planning to travel out of province, ensure that you have the special Travel Emergency Assistance ID card with you. It has a toll-free number for emergency assistance. To make a claim, download the claim form online or get a form from the slot outside the door of the GSA office (see page 24), fill it out and send it in. You can file for each claim, or save them up and send a bunch in together. Keep a copy of all receipts, documents and forms. All claims must be received by Sun Life within 90 days after the end of the policy year. However, if you use any of your travel coverage benefits, you must call the Travel Insurer immediately and submit your claim within 30 days. Also make sure that you read the back of the claim form for the special conditions before you fill it out.

**Other Benefits**

As an employee of the University you have a number of other benefits as part of the contract negotiated through CUPE. These include maternity leave, sick leave, and access to a grievance procedure. For more information about these additional rights, benefits and services, visit the CUPE office in KTH B111, x24003.

# Friendly Advice for International Students

This section has been prepared by international students in the School of Geography and Earth Sciences for incoming international students. As a visitor to Canada, you are probably undergoing a double culture shock. Not only are you stepping into the 'culture' of the School, but you are also experiencing the larger disorientation that comes from being a visitor in Canada. Here's some advice from other international students that might make your transition easier.

First off, when you arrive at MAC at the time of your first registration, you are required to provide a photocopy of your student authorization to the School of Graduate Studies and Human Resources. This should be repeated each time your authorization is renewed as well. And you don't want to forget to do this, because failure to do so will result in the withholding of your payment! Eek!

Note: International students can also visit the Office of International Affairs (Alumni Memorial Hall 203, x24700, <https://oia.mcmaster.ca>) and International Student Services (ISS) (GH 110, x24254, <https://iss.mcmaster.ca>) on campus to inquire about further assistance and support services at McMaster and in Hamilton.

## Financial Realities

Be aware that if you are living on a Departmental Scholarship and teaching assistantship this will not allow you to afford a lifestyle after deductions have been made (see *Money Matters* on pages 2-5). The cost of food, accommodation and other living expenses will account for most of this income, so be prepared to live modestly.

## Social Insurance Number

It is essential that all graduate students have a Social Insurance Number (SIN). Canadians will already have one, but for new graduate students you will have to apply for one at **Human Resources Development Canada**. Since all graduate students are required to TA during their time at MAC, a SIN number is mandatory in order to work in Ontario for income tax purposes. It is advised to do this as soon as possible. You will need to take your passport, visa, and acceptance letter (which will include your Teaching Assistantship requirements) to Human Resources Development Canada.

There are two Service Canada offices in Hamilton. <http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/>  
Hours of operation and contact information for both locations can also be found online.

### Central and Mountain office

1550 Upper James Street (corner of Rymal Rd)  
Floor 1  
Hamilton, ON  
L9B 1K3

### East Hamilton office

225 Barton Street East (at Nash Rd)  
Hamilton, ON  
L8H 7T4

### **Health Insurance**

As an international student, you have to buy health care insurance, as medical care is extremely expensive if you are not covered otherwise. At McMaster (as in other Canadian universities) the plan is compulsory, and you will not be allowed to register until you have paid for the plan. When you arrive, immediately register for the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) at the International Student's Office (Gilmour Hall, Room 110). The plan provides doctor's services, hospital ward accommodation, all maternity claims, even if pregnancy began before you arrived in Ontario or Canada, and coverage for medical care outside of Ontario and Canada. This year, UHIP costs \$612.00 for one person, \$1,224.00 for two people, and \$1,836.00 for a family. Please visit [uhip.ca](http://uhip.ca) for more detailed information.

### **Working On-Campus/Off-Campus**

Currently, visa students are allowed to work on/off-campus. It is however, advised that you talk to your employer to arrange more specific working hours to suit your needs. Please visit the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) website at: <http://www.cic.gc.ca> for more information about your work eligibility.

### **Getting the Help You Need**

Feel free to approach people in the School with questions or concerns. Get into the spirit of the School and participate in as many activities as you can. People in the School are really, truly, honestly, quite friendly. However, the transitional phase of old students turning over and new students coming in means that there are a lot of new faces for everyone. Take advantage of this situation by getting to know as many people as possible.

Make full use of the International Students Office (mentioned above)... They are *very* helpful, especially in matters concerning health care, tax problems, visas and the like. In early September the office organizes a week of activities to help you get to know Hamilton and features of the McMaster Campus. Take them up on this, and it is really fun and useful.

If you can, arrive about a month before classes start. This gives you a chance to set up a place to live in and get to know Hamilton before your hectic life as a student begins. The School's buddy system involves matching a more experienced grad student with each new grad student. Your buddy will help you settle in and get to know the School and people. They may help with finding a place to live, pick you up from the airport and point out campus facilities and points of interest in the city. They are a key resource for you. If you are not used to cold climates, be prepared to bring warm clothing, dress appropriately (i.e. you need a good winter coat and warm waterproof boots!) and acclimatize gradually. The Graduate Studies website also provides useful links to help you get settled in Hamilton: <https://gs.mcmaster.ca/resources> !

### **Tips on Learning English**

This section aims at providing international students whose mother tongues are not English with advice and tips that may help overcome the language barrier that you may face upon arriving in the School of Geography and Earth Sciences. A key to getting the most of your

graduate study period is to deal with language barriers at the outset. However, getting past these barriers is not an easy matter. Bear in mind that you may need to put a great deal of effort into improving your language skills. Below are some tips, which might be helpful in improving your language skills:

Right from the beginning, try to make friends and interact with a variety of Canadians. Using English in both social and academic settings will improve your language skills substantially. If you do not get a chance to mix with people other than those from your own culture, you will likely limit your opportunities to practice speaking English. **Don't be afraid** to speak out because you may be unsure of how to express yourself. Although at first your spoken English might be somewhat hard to understand, people in the School are pretty friendly and are willing to help you with your communication issues.

To learn more about speaking English, try to watch news and talk shows (don't take them too seriously) on TV whenever you get the chance. As it is not easy to understand conversations on TV at first, you could consider buying a TV with a caption decoder that has the ability to show written English words on the screen.

Coming out for coffee and lunch breaks is a good opportunity to take a break and have a chance to talk with students and professors in an informal setting, learn conversational English, and get to know people in the School. Remember, other students in the School have gone through the same experience as you now face, so don't hesitate to use them as resources or for peer support.

You should also consider taking part in official language programs offered by the University. Several programs that are offered include: The Speakeasy Program, Classes in English, The Writing Clinic, and Evening English Classes. The Speakeasy Program provides international students with an individual "conversation partner," normally a Canadian student. Through regular informal meetings, once or twice a week, you have the opportunity to increase your fluency in conversational English with a helpful guide. As for classes in English, you can start attending classes any time throughout the year. Check time schedules by contacting the number below. The Writing Clinic offers individual help in improving pieces of writing such as essays and reports. All of these services are free. For more information contact the Center for Student Development (GH 110), x24254, <https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca>). Graduate Studies also offers a free, non-credit English as a Second Language (ESL) program called MEEC. More information can be found at: <https://gs.mcmaster.ca/about-meec-non-credit-modules>

# GSA - Graduate Student Association

All McMaster graduate students are part of the GSA (McMaster Graduate Students Association). We pay membership dues to this Association in our tuition fees, so make use of GSA services. Their website is <https://gsa.mcmaster.org>. On that website you will find links to information about GSA awards, GSA travel grants and GSA/SGS bursaries. Applications to these numerous awards are initiated by you the student, so it best to check their site often for application descriptions and deadlines.

## Our Office

Refectory Rathskeller Building East Tower, 2nd floor  
McMaster University  
Hamilton Ontario L8S 2S1

Phone: (905) 525-9140 Ext 22043

E-mail: [macgsa@mcmaster.ca](mailto:macgsa@mcmaster.ca)

## Office Hours

- Monday            10:00 am - 1:00 pm
- Tuesday           10:00 am - 1:00 pm
- Wednesday       10:00 am - 1:00 pm
- Thursday          10:00 am - 1:00 pm
- Friday             CLOSED

### Top five lies told by teaching assistants:

5. I'm not going to grant any extensions.
4. Call me anytime... I am always available
3. It doesn't matter what I think - write what you believe.
2. Of course the midterm is going to be easy...
1. My other section is much better prepared than you

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# Section 2

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Now

That

You're

Here...



# Taking Courses and Doing Coursework

As you may already be aware, at McMaster there are two distinct routes to a Masters degree: by coursework and thesis or by coursework and project. Ph.D. students, whether or not they've done their Masters at McMaster, must take a first year of coursework as well, though in some cases coursework requirements can be reduced by recommendation of the Supervisory Committee and approval by the School's Graduate Committee.

So, in pretty well all cases for Masters and Ph.D. students, coursework is **necessary**. The main course requirements are two half-courses for Masters degrees and three half-courses for Ph.D. degrees at the 700 level (**the third course can be at the 600 level – refer to the 'Green' book for more information**). This means that you should work towards having your coursework finished by the end of the first year of your program. For physical geography students this coursework sometimes, though not always, can drag into the summer depending on the course requirements (although SGES grad courses are not typically offered in the Spring/Summer term).

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that not all the courses listed in the Graduate Calendar are offered every year. In fact, some courses have not been offered for many years. Courses offered for each particular term are generally based on student demand and/or instructor preference and availability. In any case, the actual list of graduate courses to be offered may be very limited and probably won't be available until the second or third week of the term (please ask Sal about the current course timetable). Your best bet is to keep your ear to the ground early on, especially for courses from other departments and keep in touch with your advisor and other graduate students to find out what courses (both inside and outside of the School) might interest you.

## Shopping for Courses

There are courses offered by the professors of the department, if there is enough demand from the students. Sometimes, one or two courses can be taken outside of the School of Geography and Earth Sciences. In the past, students have taken courses in related disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, biology, health sciences, statistics and engineering. If you are considering registering for a course outside of the School, note that registration requirements vary by department. In addition, some courses (particularly those in Health Sciences) fill-up quickly and registration may have begun as early as the July or August preceding the Fall Term. In these cases, if you wait to September to sign up for a course, you may be put on a waiting list. Your supervisor may suggest possible courses to take outside the School, but it is usually up to you to find out what is offered, (speak to Sal to obtain the required permission to register for the course) when, and to make sure that you meet the specific registration requirements.

### Taking Undergraduate Courses for Graduate Credit

Selected courses at the 600 level are offered to both graduates and undergraduates. However, 600 level courses do not count towards your graduate course requirements (see above)!! Courses to meet this must be 700 level courses. 600-level courses however can be a smart addition to course requirements if you're moving into a new area, or wish to expand your knowledge base. As a graduate student you will most likely be required to complete additional work above and beyond the undergrad work load. This will be specified by the instructor, but may involve an additional paper or a more in-depth analysis of a particular issue.

