

I, personally, have developed a wonderful relationship with my advisor. She has the skills and motivation to be a great personal and professional guide for me. Many students have not had this opportunity. > Simply put, if there is anything else you think you might enjoy doing, DO NOT go into a doctoral program. The job market is awful. > As far as I can tell, the key to success in graduate school is stubbornness. I have seen many talented people decide that they were no longer interested in the program. A little tenacity will go a long way. > Choose graduate school for the right reasons—because you love to research and wish to teach in the field that you will enter. Since it is incredibly glutted already, realize that you may never get a job in your field. Find ways of keeping yourself fully informed of both the stated and unstated requirements of the program. Have a life outside of the program. Take it one year at a time, and don't feel like a failure if you decide to get out. > Be absolutely sure you love your field enough to give up time, money, effort, and sweat...if you're not 100% certain, do something else for a while. It's a wonderful, exhilarating, horrible, frustrating process; you'll be poor for years, you'll work like a dog, your advisor will probably kick your ego around a bit, so if you're not passionate about your field you'll probably have a hard time. On the other hand, it can be a great experience. I'm glad I did it, but I can't say it's been easy. > There is a big difference between what you expect and what you get. > Be sure to cultivate supportive friends who will help you survive struggles with procrastination, guilt, panic, fear, and discouragement, and who will help you have fun too! > It's not a continuation of college. You'll take longer than you think. You'll be poorer than you think. Realism in place of idealism will serve you best in making decisions along the way. > Prepare yourself for an enormous commitment of both time and money. > Only do it if you're serious. Choose a program that is both rigorous and humane. > I very much enjoy my work and education but was not prepared for the tight job market and the strains and pressures that would create. I'm not sure I would do anything differently but I think my program could have taken some of that pressure off by providing more information on alternative careers. I'm not sure that long-time professors are equipped to do that and I'm not sure they should be. > My career goals remain the same. My perception of how long it will take to attain those goals has changed and, I believe, become more realistic. > Take time off before starting graduate school. I worked for three years before going back, and I feel like that experience made me less anxious to rush through. Don't put your life on hold just because you are in school. Graduate school lasts way too long for that. > Successful completion of a doctoral program consists not only of intellectual capacity but also emotional stamina. > As a chronic over-achiever, I was unprepared for how insecure I would feel as a first-year graduate student. I have since learned that the experience is nearly universal. Some acknowledgement of this, some preparation for how different graduate school would be, may have helped me. > I would recommend that you learn everything you can about the program you're interested in and about the professors with whom you will work. Also, know that it will be a difficult 5-7 years of your life, with little time to devote to other things. Knowing all that, I highly recommend graduate school to those who are willing to put in the work and the time. It is worth it in the end!

AT CROSS PURPOSES:

WHAT THE EXPERIENCES OF TODAY'S DOCTORAL STUDENTS REVEAL ABOUT DOCTORAL EDUCATION

Getting through the program is probably going to be more difficult than you anticipate. Just keep your sight on the goal, and you'll be fine. Realize that most Ph.D. students have to jump through a lot of hoops, and some are ringed with fire. Just DO it, and don't waste energy fighting it. Be honest. Be positive. Always take the high road. > Most prospective graduate students are woefully mis/uninformed as to what graduate school will ACTUALLY do for them. > Your choice of an advisor will have a much larger impact on your graduate school career than either your choice of university or your choice of topic. Also, do not think that there is only one way to accomplish the learning and research involved with an advanced degree. Look for opportunities to go in new directions and explore new possibilities. > Graduate education is designed to create academics, of which there is a gross oversupply. Yet the everyday world of consultants, government, industry, business, pre-college education, etc., needs qualified people. > There should be more career counseling and education about alternative careers. My professor wants his students to go into academics and teach, and this is really all that he knows about. I wish that there would be more support for students who do not want to follow this path, and more contact with people outside of academia. > Students who want to get a Ph.D. should be ready to be trained for an academic job, and realize that Ph.D. programs are apprenticeships for academic jobs. They are not programs for people with general interests in the discipline. > Make sure that your advisor not only has similar academic interests, but is compatible personally as well; he/she has similar philosophies on the graduate student/advisor relationship; shares the same goals for what you should get out of a graduate program; and provides the kinds of emotional support you need to perform your best work. > I have always planned to become a professor at a major research university. The one thing that gives me pause, and increasingly so, is my perception of the job as highly stressful. I do not want to pursue my long-time goal if it compromises my health and happiness. > Try not to accumulate large amounts of debt. While I do not regret this decision, I do not relish devoting a huge chunk of my income over the next ten years to repaying student loans. > Reconsider your decision to pursue a Ph.D. The job market in most fields is poorer than your professors will lead you to believe. > If you find out that graduate school isn't for you, don't be afraid to cut your losses and leave right away, or after only a master's degree. It's much better than spending four or more years of your life doing something you don't want to do, followed by perhaps a career in a field or setting you don't enjoy. > I believe my program is typical of departments around the country. The program has fairly unclear and confusing requirements, especially in regards to completion of the Ph.D. There are a lot of hoops to jump through on the road to completion that have nothing to do with the actual degree. > I started out thinking I might be a professor. However, my first few years of teaching made me despise the profession! I was given no guidance on how to teach a college course (or any course), therefore it was a traumatic experience for me and my poor students! > One of the most difficult things about being a graduate student is being subject to the power of faculty members. I worry that there is often little real mentoring that goes on in graduate school. Many students are left to wander and try to figure out what are reasonable standards to hold themselves to and how they might meet those standards. I suspect that this is linked to the fact that our primary purpose is to provide cheap undergraduate instruction. I don't think there's much real attention paid to graduate students as human beings and as people who need to learn and be nurtured intellectually instead of being judged.