

A work in progress...

“The Graduate School Journey”

The Graduate Experience in the Center for Sportfish Science and Conservation

Graduate school will be very different from your undergraduate experiences. The goal of the undergraduate education is to *obtain* knowledge; while the goal of the graduate experience is to *contribute* to the scientific knowledge base. Graduate school is not necessarily about just “the degree,” it is really about a “*Journey*.” Completing certain theses/research tasks or jumping through required hoops (proposals, classes, etc.) are just a very small part of the graduate experience. One chooses this career path because they have a passion for the work and doing fisheries ecology, the other “requirements” (proposals, thesis/dissertation, classes, etc.) are just details (a means to an end) that allow us to do the work we enjoy and contribute to the scientific field. The good news is that if you are doing what you should as a graduate student, the degree just happens along the way. That is “*The Journey*”... the learning process as you become a scientist.

The knowledge you acquire as a graduate student (both in and out of the classroom) will be invaluable throughout your career. You will learn skills and acquire abilities to become a *professional* at all aspects of science at the Master of Science or Doctoral (Scholar) level. That means becoming the authority in your field with a strong knowledge of ancillary areas. You will actually be tested for these abilities during your thesis defense or Ph.D. preliminary exams. To reach this level of expertise will require (and I would expect of you) reading all you possible can about your topic, attending seminars and defenses, scientific meetings, publishing your work, volunteering to help and learn about other related projects, and more. Your experience and success is really what you make of it. The point is - become involved!

The specifics...So, what should you be doing:

As a MS or Ph.D. student, you are progressing from a student to a peer. Take charge of your own education and research. You should be a leading expert on your topic project by the end of your studies (2 years for a MS; 4-5 for a PhD). For your thesis you should develop the idea (in most cases), design, make sampling/experiment plans, keep the laboratory routinely (typically weekly) updated on the progress, and discuss your successes and challenges. As an advisor, I should not have to give you a list of duties necessary for your research, but you should take the initiative in planning all aspects, and I will guide and facilitate you at most steps along the way. The primary role of an advisor is to provide you with the means (funding), mentoring, and guidance to succeed.

Finally, to eventually realize the full potential of what it means to be a “Master of Science” or “Doctor of Philosophy” your graduate education needs to be treated as a priority and a full-time commitment. You and the laboratory working hard as team will ensure you are successful in your studies.

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