### Reading Courses

Due in part to the limited course selection, but also in the interests of efficiency, many graduate students complete a reading course as part of their coursework. Generally, a reading course is geared towards an individual's specific area of interest or potential thesis topic, although this is wholly dependent upon the arrangement that is negotiated between a professor and a grad student when setting up the course.

Normally you are only supposed to register for one reading course in your program. However, there have been cases where a professor has offered a reading course under a standard course number when that course has not been available. Once again, you should first check with your supervisor about this option and clear it with the School before you assume that it's okay. Some sage advice from past graduates is that you try to avoid taking two reading courses concurrently as the workload for these are usually quite heavy. For a more personalized view of what a reading course entails, see Section 3: Advice from the Trenches.



# Graduate Activities

## How do I find out what's going on?

There are a number of modes of communication in the School of Geography and Earth Sciences. One of the most vital links is through e-mail. Make sure you get on-line and activate your Mac email as soon as you can to get added to the School's electronic mailing list (Mac email addresses ONLY!). Your buddy will be able to introduce you to Mac's e-mail system when you arrive. You can also keep your eyes open for postings on the notice board outside the main office (GSB-206). Most activities are posted there at least a few days in advance. Also remember to visit SGES' website and browse the current 'News and Events' page listings (<https://www.science.mcmaster.ca/geo/>).

### Coffee Breaks

Over the years this ritual has been modified time and time again and is currently a once-a-week occurrence. The dates and venue will be set once all the new students arrive. It is a great time to catch up on news/gossip and relax, but can also be useful for obtaining helpful hints for making life easier at grad school. For example, you might find out about new scholarships, the inside scoop on the weekly seminar speaker, union contract negotiations, conferences, and so on. Some take the passive approach and prefer to listen, while others talk non-stop: either strategy is encouraged. There is also a coffee shop on the first floor of BSB near the bridge to GSB.

### Lunch Breaks

The school also provides a graduate student lounge on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of BSB. (Note – this is the best place to meet others). There is a refrigerator and a microwave in the room for your convenience. There is a key-card access on the door (all grad students are given access to this room). Feel free to drop by, but be sure to always tidy up after yourself. And remember meetings and conferences always take precedence! Be sure the room is not in use before you enter (schedule is usually posted on the door).

## Sports and Recreation

### McMaster Athletics and Recreation

As a registered McMaster student part of your tuition fees are designated to Athletics & Recreation and you therefore have a Base Membership at the David Braley Athletic Centre. A Base Membership provides access to the athletic facilities at McMaster (excluding the Pulse Fitness Centre and Feather Family Climbing Wall). Base Membership privileges include access to open gym time, indoor track, squash courts, pool, outdoor track, saunas, and member rates for instructional programs and use of day lockers. You may also purchase a Fitness Membership. This includes all Base Membership privileges plus access to the Pulse Fitness Centre. The Pulse includes access to group fitness classes, cycling classes, free weights, circuit, selectorized weight machines, cardio equipment (including treadmills) and the Feather Family Climbing Wall. To learn more about cost and other services (including sports medicine) offered at the centre, visit their website at: <https://rec.mcmaster.ca> or reach them at: 905-525-9140 x24464.

### Organized Sports

You know what they say about working hard and playing harder ... we try to live up to it. Most of the sports activities are based on interest and whether or not someone has the equipment. But, most of all, the focus of all sporting events in the School of Geography & Earth Sciences is to have fun and get together with friends and colleagues.

#### Softball

Each summer the current, and some former, Geography and Earth Sciences graduate students field a softball team (or two!) in the GSA non-competitive 3-pitch league. The School's A-league team, the Rockall Gannets (there is a story behind the name, but you'll have to come out and play to find out) and the less competitive C-league team, Hutton's Heroes always have a great time playing and then recovering at the Phoenix with food and drinks afterwards. The teams play about 20 games (usually once a week over the summer) plus a couple of additional "tournaments" each season. Although winning makes playing even more satisfying, the main focus of these teams is fun and camaraderie. Visit the website for more information on the softball league ([gsasoftball.mcmaster.ca](http://gsasoftball.mcmaster.ca)).

#### Squash

With strong historical ties to Britain (the origin of squash), the School of Geography & Earth Sciences has a strong tradition of active squash participation. Currently, the School has many graduate students, post-doctoral fellows and faculty playing squash regularly. This relatively inexpensive, highly entertaining and athletic sport does wonders for your level of fitness and mental focus. Members of the School of all levels, from beginners and the moderately talented to those with decades of experience, are currently playing. Please visit <http://www.squashorbit.com/McMaster> for more information about signing up for the SGES squash ladder, an online system for scheduling matches with your peers.

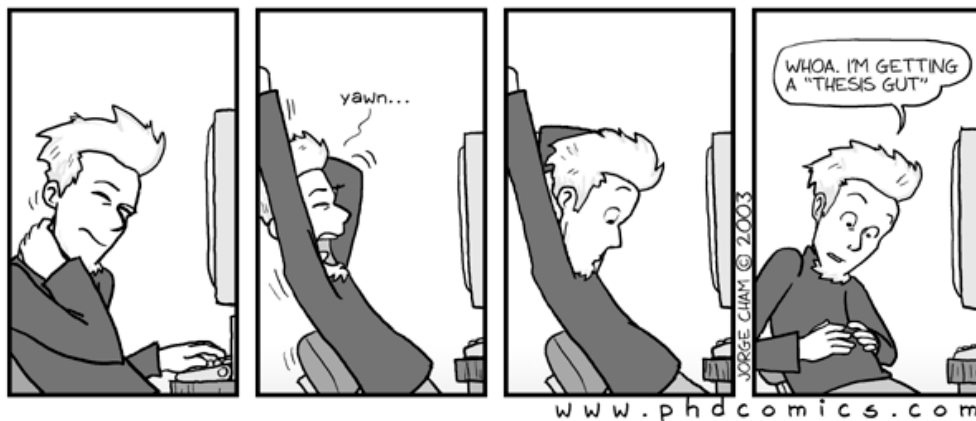
## Soccer

Soccer is another highly popular sport within the School. In the fall of 1998 the GFC United (Geo Football Club) was formed and began playing in the men's intra-mural outdoor soccer league. They continued play in an indoor league during the winter. A joint School of Geography & Earth Sciences and Chemistry women's team also played indoor intra-mural soccer. In the summer, the School has entered a co-ed soccer team into the GSA league. There are many opportunities to play if you're interested, watch out for e-mails regarding soccer teams and also check out the GSA Co-ed Soccer League website for more info. (<https://gsamcmaster.org/soccer-league/>).

## Other Sports

Each year, SGES graduate students will form intramural sports teams/events. Look out for these emails throughout the school year.

If there's a sport that you're interested in, by all means take it on and you'll probably have no trouble finding someone to come out and play. Remember, whether it is getting on with your thesis or playing sports, in the words of the multi-national, capitalist, exploitative shoe manufacturer: "Just Do It!"



## Events

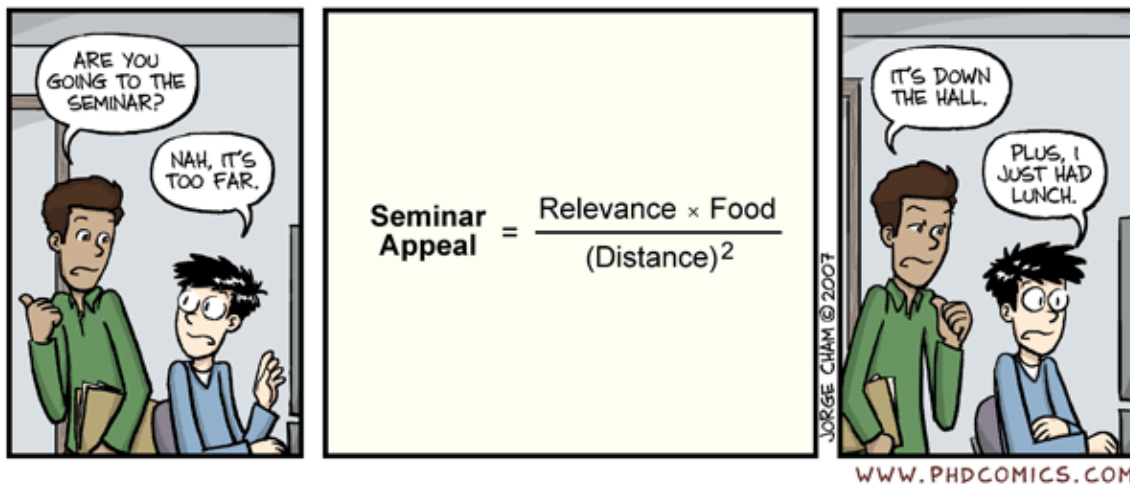
### Weekly Seminars

The School of Geography and Earth Sciences sponsors a speaker's series with a visiting scholar approximately every other week throughout the school year. Coffee and treats are served and the talks usually last from approximately an hour. Some graduates like to slip out for lunch at one of the campus food spots before the speaker and others head out to the Phoenix (graduate watering hole) afterwards. Keep your ears open and ask around if you're interested in these before and after activities. The dates, venue, and topics for the seminars will be released in early September and normally emailed a few days prior with full abstract information.

### SGES Social Events

In recent years, the SGES Social Committee organizes and hosts several social events throughout the school year (e.g. SGES Holiday Festivus, Phoenix Social). This is a great way to come out and meet new and existing grad students and to connect with other members of the SGES community! Watch for email invites that confirms dates and times.

So, regardless of the time of year there is always a fun evening of entertainment coming up soon. It is always hoped that students will get together to plan some of these events and make it a fun time for all.



# Service & Committees

There are a number of opportunities to 'get involved' in the decision-making and operation of both the School of Geography and Earth Sciences and McMaster University. The positions below are the ones that require graduate student representation. As you would expect, there are numerous other activities in the university and you can get formally involved with any of them—just consult your graduate calendar for a full listing.

The positions start to get filled during the yearly "SGES' Welcome Back Brunch" in early September to allow all new and current graduates to get involved and take up some of the open positions. So RSVP for this popular event (Sal sends out the invitation in late August), and come out and get involved!

