Why are YOU here?

Certification

Knowledge/expertise in content areas

Other work skills

Get what you need for certain types of jobs

[Delay employment?]

Do it in a timely manner

How is graduate education different from undergraduate education?
Why do Research?

Learn a set of work skill that you can’t get from classes
  • Significant writing task
  • Independent/unstructured work task
  • Do something “real”

Become a true expert in something

It’s the only way to get a PhD

A key concern with doing a research degree:
  • When will it end?
Faculty Effects on Timely Graduation

Faculty do *not* want to keep you here as a perpetual slaves.

Faculty *do* have many conflicting demands on their time that might make them inattentive to your progress.

Faculty do *not* necessarily have good management skills.

Students should be proactive in fostering good management practice by their supervising faculty.
Graduate Research

Steps to a degree:

- Take a bunch of classes
- Find an advisor
- Pick a topic
- Do the work
- Write it up

WRONG! WRONG! WRONG!

This is how to delay (or kill) getting a degree.
Graduate Research: How to be Successful

Initially:
- Don’t just take classes – interact with faculty their students (research groups)
- Attend talks, read papers

Get PhD qualifier (or equivalent) out of the way early.

Identify an advisor early, and get involved in research
- GRA, Independent Study, or volunteer
- Research topic often comes from the work, not work from the topic.

Set deadlines or milestones... And keep them!

Intersperse writing with working
- Documenting literature review is an ongoing process
- Constantly write progress reports
- Publish if possible

Learn how to write!
Picking an Advisor

How *not* to be successful:

- Pick an advisor on one criteria, such as support, research area, or personality.

How to be successful: Pick the best compromise (for YOU!) of the following indicators.

- Research area
- Support opportunity
- Physical environment for getting work done
- Intellectual environment for getting work done
- Peer support system (research group)
- Personality: Interaction at a personal level
- Personality: Management style (hands on vs. hands off)
- Level of attention
- Track record on timely graduation
- Professional advancement
Working with an Advisor

The most important thing is frequent interaction

- Meet often
- Document your progress (in writing)
- Have short and long-term milestones
The Role of the Advisor

• Serves as your mentor
• Serves as a source of technical assistance
• Helps you do the best work you are capable of, given constraints of time, ability, knowledge, etc.
• Helps you find resources you need (financial, equipment, psychological support)
• Helps you prepare for preliminary exam and defense
• “Keeps the Department and other hostile entities off your back.”
• Introduces you and promotes your work to important people in the field
• Gives you advice and direction on your work
• Gives you advice on career directions
• Helps you find a job
The Role of Research Topic in Deciding Your Future Career

Independent Study: None.

Masters Thesis: Minimal.

PhD: As much or as little as you want.

Moral:
- The topic has to motivate you to finish your degree.
- It *doesn’t* need to dominate the rest of your life.

Corollary:
- Don’t obsess. Do work.