INCOMING GRADUATE STUDENTS:
Important Information For Your First Semester

Beginning your graduate career can be intimidating, nerve-racking, and just plain confusing. From which forms to complete, to where everything is located on-campus, or what to do when it snows – we hope that the tips & tricks provided by current graduate students and the Graduate Student Government will help. In preparation for the start of the semester, you have already received a First-Semester Checklist. If you missed that checklist, or want to be sure you have covered everything, visit this link.

Be prepared for hard work. No one ever said graduate school was going to be easy! Between your coursework, research, participating in departmental events, and other work you should expect that much of your graduate study will be more time intensive than your undergraduate degree work.

Time management. You’ve been successful in being admitted to graduate school and are a good student. By now, you should know best how you work; are you a procrastinator who needs a looming deadline, or someone who needs to break those projects into smaller steps? If you would like a refresher on how to get organized, check out the helpful tips from the Tutor Program on campus.

Find your “spot” to study. Whether you have your own office, you enjoy Fogler Library, or you prefer the Graduate Center on the ground floor of Stodder Hall, find a spot where you can be productive. Some students will tell you it’s best to come to campus and get your work done – if that doesn’t work for you, figure out what does.

Find a mentor. Whether it is your advisor, another faculty member, or a senior graduate student, find someone who is willing to “take you under his/her proverbial wing” and “show you the ropes” – so to speak.

Show initiative with your research. Don’t wait to be handed a research project opportunity by your advisor. Find out what research is going on in your program/department and be proactive.

Know your advisor and don’t be afraid to be persistent. You should have regularly scheduled meetings or contact with him/her on a weekly basis.

Be understanding with your advisor’s time. While it is important to be persistent, you have to learn that taking on graduate students and mentoring them requires a substantial time commitment.

If you are in a thesis program: start writing now! Many parts of your thesis/dissertation may be started without your research data. Most importantly, if you are in a thesis program, be absolutely certain to follow the Thesis Guidelines. Trust us when we say that following the Guidelines outlined by the Graduate School will prevent a huge headache at the end of your program when all you can think about is graduation – or that nice job you’ve lined up!

Treat your Research or Teaching Assistantship like a job, because it is. You aren’t getting a stipend and tuition support “just because you did well in your undergraduate study.” Make the most of this opportunity, as not every student has the chance to be funded (and it is possible to lose your support).
Be nice to your departmental administrative staff! We cannot stress this enough. These are the people who will be helping you the most when it comes to registering for courses, completing the appropriate forms to help get you through your program – or get paid if you are on an assistantship. With that said, patience and a positive attitude go along way when dealing with other administrative offices on campus as well. Try to remember that the staff are here to assist you in every way possible.

Don’t get charged a $50-per-month late fee by not paying your tuition or fees on time. Even if a 3rd party is paying for your tuition – everything may not be covered (e.g. fees). If you aren’t sure what your tuition bill is (or you’ve misplaced the copy that the Bursar’s Office sent), check your Student Service Center in MaineStreet.

Buy some appropriate winter apparel! This is most important for those of you who have never experienced a Maine “winter” season. You can find the following items for a low cost at the Black Bear Exchange, the Orono Thrift Shop, or Goodwill:

- Winter jacket (one that is capable of keeping you warm during at least 0° F weather)
- Hat
- Gloves or mittens
- Scarf
- Insulated Boots

Put 581-SNOW or 581-7669 in your cell phone contact list. Occasionally school will be cancelled due to inclement weather. Why brave the winter elements when you can study from the comfort of your home?

Get to know your fellow graduate students by attending Graduate Student Government (GSG) socials, joining one of the clubs on campus, going to sporting events, or just talking to students in your program. Networking is extremely important – even with those students who aren’t in your program.

Get involved. There are plenty of volunteering opportunities on campus in addition to a variety of events run by Campus Activities and Student Engagement (CASE).

Take advantage of campus resources. Go to a sporting event (check out the goblackbears.com for information), see a show at the Collins Center for the Arts, or use the New Balance Student Recreation Center. As part of the fees you pay each semester, you are able to go to various events on campus for free or at a discounted rate.

Make time for fun. This goes hand-in-hand with time management. Plan times in your schedule when you can take a break with friends. There are plenty of local establishments near campus that have open mic nights, or live performances, if you like crowds and people. Take advantage of the University Nature Trail (or others located around Orono & Bangor), the ocean, Baxter State Park, etc. Whatever you consider fun, there IS plenty to do in Maine.

Go where the free food is! There are various times on campus when the Graduate School, Graduate Student Government, your department, etc. will hold events for the public (or graduate community). Never pass up an opportunity to network and eat the free food!