## Graduate Student Service & Committee Positions

### **1. Faculty of Science Graduate Council Meetings:**

- attend meetings (schedule is online) and keep grads informed
- minimal input required
- a good way to make Faculty contacts
- 2 science reps needed (Phd/Masters)
- meets once a month or less, approximately 3 hours a month

### **2. Faculty of Science Graduate Curriculum and Policy Committee Meetings:**

- attend meetings and keep grads informed of updates/changes
- 2 geography reps needed (Phd/Masters)
- meets 2-3 times a year (background info is online)

### **3. Graduate Buddies:**

- 2 reps needed (Domestic/International)
- help new incoming students get settled into their new environment

### **4. SGES Social Committee:**

- 1 science/1 geographer rep needed
- attend monthly meetings
- assists with organizing fun events to heighten social interaction in the school

### **5. SGES Departmental Meetings:**

- attend faculty meetings & report relevant issues to grads
- a good way to make School contacts, voting member
- useful for those interested in staying in academia
- 1 human geographer, 1 physical geographer and 1 geologist needed
- meets bi-monthly, 2 – 3 hours per meeting

**6. Koffee Klatch:**

- organization of “Koffee Klatch” social once a week
- 2 reps needed
- responsible for making coffee, providing baked goods (donated), clean up

**7. SGES Graduate Committee:**

- attends meetings and relays info back to fellow grad students as needed
- automatically assigned to Research Day committee
- 1 human geographer, 1 physical geographer, and 1 geologist needed
- meet bi-monthly, 1-2 hours per meeting

**8. Handbook Editors:**

- revise grad handbook (most of the work takes place in the summer term)
- 1 geography/1 science rep needed, most work takes place in summer term

**9. CUPE Union Representatives:**

- attend union meetings and relay info to grads
- can be a heavy commitment in negotiation years
- 2 reps needed (1 social science/1 science)
- meets once a month for 2 - 3 hours

**10. Building Safety Committee:**

- lab and equipment safety inspections
- WHIMIS training is mandatory
- 1 BSB rep/1 GSB rep needed

**11. Geography and Earth Sciences Society (GESS) Graduate Representative**

- 1 rep needed
- meets once a month
- communication liaison between GESS president and Grad Social Committee
- events are open to all undergrad students and grads are encouraged to attend
- main communication is through email and advertising

**12. Social Media Representative:**

- 2 reps needed
- assists and advises on the media platform(s) used in SGES

**13. Seminar and Speaker Committee:**

- 2 science/2 geography students needed
- responsible for purchasing refreshments (reimbursed through SGES office)
- brew coffee



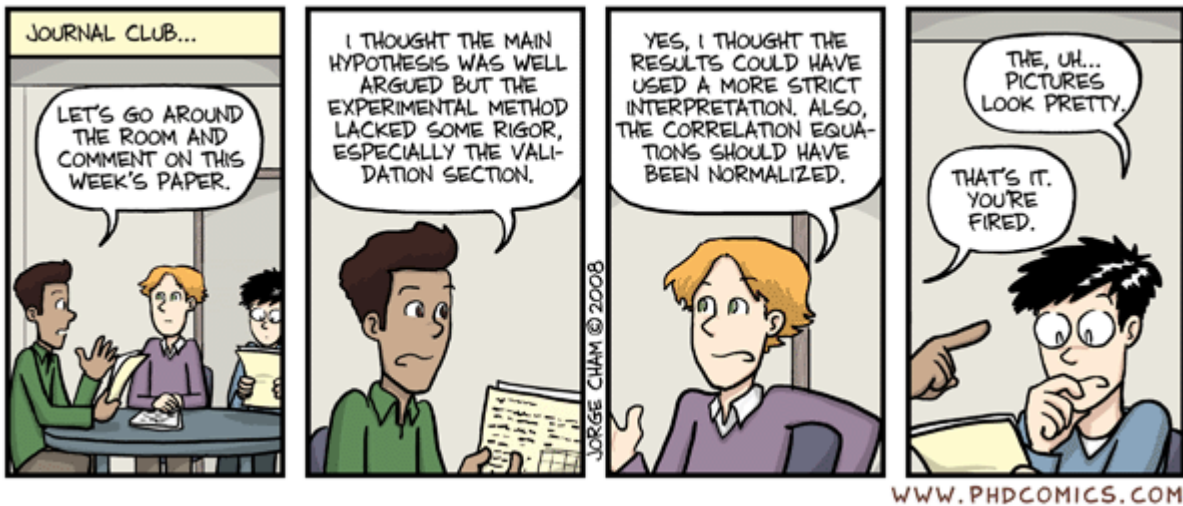
- set up equipment and make sure it runs properly
- clean up as needed
- work with designated faculty member

**14. Highschool/Community Outreach/Publicity Committee:**

- committee is geared towards future students to educate them on the types of programs/opportunities offered in SGES
- create and deliver a group presentation targeted at highschool students
- promote departmental events
- assist with program as needed (runs in the Winter term)
- 4 reps needed

**15. Research Day Committee Assistants:**

- also sits on the grad meeting committee (see # 7 above)
- assists with the organization of Research Day (held yearly in April)
- duties include purchasing and setting up refreshments/snacks, planning agenda, monitoring rooms, providing direction as needed



# Conferences

## Geography

As a geographer, it is important to establish a social and professional network with other geographers at Mac, across Canada and abroad. A great way of doing this is to become a member of one of the many geographic societies here in Canada (Canadian Association of Geographers—CAG), the United States (Association of American Geographers—AAG) or in other countries.

A yearly membership fee will cost you \$40 to \$80 CDN. As a member you will receive newsletters (usually once a month) and various publications. Sometimes associations will provide travel grants to its members to help defray the costs of travel to their yearly conferences.

Each association holds either an annual or bi-annual conference. These conferences are the ideal setting in which to present your own research, learn about research taking place at other institutions and meet other geographers.



phd.stanford.edu

### Canadian Association of Geographers

The CAG usually holds its annual meeting in late May or early June, and the location changes from year to year. The CAG mainly attracts geographers from Canada while a handful does make the trek north from the United States. The CAG is a great place to present your first paper as it is a much smaller scale than the AAG and less intimidating. If you do wish to present a paper or poster, the deadline for submitting your application is usually some time in February. If you are attending the conference to just listen or learn then you can register by mail or wait until you arrive at the conference. The most recent CAG annual meeting was hosted by York University. Ask your supervisor or senior grad students for more information on conferences. You can also go online for more information at: [www.cag-acg.ca](http://www.cag-acg.ca).

### **Association of American Geographers (AAG)**

The annual AAG conference is normally held in the spring and it attracts geographers from across the globe. This large conference also comes with a bigger price tag, i.e. a registration fee of approximately \$195 US (member price). If you wish to present at this conference, you should submit abstracts very early in the academic year. The AAG's Annual meeting will be held in New Orleans, Louisiana from April 10 - 14, 2018. You can also go online for more information at: [www.aag.org/](http://www.aag.org/).

For reasons of space we have only mentioned a few of the many conferences held in Canada and abroad. Many subfields of geography (health, development, hydrology, karst, transportation, etc.) hold their own conferences either annually or bi-annually. Ask your fellow students and professors to find out if there is a specialty conference for your area of study. The School posts a list of conferences or sends announcements via email.

## **Earth Sciences**

As an Earth Scientist, there are several conferences that may be of interest to you.

### **GSA Annual Meeting**

The GSA (Geological Society of America) conference is popular. Please check the website at: <http://www.geosociety.org> for more information.

### **AGU Annual Meeting**

American Geophysical Union (AGU) hosts two major meetings every year, one is a spring meeting (often in May), the other is a Fall meeting usually taking place in early December. AGU's Fall meeting is one of the biggest conferences of its kind. The 2017 AGU Fall meeting took place from December 11<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> in New Orleans, LA. Please check the website for future meetings and details (<http://www.agu.org/>).

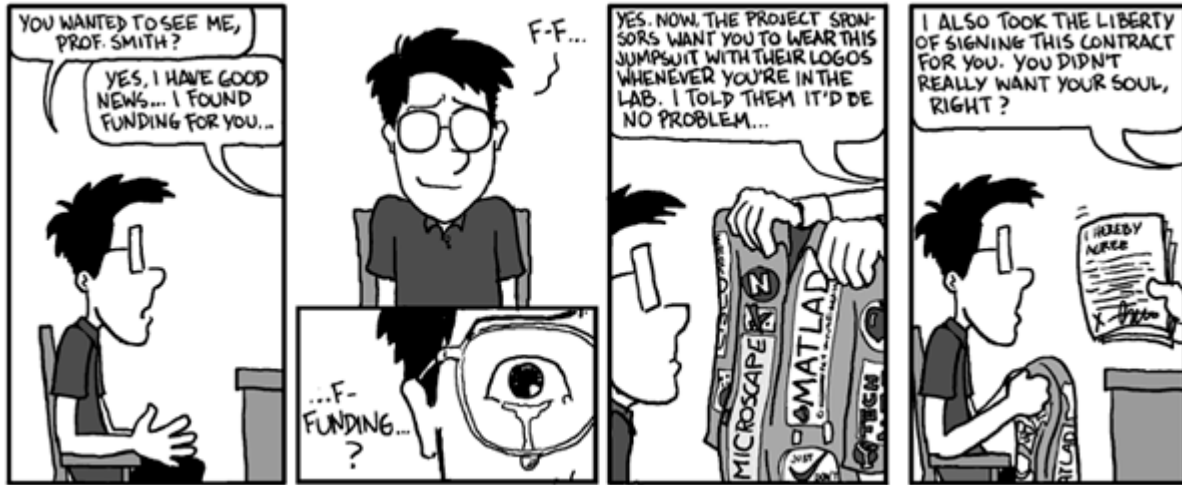
Please ask your supervisor or other members of the department about conferences, which may be of relevance to your area of interest. There are many more Geology/Earth Sciences conferences than listed here.

## **Funding for Conferences**

Let's be realistic, attending a conference may be a strain on an ever-shrinking student budget and you might now be thinking, 'Who is going to pay my way?' If you are lucky enough to be the recipient of SSHRC, NSERC or OGS scholarships part of this money should be allocated for conference attendance. The CAG offers travel grants for students who wish to present. You must, however, be a member of the CAG from the previous year to be eligible. In addition, the Graduate Student Association (GSA) has a travel grant program. The GSA awards a number of travel/research grants of \$500 each per term (for a total of three terms). You can get details and application forms from the GSA. Check for updates on the GSA webpage and for deadlines

for applying respectively for travel/research to be carried out in that term.

If you do not have external funding, then it is a good idea to discuss the matter with your supervisor. Don't be afraid to ask — the more interest you show, the more likely you are to get help to go.



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# Section 3

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Advice

From

the

Trenches . . .

## Now What?

As a graduate student, you'll probably be asking yourself this question quite a bit for the next few years. This section has been compiled to help you deal with all that unspoken psychological stuff that goes along with being a graduate student.

A graduate student's greatest resource is the group of colleagues that make up the School of Geography and Earth Sciences. In this section, we surveyed graduate students in the School and asked them what little bits of advice they might give to incoming students.

The responses that we received were a little hard to classify so we thought we'd just present them to you as they came to us. These all represent INDIVIDUAL experiences—you may find that your own experience differs greatly from these. In fact, you'll see that some of the opinions are even contradictory as they represent students working in different specialties and with different advisors.

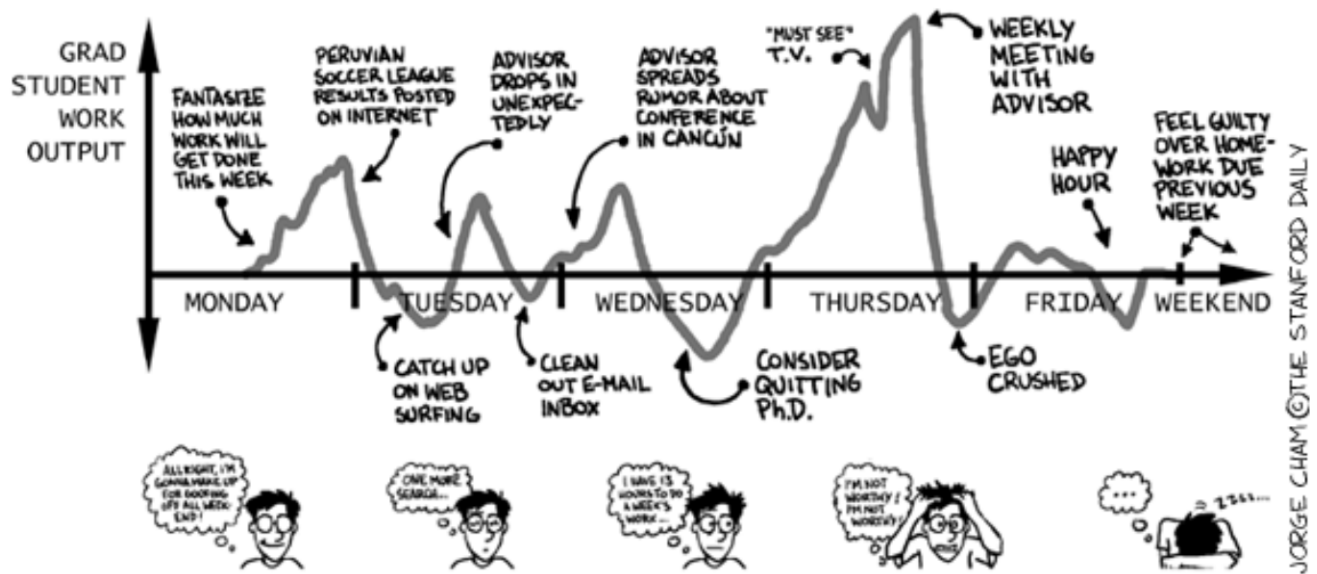
Please accept the following bits of advice in the spirit in which they are meant. Your own graduate experience may mirror these or it may be substantially different.

### **You Just Might Be a Graduate Student If.....**

- You can analyze the significance of appliances you cannot operate
- Your office is better decorated than your apartment
- You are startled to meet people who neither need nor want to read
- You have ever discussed academic matters at a sporting event
- You have accepted guilt as an inherent feature of relaxation
- You find yourself explaining to children that you're in the "20th grade"
- You frequently wonder how long you can live on pasta without getting scurvy
- You reflexively start analyzing those Greek letters before you realize that it's a sorority sweatshirt, not an equation
- You have ever brought a scholarly article to a bar
- You regard ibuprofen as a vitamin
- You have given up trying to keep your books organized and are now just trying to keep them all in the same general area
- You look forward to summer because you're more productive without the distraction of classes

# Surviving the First Year Or “What am I Doing Here?”

If you are feeling awkward about your new experience as a graduate student and you are just not sure what to do, then here is a month by month account of things you should be keeping yourself busy with and things to expect for the first term. The reason for this section is to give you some help in feeling more relaxed and comfortable about the transition to grad life based on our experiences in the past year.



## Term One

### September

Generally things are pretty slow the first few weeks and you may wonder what the big deal is all about with respect to grad school stress. The most common piece of advice heard by incoming grad students in their first month is to ‘just wait’ and things will happen on their own, however, there are things you can and should be doing in this first month.

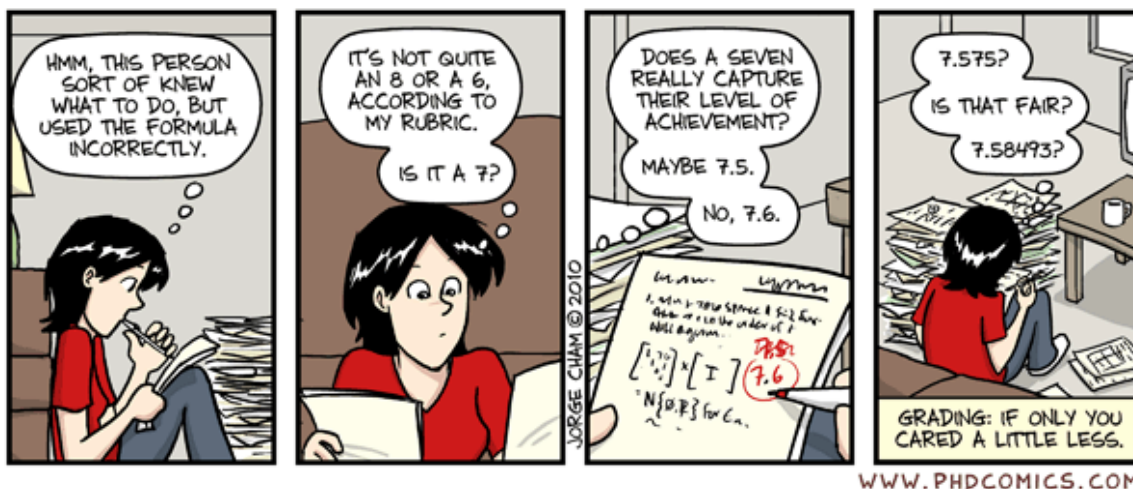
First, get your courses selected. This may not seem like a big deal seeing as courses don't start right off the bat in September, but the process is a little more involved than it was at the undergrad level. **Note:** All new and incoming grad students must complete (by the end of September-Term 1, January-Term 2, May-Term 3) SGS 101-Academic Research Integrity and Ethics and SGS 201-Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). These are mandatory short online courses that are recorded on your transcript with a Pass or Fail grade.

Information and descriptions of these short courses can be found at: <https://gsamcmaster.org/new-students/>.

Second, September is a good opportunity to familiarize yourself with the campus, services, and resources (particularly the library system). There are library tours and information sessions on how to use the reference and computer systems—get to know them! This will save you time in the future. This is also the time to get your computer needs met and e-mail up and running. E-mail is a major mode of communication between grad students, faculty and the broad ‘university community.’ Check your MAC e-mail fairly regularly (preferably daily) for social events, seminars and general School happenings.

Third, meet other grad students. There are many opportunities to do this, namely for coffee or lunch breaks that will take place throughout the academic year, or through informal get-togethers. Coffee and lunch are good informal ways to regularly keep in touch with people, both students and professors, and keep up to date on what's up. Your peers are your greatest resource!

Fourth, get organized for your TA position. Being a Teaching Assistant for the first time can be an intimidating experience. In order to smooth the transition into this position, SGEs recommends visiting the MacPherson Institute as it offers education courses/resources for all new and returning TAs (see page 63). Also, find out which course you will be TAing and arrange to meet the professor to talk about the course, expectations, readings and your responsibilities for the semester. Also check with Kara Salvador about Health and Safety training and the Hours of Work Form that has to be completed each term you are TA'ing.



September is slow in comparison to other months so take it easy, have fun and get to know the secrets of the city (Hamilton isn't all bad) and the School. About setting up your office, although there can be many distractions at school, it provides a good support systems and is a place to get to know other people. Setting up regular meetings with your advisor for the first few months to keep yourself in tune is probably a good idea to get answers to all of those questions



you might have. Remember, all other grad students have been right where you are right now!

As for more obvious social happenings look forward to annual school events and other School seminars. These are great opportunities to learn about what other people's research interests are, and you can also practice presenting your work in an informal, friendly atmosphere. It's also a time to get to know people and forget about school. Graduate Studies offers numerous student orientation (*Welcome Student Welcome Week*) events during early September (and throughout the year) so it is always a good idea to check their website on a regular basis.

### **October**

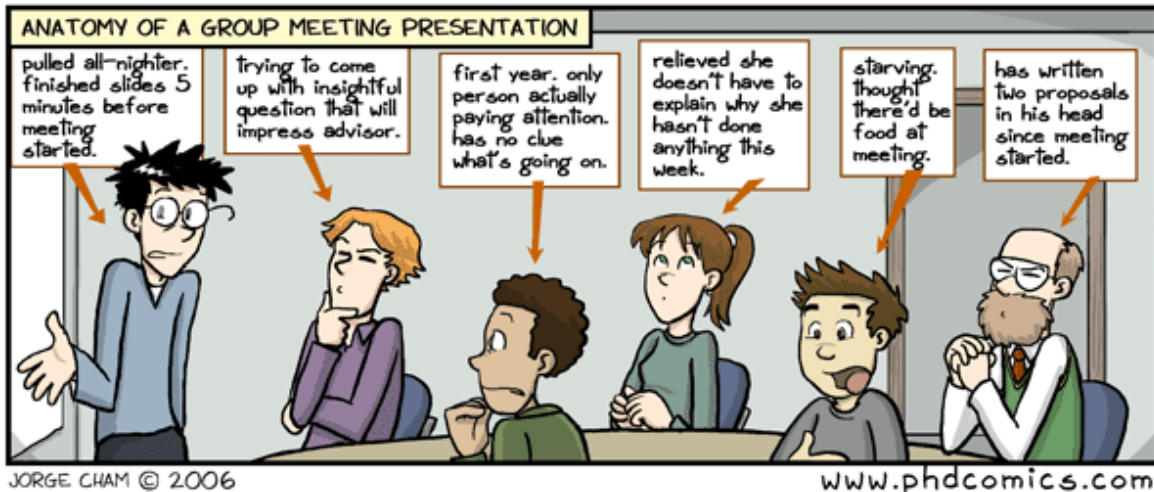
Now things are starting to roll. You have probably already had your first class and have noticed the workload is a little more demanding (all those readings...geez). Take it all in strides. Get a plan of attack for your work load and try not to pile too much on the weekends as they will become your sanity-saving/no-school zone time.

In order to get through these months successfully and avoid the end of term crunch (which will hit you anyway), time management is the key. One idea is to take a few minutes and plan a schedule for the week. This may seem like a waste of time initially, but it is key to keeping track of where your time is going. You will find that grad school entails a great deal of running around. This is expected. But at the same time you will wonder where your time is going. By using this simple time management tool, you will be able to use your time more effectively.

Expect to be under close watch by your advisor. This first term will prove to be a boundary scoping time period for both of you to see what your limits are in terms of workload, abilities, and demands. This may seem stressful but remember that it is not a test; it is an exploration of limitations—both yours and your advisor's.

Expect not to be told what to do! You wouldn't be here if you weren't self-motivated and hard working so don't lose sight of your interests and the drives that brought you here. Take this time to also explore your advisor's interests since h/she will be a good resource and strong influence on your thesis. Take time to start thinking about your own interests and don't get swayed by the research agendas of others (it is good to know this going in sometimes). You should also be thinking about how your coursework papers can contribute to, or inform your potential thesis work (i.e. doing a lit review or doing a paper that is background work for your thesis interests).

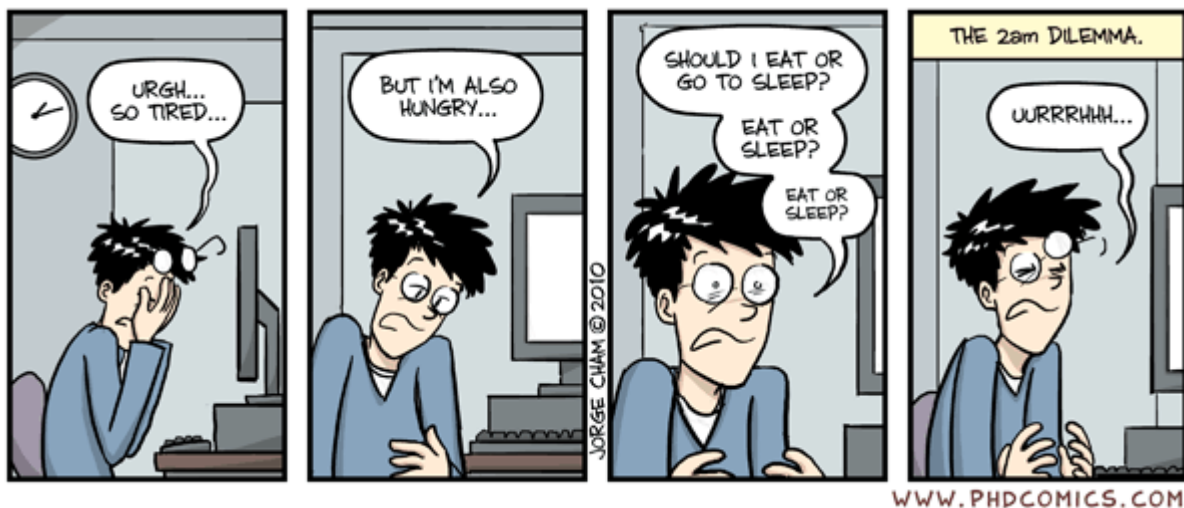
Choose paper topics that interest you and get those creative juices flowing. 'Graduate Studies Information Session' is another social event (organized by GESS) in the fall term. Take advantage of this opportunity to interact socially with the professors and undergrads.



### November

Stress is building. Get organized—this is your best hope for minimizing stress levels. All major projects and papers come up suddenly and you will feel like you are living in the library. You constantly doubt why you came to grad school and the idea of just walking away crosses your mind a great number of times. Hang in there—just stay organized and motivated (sometimes easier said than done).

Take time out to do stuff that feels like you haven't done in a long time. Try to remember to exercise because it reduces stress. Find out what you think of as "rewards" and celebrate small achievements. Allow yourself to take a night off once in a while—this will keep you sane.



### December

The big PAPERS or PROJECTS are due. Don't expect that this paper will be crafted any differently than any paper you wrote in 4<sup>th</sup> year. For some reason the pressure and stress rises unnecessarily because you think that your first grad paper has to be a masterpiece. Original ideas and incorporation of your interests are key elements for your papers, but don't agonize

over everything. Try to remind yourself that you belong here and that your whole ego isn't on the line (hard as that may be to remember). Near the beginning of the month look forward to the School's Christmas/Winter party put on by the Social Committee (who also host other events such as social nights at the Phoenix.)

Make sure that your papers are done before the Christmas holiday starts!! The University closes down over the holiday season and you won't be able to get much work done there. Finally, give yourself permission to have a great Christmas/winter holiday and forget about school, papers and thesis stuff.

## Term Two

On top of other things start thinking seriously about your thesis and how you might want to go about doing it. Ask yourself: What? Why? How? When? Months five to eight (January to April) are a continuance of the third and fourth months, but at a slower pace. The seventh and eighth (March and April) are another stressful period where all project due dates coincide with marking finals and assignments for your TA duties.

March/April brings a year-end review of your courses, marks, and thesis proposal. This is slightly intimidating but a good organizational and task setting experience that sends you off for the summer with research goals and data collection plans.

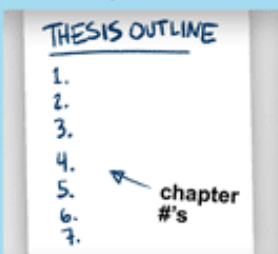
The School reviews the progress of each new student annually. While PhD students have their first supervisory meeting, Masters Students will be advised of their scheduled review meeting via e-mail a couple of weeks prior to the meeting. For this meeting you are to have a proposal prepared (2 pages). If you should have any questions about this review meeting or your progress in the School, you can consult with your supervisor or speak to Sal. Additional information about the review can also be found in the School's 'Green' book (be sure to read this).

The ninth to twelfth months generally occur in the summer for most grad students. This is when you will begin your research data collection. Traditionally, this is a more relaxed period but at the same time, if you intend to finish on time, this period is critical for completing a great deal of work. **Note:** TA'ships are not normally offered during the Spring/Summer term.

# WRITING YOUR THESIS OUTLINE

NOTHING SAYS "I'M ALMOST DONE" TO YOUR ADVISOR/SPOUSE/PARENTS LIKE PRETENDING YOU HAVE A PLAN

**STEP 1** Aim for a respectable number of chapters:

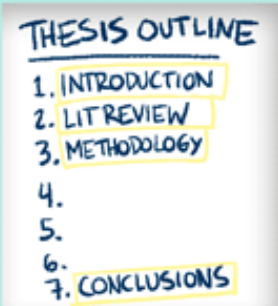


THESIS OUTLINE

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. ← chapter #'s
- 6.
- 7.

5 = "That's IT??"  
 6-7 = "Not bad"  
 8+ = "Are you crazy??"

**STEP 2** Fill in the "freebies":

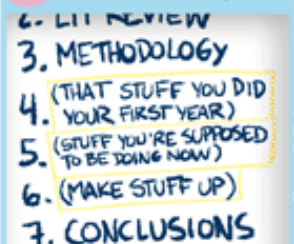


THESIS OUTLINE

1. INTRODUCTION
2. LITREVIEW
3. METHODOLOGY
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
7. CONCLUSIONS

You're half way done!

**STEP 3** Make up titles for the "meat" chapters:



6. LIT REVIEW

3. METHODOLOGY
4. (THAT STUFF YOU DID YOUR FIRST YEAR)
5. (STUFF YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DOING NOW)
6. (MAKE STUFF UP)
7. CONCLUSIONS

(It'll be years before you actually have to work on that later chapter, and by then your thesis topic will have changed anyway)

**STEP 4** Voilà! You just bought yourself another two years



So, how's your thesis going?  
 i have an outlined

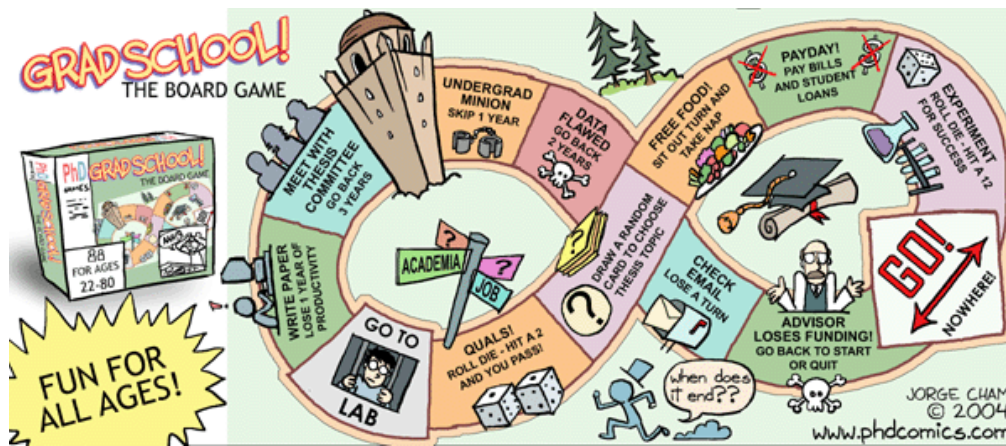
JORGE CHAM © 2006

www.phdcomics.com

## Tips for surviving your 1<sup>st</sup> year:

- Keep a journal of meetings with your advisor and also jot down research ideas that pop into your head
- Make use of the people resources in the department
- For those of you coming to MAC for the first time, know that the first year may be a slightly isolating experience. Take comfort in knowing you are in fact, *not* alone. Also- get out there and socialize!
- It's not hard because you're not good enough, it's hard because it's hard. Remember that you're not in graduate school to be praised for your brilliance; you're there to become even more brilliant!
- Go ahead and apply for scholarships and submit entries for conferences-even if you think you have no chance. Your chances are higher than you think!
- It's up to you to learn about what's happening in your field, around campus and abroad-so get informed!!!
- Have fun and don't take things TOO seriously

## You WILL survive!



## More about Reading Courses

So you're thinking about taking a reading course.

This situation usually only arises when the School's selection of 'offered' courses is limited and your attempt at course shopping in other departments has come up dry. The reality is that it is probably now mid to late September and you're only officially registered in one course when you're supposed to be registered for two. It's not uncommon to be in a panic at this point, especially if your second term slate is full. It happens, and you wonder why it's September 23 and you haven't started anything yet. Of course, you know the campus inside out and you've read all sorts of style manuals, but nothing that'll go toward your degree. Please refer to the Policies and Procedures Manual for more information.

Your first stop should be with your supervisor. This is common and s/he will likely oblige to oversee your work. But shopping around can sometimes be more involved than that. You may want to take one in Engineering or Sociology, for example, which often means you're on your own. You'll have to approach the instructor(s) in those departments (usually without any advice on what those people are like). Politely ask them whether they're willing to spare 30 to 40 hours that term and then hope they'll say 'yes'.

You may even have some great professor in mind who is off campus, maybe in your home town if you've come from outside Hamilton, and decide that making frequent trips to meet with her/him is feasible. A few words of advice: the trips are time consuming and tiring and, unlike meeting with someone on campus, you can't just 'pop in' when you've got a great idea or problem. E-mail is there and so is the phone, but it is never as good as face to face. If you're calling long distance, it can get expensive.

Have we been negative enough yet? Actually readings courses are not all bad. For one thing, you're sure to go through a lot of relevant stuff. And fast! By the time you get going, it could be the third week of September, or even the last. Now that you're settled, you'll be presented with reams and reams of references along with one of two common phrases:

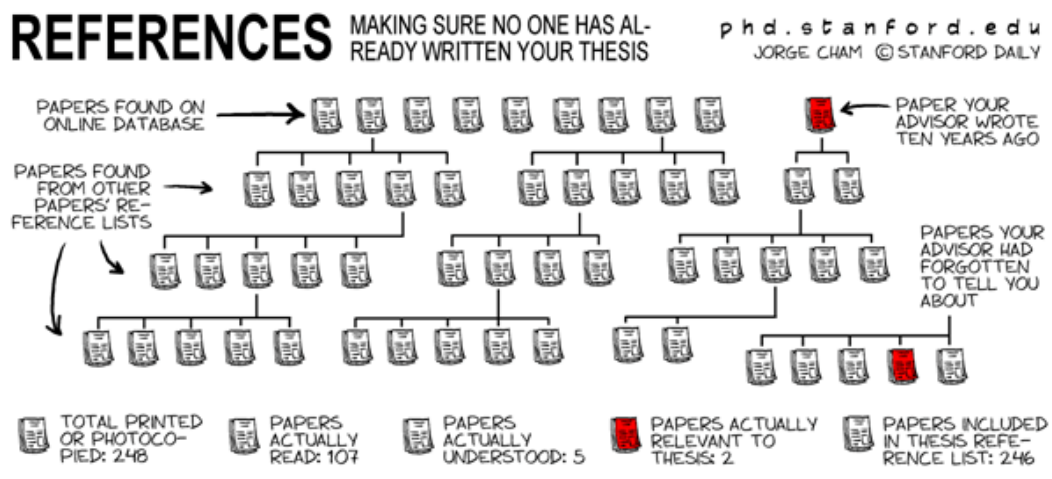
1. "Go through these and have a major paper ready for me at the end of term," or
2. "Go through these and have your first of three or four papers ready for me in three weeks."

This may seem negative but, believe me, you'll learn a heck of a lot. By the way, if you're structured enough to meet with your instructor weekly you can bounce ideas off her/him and develop the paper as you plow through the reading list. It really pays off in the end—maybe more than a 'structured' course in this respect.

Finally, we get to the relevance issue. Where at all possible, make your reading course count. If your main interest is Biogeography you're unlikely to shop in the Classics or Anthropology departments. Try to make your readings course directly relevant to your thesis (i.e. try to make it a pseudo-literature review). This way, you will have completed the course requirement and, more importantly, part of your thesis!

But be aware that while some instructors make it a rule that their students' readings course should be readily transformed into a literature review chapter, other instructors insist that all thesis work be separate from coursework. Maybe they just want their students to come out of grad school well rounded. Nevertheless, try to make your reading course relevant. It's a lot of work, likely more than any 'structured' course you'll ever take so unless you can make it pay off in the end, you should consider scrapping the idea.

There you have it. You have a lot to consider - whether you should take one, with whom, the work involved, and most important, the relevance. Weigh all of these, compare them to any possible 'structured' courses available and your decision should be a little easier.



# PhD Comps Demystified

Since it was a bit difficult to find some written advice for this ‘dreaded’ PhD Comps exam, we thought of putting something together in this Survival Handbook for our future PhDs.

In order to pass on their advice to the next generation, we surveyed SGES PhD graduate students, who already went through the ordeal. We would like to thank all those who responded to our survey for their time and contribution! Below is a summary of what those students had to say, in addition to some general descriptions of what is going on during the exam.

## **First a Bit of an Intro**

If you have entered into a PhD program at our School, then you should already know what awaits you within 12 to 20 months from the start of your program! Yes, an exam, one of the biggest ones in your research career. You will have to successfully pass a PhD Comprehensive exam in order to continue in the program. This exam is a ‘milestone’ for PhD students, after which they become “A.B.D.”s. (all but dissertation). During the exam you are tested on the general and specific knowledge pertaining to your research. That is also the time when you get your research proposal approved by a committee of professors (and occasionally outside reviewers). You have a committee (PhD Comprehensive Committee), which oversees your exam and evaluates you. In our School, there are three components to the PhD Comprehensive exam period: a written part, an oral part, and PhD research proposal defense, all happening within one week. (Please refer to the Green book for more detailed information.)

## **Months Before the Exam**

Prior to the exam several things happen:

### **1. Your PhD Comprehensive Committee is formed.**

Just remember that you also have a say in the selection of Committee members. This is comprised of the supervisory committee and one other. There are usually 4 members, including your supervisor. Some can be from outside our department or even University, so do give a thought as to whom you’d like on your committee. Remember your PhD Comps committee will review your research reading list AND your RESEARCH PROPOSAL. So it is a good idea to find and contact those experts in your field of research who may give crucial guidance and advice to you regarding your research. In any case, it is good to have at least one person on your committee, whose own research area is close to your selected research topic. You can also discuss your reading list and proposal with your Committee prior to the exam, asking them for advice/suggestions, which may help to focus you in the end.



## 2. Compiling a reading list.

For your Comps you will have to read through approximately 80 – 100 readings, most of which will include journal articles, but also a few book chapters relevant to your research topic. You will put together the reading list (often going through several revisions of the final list, upon consultations with your supervisor and/or committee members). The list will have some well-known general reference works in your research area, as well as some more specialized articles. Often you would have read, skimmed through, or heard of these articles, during your 18 months in your PhD or from previous studies (i.e. MSc, if you're lucky to continue in the same topic). The key to the reading list is to ORGANIZE the list (even making a 'table of content' or outline for the different topics your readings cover) and start making one as soon as you begin your program. You can always refine it later. Often separating articles and book chapters into topics or by your research objectives will help guide your study and make searching for answers to questions easier. Make sure to have a list of all your readings in a 'Reference/Bibliography' format for easy reference/copy paste into your written exam. Better yet, if you have access to referencing software such as 'End notes', (McMaster Library has a list of similar services to all registered students free of charge: <http://library.mcmaster.ca/citation/software-comparison>) use it - it will save you a lot of time in the end. Your reading list will be used by your Comps committee to guide the writing of your written exam questions. It is typically submitted no later than ~ 3 months prior to your written exam.



WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM

## 3. Three months prior to Comps you will have your first PhD Comps Committee Meeting.

During this meeting you get your reading list approved, possibly amended by the Committee. You also submit a draft of your research proposal, including a timeline to completion. Your reading list will be submitted to the Committee a few weeks prior to this first meeting, so that they have a time to review the final version and comment on it during the meeting. At this meeting, the Committee also schedules the date of your written and oral exams (the date being within three months of this meeting date). After that first meeting with your Comps committee, you get into your study mode. From then you have just 3 months to study for the exam AND write-up your research proposal.

**Exam Time**

The PhD Comprehensive exam itself has two parts: a written and oral, both of which you complete within a week. On top of that you must have your PhD proposal ready prior to the time of the written exam.

**Written exam:**

The written exam is the first of the two components and goes something like this:

1. Your PhD proposals are handed in approximately two weeks before your written exam.
2. On the morning of your written exam (usually around 8:30am, you pick-up your question sheet from Sal. The exam is returned to Sal by 4:30pm the same day. Sal will then pass the questions and answers to the committee members the next day via email. You only have 8 hours to complete your written exam from the time you get your question sheet (in a sealed envelope) from Sal. These eight hours include the time it takes to print your answers and deliver them to Sal's office at the end of the day. Often the exam lasts from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm.
3. The accepted standard is that your answers are typed in a Word processor, including a complete list of references you used and any equations, figures or tables. A title page, or at least your name and date in the header of each page of answers and page numbers at the bottom of pages are a good idea also.
4. This exam is open book. So you can have all your reading materials with you (electronic copies are allowed). Note that Sal has a binder in her office with past exam questions. So you can take a look at the material in that binder to get an idea of the type of questions that are asked during PhD comps.
5. You will be given 8 questions; all proposed/written by your PhD Comprehensive Committee, especially for you that is based on your reading list. You must answer any 4 of the 8 questions in the exam.
6. Where to write? Sal will set up a room for you to use and provide a computer and USB key for you to use. In any case, have your reading materials at hand, and be familiar with your surroundings (i.e. where the washroom is and closest route to Sal's office from your exam room. Bring food and drinks with you, so you don't waste time going out to buy lunch in the middle of the exam. Finally, make sure you are not disturbed by others during your exam.

**Oral exam:**

The oral exam takes place one week after the written, so, no, you can't take off on a long vacation right after submitting the written part to Sal! Usually that week is spent improving your answers, in case your "Eureka moment" came after you submitted your answers (happens to the best of us), and also to work out the answers to the questions you did not answer, since

they will be asked during your oral exam. The proceedings for the oral part are something as follows:

1. Orals usually take approximately 3 hours.
2. You and your Committee meet at the scheduled time and place, Sal will coordinate all scheduling. After a brief intro, you are 'kicked-out' of the room for a few moments, during which the Committee decides on the order of questioning. Each Committee member gets two official rounds of questioning to 'terrorize' the student. These rounds last about 15-20 minutes each, with the first round being longer than the second one. Your supervisor also gets to drill you.
3. In the first hour or two, YOU WILL BE ASKED the four questions that you DID NOT answer during your written exam. Then, the Committee may ask you to 'clarify' any of the answers from your written (that is your chance to correct, improve, elaborate, or defend your written answers, having an extra week after the written exam to check them over).
4. In the last hour, the Committee will spend time reviewing your PhD proposal with you, making suggestions, clarifying things, basically approving or disapproving things. This is the time when you defend your proposal.
5. At the end of all the question periods/discussions, you are again asked to leave the room and that is when the Committee decides on a Pass or Fail. Although failing can happen, avoid it at all cost. In case you do fail (one of the components), you will get a second chance (either to re-write the written, re-do the oral), but it is best to avoid that route.

**Proposal:**

Ah, yes, that thing again...Don't forget your proposal! Do not leave writing the proposal to the last day before you have to hand it in. It is very easy to get lost in your readings, and forget about your research proposal, however, it is just as important if not more so. Start it early! Often, as you read through your reading list, you may get ideas and refine your old ones regarding your research objectives/methodology, etc.

Your proposal will depend on your research area and topic (if you're in social or physical sciences). However, in general they all address all or most of the following:

1. Literature review (specific to your research area)
2. Your research Objectives/Hypothesis
3. Methods you intend to use (make sure things are realistic – i.e. that the instruments you propose to use during your research are, in fact, available to you, either from your supervisor's lab or from others', with their permission of course)
4. Preliminary results – any results you may have to-date; including tables, figures, etc.

5. Reference/Bibliography list.
6. Time-line - ALL PROPOSALS will have a 'TIME-LINE to completion', where you indicate clearly your research, writing, conference activities for the duration of your PhD, including the most important date there – your proposed PhD defense day.

Keep one thing in mind, when writing your research proposal and objectives: ask yourself if your proposed work is do-able in the time you set out to do it in. Be realistic.

What about the page limit? Well, that varies in our Department, but anywhere from 15-40 page proposals have been written. Often the shorter (the length/format of NSERC proposals) is preferred by the Committee.

### **Preparing for the Above Madness**

So how do you prepare for your Comps? The key is 'organize, organize, organize!!!' Organize your reading list and pace yourself with your readings. Three months is not that long, but reading through 100 readings is doable.

Very often as students read an article, they will make written notes/summaries of the articles which can be used in the written exam). Making these notes/summaries does take a while, but in the end this may pay-off in time saved during the written. It is easier to review a brief summary than having to re-read the article again. Highlighting or making summary diagrams might also help. You can and should use diagrams/figures/tables in your exam question answers. If you copy from a journal article, don't forget to reference the figure properly.

Another useful thing to do as you read through the list is to make sample questions for yourself (and answering them in writing later). This strategy helps many with exam preparations. And who knows, may be your question will appear on your actual exam!

You will probably find yourself stressed-out during this exam prep-time and during the exam, we all do, but that is not all that bad, it keeps you studying harder. Remember one thing, if you prepare, the exam is DOABLE. You will be fine.


## Other Advice and Suggestions:

- If you have any more questions about PhD Comps or proposal, the writing process, etc, just ask other PhD grad students or professors in the department or speak to Sal.
- During your exam relax! Don't worry too much about your Committee 'terrorizing' you during the oral. More often than not, their questions help guide you to the right answer. The Committee is not there to embarrass you or fail you. After all, once your committee was in your shoes too, so it helps to be courteous to them too, even if you do not necessarily agree on things. And if there is something you don't know (and they may ask you a question to which there is no answer yet then just say so - I don't know)
- Get a goodnight's sleep before your written and oral exams. DO NOT PULL OFF AN ALL-NIGHTER. If you did not finish reading till the day before, than just leave it. Remember that you only need to answer 4 of the 8 written questions at first. Then you'll have a week to catch-up. A well rested/cleared mind will do you better, than trying to cram stuff in to the very last minute.
- Party afterwards! :)
- As an aside, don't just forget all you have studied for the Comps, because during your PhD THESIS dissertation you may be asked about your Comps question or something similar to them/your reading list.
- Also a note on your research proposal: It is never written in stone, it can be amended as your research goes on, but you should not diverge too much from your initial objectives.
- Finally, did we mention "ORGANIZE" ahead of time - it really does help in the end. AND, ask questions if you are not sure!!!

### ANOVA: ANALYSIS OF VALUE

IS YOUR RESEARCH WORTH ANYTHING?

Developed in 1912 by geneticist R.A. Fisher, the Analysis of Value is a powerful statistical tool designed to test the significance of one's work.



am i wasting my time?

The test involves computation of the  $F'd$  ratio:

$$F'd = \frac{\text{sum(people who care about your research)}}{\text{world population}}$$

This ratio is compared to the F distribution with  $I-1, N_I$  degrees of freedom to determine a  $p$ (in your pants) value. A low  $p$ (in your pants) value means you're on to something good (though statistically improbable).

Significance is determined by comparing one's research with the **Dull Hypothesis**:

$$H_0 : \mu_1 = \mu_2 ?$$

where,

- $H_0$  : the Dull Hypothesis
- $\mu_1$  : significance of your research
- $\mu_2$  : significance of a monkey typing randomly on a typewriter in a forest where no one hears it.

Type I/II Errors

The Analysis of Value must be used carefully to avoid the following two types of errors:

- Type I: You incorrectly believe your research is not Dull.
- Type II: No conclusions can be made. Good luck graduating.

Of course, this test assumes both Independence and Normality on your part, neither of which is likely true, which means *it's not your problem.*

WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM  
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## Secrets about the Mac Campus & Hamilton

For a stress breaker, there are nature trails in Cootes Paradise hidden behind the campus. They are most easily accessed by the parking lots located behind the tennis courts near Heddon Hall residence or behind the Brandon Hall residence building. Instantly you find yourself in a ravine forest—a great place to relax and enjoy nature. You may bike or hike along these well marked trails.

For snacking and real meals there is a choice of cafeterias on campus (<http://hospitality.mcmaster.ca>). The best is the hospital cafeteria which has a variety of hot meals everyday. The most convenient cafeteria location is “La Piazza” which is located in the McMaster University Student Center (MUSC). There's a Tim Horton's (coffee & doughnut mecca), a Pizza Pizza, a Pasta Bar “Tomasitos”, a Sandwich/Wrap station, Creation X (who offers up daily dishes and grilled/fried options) and other snacks like sandwiches and soups are located in this area. The MUSC also offers “The Teriyaki Experience”, a smoothie/patty bar and a Starbucks coffee shop. Other eateries on campus include: IAHS café, Fireball Café in JHE, Commons Marketplace, and MacExpresses located throughout the campus. In the Mary Keyes Residence, there is also a bistro-style cafeteria, called “East meets West”. For vegetarians there is Bridges run by the MSU in Rathskeller Refectory across from GSB. There is also the Phoenix, which offers cheap lunches, pubfood and the cheapest pitchers of beer on the west side of Hamilton. There are also a couple of good, affordable off-campus restaurants within a few minutes walking distance of the School. For some off campus birthday fun, hop over to the Snooty Fox in Westdale for a free dinner and drink (on your actual ‘special day’). Or visit the Bean Bar that offers a unique and delicious menu and sumptuous dessert items! You can also celebrate graduation at the Phoenix with a free pitcher of beer!



The Pulse (Mac's fitness/workout centre) is great and affordable way to de-stress year-round (see page 28 for details). Westdale has a movie theatre, cafes, banks, drug store, grocery store, shops and a pub. There is a Boston Pizza on Main Street West, offering good food. Hess Village is a great pub/restaurant hopping place with a good patio scene in the summer and live music all year round (on Main bus routes, 5 minute campus drive or 35 minute walk). For the best advice on where to go and what to see in Hamilton, talk to your office-mates or senior grad students.

## In the Field

As a new grad student at Mac, you may or may not be accustomed to the rigors of field work.

For physical geographers and geologists, time spent working and living in the field can account for almost half the year—it pays to know what to expect. Ask your supervisor or co-workers what conditions are like at your field site, or, if you are working at a new site, be sure to do lots of research on the conditions to expect there. Residential field seasons can mean weeks of cold and/or damp weather, isolation, boredom, danger from wild animals and infectious disease, and poorly prepared food. Don't expect your field season to be one big holiday, no matter what your destination. Be realistic, know what to expect when you get there, and be sure you have the right gear!

### Typical quotes from those who live “in the field”

- “Horrible weather AGAIN today...”
- “Are you SURE that’s not a bear/ alligator/ poisonous snake?”
- “I don’t wanna go! Don’t let them take me!”

Although most human geographers at Mac don't have residential field seasons, there are still important issues to consider when doing field work, mostly concerning personal safety. Do you know the areas in which you are conducting research? Do you feel comfortable working alone, particularly if your research is being conducted in the evenings? These issues are particularly important if you are conducting interviews as part of your thesis, since there ARE a lot of wackos out there. Be sure to discuss any concerns you have with your supervisor, and always be sure someone knows where you are...You are not allowed to enter the field alone. Talk with your supervisor about having a buddy in the field and make sure to fill out all the waivers and paper work for yourself and any visitors before going into the field (ask Sal about the required Field Work paperwork).

# "I'm just doing a Masters" or Halfway Across the Bridge

If you are a new MA or MSC student and aren't sure whether or not academia is your calling in life, relax. There are many of us who share your predicament. Many students are unsure whether or not they want to pursue a Ph.D. Many are left searching for options for the future from a very theoretical thesis that might be viewed as a 'stepping-stone' degree. What do you do? How will this affect your experience at Mac and the course of life after Mac? Here are a couple of things you should keep in mind.

## **Number One: Know what you want**

Don't simply know what you want, make sure you articulate it. Because most Masters programs are two years, you have a short time to both gain focus on what you want to study and figure out where you want it to take you. Try to do this early by exploring options about your plan of study with your advisor, other faculty and, especially, other graduate students (who are perhaps the best resource—they've been in your shoes!).

If your degree is in a theoretical subject and leaves you with little in the way of a marketable skill set for the workforce, you must let your advisor know what your intentions are. If they know what you plan to do with your finished degree, they can help you plan an appropriate course of study. Don't be afraid to tell your advisor if you are unhappy with your topic—maybe you can change or modify it to give you something that will better meet your needs.

## **Number Two: Watch out for streamlining**

Be advised that in articulating that you're unsure about the 'Ph.D. thing' or that you consider this a 'terminal' degree, you risk being streamlined into different treatment from your advisor because of your indecision. Advisors are much more willing to invest time, money and brainpower in students who are certain to continue because those students are seen as a 'safe' investment. However, should you feel that you are being treated differently than other grad students, or that you're getting short shift in terms of your advisor's time and energy, communicate your thoughts to your advisor immediately. You should never feel that your education is being marginalized in any way. This will not always happen, but it is a possibility so don't feel like you're the only Masters student to go through this.

## **Number Three: Know your options**

Always remember that there are other options besides a Ph.D. If going on to do doctoral work is not right for you, don't worry. There is no rule that says you have to do all your degrees in a row. Many choose to delay further graduate work and seek work or go traveling. Remember that at this level it is not intelligence that is the guiding factor but direction and desire. You can always follow up studies later when you have a firmer conviction as to what you want from your future.



# Recommended Readings

Probably the two most difficult parts of graduate school are learning how to manage your time effectively and understanding the advisor-student relationship.

We all know that the main reason that you choose to come to grad school is that you have a fetish for researching things. Let's face it—there should be a 12-step program for us grad students who are obsessed with researching EVERYTHING, understanding EVERYTHING and making the best (right) decision about EVERYTHING. Lucky for us, some kindly folks have put together reference books on EVERYTHING to do with being a graduate student.

We have found the following books invaluable when writing our various theses. We hope that they help you too.

**1. Ogden, Evelyn H. *Completing Your Doctoral Dissertation or Masters Thesis in Two Semesters or Less*. 2nd Edition. 1993. Technomic.**

This is probably the best thesis guide in print. It takes a no-nonsense approach to demystifying the whole thesis development, research and writing. It is very short (about 160 pages), comes with handy checklists to keep you on track, and is written in an easy style and friendly tone. Whenever you feel your panic levels starting to rise, grab this book—it will calm you down and make you feel like you're right on track. There is a copy of this guide in Mills Library.

**2. Madsen, David. *Dissertations and Theses: A guide to Graduate Student Research from Proposal to Completion*. 2nd Edition. 1991. Jossey-Bass.**

Another general guide, though this one is more geared to natural, rather than the social sciences. Therefore, this book is probably more appropriate for physical geographers and geologists, rather than human geographers. Available at Mills Library.

**3. Mauch & Birch. *Guide to the successful Thesis and Dissertation: A Handbook for Faculty and Students*. 3rd Edition. 1993. Dekker.**

A very good, general guide. In terms of content it equals Ogden's book—it just is a lot longer and goes into quite a bit more detail (a good or bad point, depending on how much time you've got). The main goal of this book is to demystify the whole graduate experience. Especially helpful for Masters students are the sections outlining the responsibilities of students, advisors and committees. A good timeline form is provided to help you finish in time. Multiple copies available in Mills Library at McMaster.

## Other books that you might want to check out:

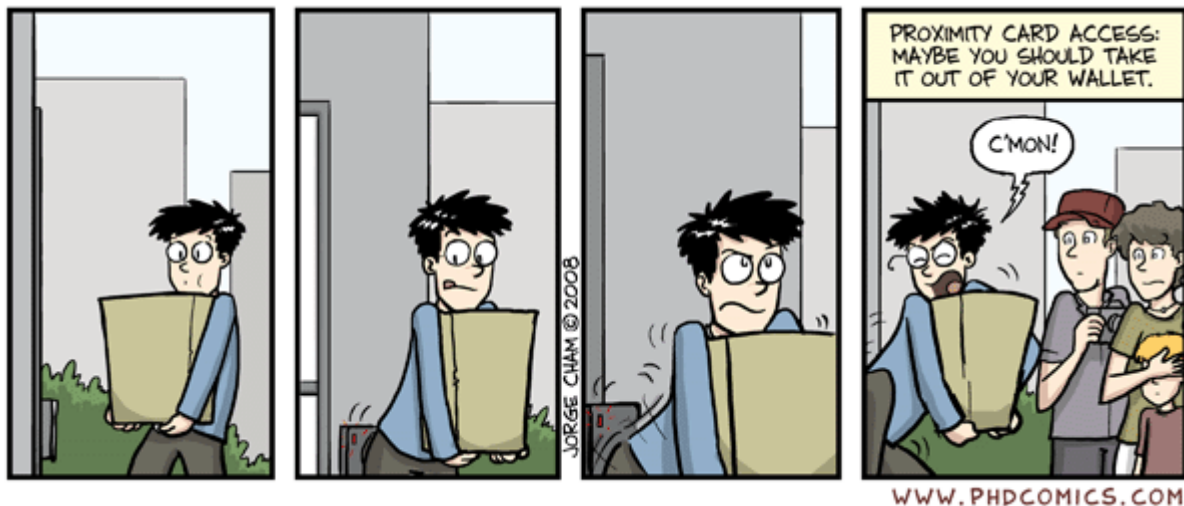
Nickerson, Eileen. 1993. *The Dissertation Handbook: A Guide to Successful Dissertations*. 2nd Edition. Kendall-Hunt.

Rudestam & Newton. 1994. *Surviving Your Dissertation: A Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process*. Sage.

Simon & Francis. 1991. *The Dissertation Cookbook: From Soup to Nuts, A Practical Guide to Start and Complete Your Dissertation*. Kendall-Hunt.

Van Wageningen, Keith. 1990. *Writing a Thesis: Substance and Style*. Prentice-Hall.

Watson, George. 1987. *Writing a Thesis - A Guide to Long Essays and Dissertations*. Longman.



## Graduate Humor

On that night that you cannot write yet another word, or cannot stand another minute of being a grad student, or when you cannot procrastinate another second, or two or three... (you get the picture)... take a moment to check out some of the following websites for a humorous look at graduate life. Some of the funnies in this handbook have originated on these links. Remember that it always helps to know that someone else is in the same place you are!

- <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~danhorn/gradhumor.html>
- <http://www.emory.edu/EDUCATION/mfp/grad.html>
- <http://www.phinished.org/>
- <http://www.phdcomics.com/>

## A Final Note

This handbook is neither exhaustive nor comprehensive. If you have suggestions, ideas, recommendations or comments on how to make this better for next year, please make comments throughout and submit your suggestions to next year's editors. Good luck and have fun!

### The top 10 lies told by Graduate Students

10. It doesn't bother me at all that my college roommate is making \$80,000 a year on Wall Street
9. I'd be delighted to proofread your book/article/chapter
8. My work has a lot of practical importance
7. I would never date an undergraduate
6. Your latest article was so inspiring
5. I turned down a lot of great job offers to come here
4. I just have one more book to read and then I'll start writing
3. The department is giving me so much support
2. My job prospects look really good
1. No *really*, I'll be out of here in only two more years



phd.stanford.edu

# Useful Campus Information & Contacts

## **Student Wellness Centre, MUSC B101**

- x 27700
- [wellness.mcmaster.ca](http://wellness.mcmaster.ca)

## **Student Success Centre, GH 110**

- x 24254
- [studentsuccess@mcmaster.ca](mailto:studentsuccess@mcmaster.ca)

## **Chaplaincy Centre, MUSC 231**

- x 24207
- [chaplain@mcmaster.ca](mailto:chaplain@mcmaster.ca)
- Counselling services

## **CUPE 3906, KTH B111**

- x 24003
- <https://cupe3906.org>

## **Graduate Students' Association (GSA)**

- x 22043
- [gsa.mcmaster.org](http://gsa.mcmaster.org)

## **International Student Services**

- x 24254
- [iss.mcmaster.ca](http://iss.mcmaster.ca)

## **Student Accessibility Services, MUSC B107**

- x 28652
- [sas.mcmaster.ca](http://sas.mcmaster.ca)

## **Ombuds Office, MUSC 210**

- x 24151
- [ombuds@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ombuds@mcmaster.ca)

## **Parking Services, ET Clarke Centre 102**

- x 24232
- [parking.mcmaster.ca](http://parking.mcmaster.ca)

## **School of Graduate Studies**

- x 23679
- [graduate.mcmaster.ca](http://graduate.mcmaster.ca)
- [askgrad@mcmaster.ca](mailto:askgrad@mcmaster.ca)

## **Equity and Inclusion Office, MUSC 212**

- x 20909
- [svrp.mcmaster.ca](http://svrp.mcmaster.ca)

## **Student Financial Aid and Scholarships Office**

- x 24319
- [sfas.mcmaster.ca](http://sfas.mcmaster.ca)

## **UTS (Technology Services), BSB 245**

- x 24357 (2HELP)
- [servicedesk@mcmaster.ca](mailto:servicedesk@mcmaster.ca)

## List of Campus Libraries

There are four libraries in the University Library system that are here to help you with your research, teaching & learning! The combined collections of the libraries total more than 2 million books, 20,000 print and electronic journal titles, and an additional 200,000 e-resources. You can access the online catalogue and database at: [library.mcmaster.ca](http://library.mcmaster.ca)

### **H. G. Thode Library of Science and Engineering**

McMaster University  
1280 Main Street West  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, L8S 4P5  
Phone: (905) 525-9140 x22000  
E-mail: [library@mcmaster.ca](mailto:library@mcmaster.ca)

*Thode houses the collections in all the various disciplines of science and engineering.*

### **Health Sciences Library**

1280 Main St. W., HSC 2B  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, L8S 4K1  
Phone: 905-525-9140 x22327  
E-mail: [hslib@mcmaster.ca](mailto:hslib@mcmaster.ca)

*The HSL is located on the 2nd Floor, Purple Section, of the McMaster University Medical Centre.*

### **Innis Library**

Kenneth Taylor Hall - Room 108  
McMaster University  
1280 Main Street West  
Hamilton, ON, Canada, L8S 4M4  
Phone: (905) 525-9140 x22081  
E-mail: [library@mcmaster.ca](mailto:library@mcmaster.ca)

*Innis supports the academic and research interests of the DeGroot School of Business.*

### **Mills Memorial Library**

McMaster University  
1280 Main St. W.,  
Hamilton, ON, Canada, L8S 4L6  
Phone: (905) 525-9140 x 22077  
E-mail: [library@mcmaster.ca](mailto:library@mcmaster.ca)

*Mills houses the Humanities and Social Sciences collections, with a wide range of print and digital resources.*

Hours of operation for all four libraries can be found online at: [library.mcmaster.ca/hours-info](http://library.mcmaster.ca/hours-info)

## OTHER IMPORTANT LINKS AND RESOURCES OF GRADUATE INFORMATION

**University Policies, Procedures and Guidelines:**

[www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies](http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies)

**Field Research RMM (Risk Management) 801 form and Supplementary Guidelines:**

[www.workingatmcmaster.ca/policy/index.php](http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/policy/index.php)

**Health and Safety Training (required for all TA's/RA's in Lieu):**

<http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/eohss/index.php>

**Supervisory Relationship:**

[https://gs.mcmaster.ca/sites/default/files/resources/supervisory\\_relationshipjuly\\_222016.pdf](https://gs.mcmaster.ca/sites/default/files/resources/supervisory_relationshipjuly_222016.pdf)

**Graduate Work Supervision Guidelines:**

[https://gs.mcmaster.ca/sites/default/files/resources/graduate\\_work\\_supervision\\_guidelines\\_1.pdf](https://gs.mcmaster.ca/sites/default/files/resources/graduate_work_supervision_guidelines_1.pdf)

**McMaster Industry Liaison Office (MILO):**

<https://milo.mcmaster.ca/>

**SGES' Policy and Procedures (Green) Book:**

[https://www.science.mcmaster.ca/geo/images/documents/Policy\\_Procedures\\_Jan2016.pdf](https://www.science.mcmaster.ca/geo/images/documents/Policy_Procedures_Jan2016.pdf)

**Thesis/Degree Completion:**

<https://graduate.mcmaster.ca/academic-services/degree-completion>

**MacPherson Institute (TA resources/courses):**

<https://mi.mcmaster.ca/contact-us/>

**Professional Skills:**

[MyGradSkills.ca](http://MyGradSkills.ca)

## NOTES: