SWAN 2004 Student Workshop
Graduate Student Success and Survival Strategies

Generally, I plan to make comments to the effect outlined below. I wish to do this initially, while allowing Sarah and Miguel to add comments as well. Then we will open up the floor for questions, comments, suggestions, etc.

Outline

Choosing a program or school
   Know what you are looking for
   Go to meetings
   Network
   Take advantage of potential field trips
   Make opportunities
   Visit the schools to which you might apply
   Get a person on the “inside” to pull for you

Choosing an advisor
   Read potential advisor’s research papers
   Talk to people who know potential advisor
   Email past and present students of the advisor
   Find out what past students are doing currently
   Get to know your potential advisor personally, if possible

Be prepared!
   Anticipate problems and deadlines, with application AND once in your program
   Learn and know that YOU are in charge of your academic career!

Be confident!
   Believe in yourself and your skills
   Believe in your work ethic
   Concentrate on the positive
   Don’t get caught up in the “whining” and “bashing” that are sometimes present among graduate student groups
   Remember that people you look up to usually are not smarter than you; they have just studied more, and learned more along the way
   Be patient!

Set goals for your performance in your coursework
   If you want a 4.0, go get it.
   Learn to balance effort for courses with efforts on your thesis and dissertation

Read primary research articles, both current and seminal
   Work to wean yourself off of text books…they are for beginners
Research Proposals
Read widely!
Seek advice from fellow students, other professors
Get a draft to your major advisor as soon as possible
Benefits of a research proposal

Know why your work is important, see it in the big picture
Visualize the next steps of your work, larger projects in your system
Concentrate on the current step
Learn to balance what you have to do today, with what you have to do next week,
with what you have to do next year, with what you have to do in 3 years….5 years

Seek funding in as many places as possible
Even small grants for research help you formulate proposals
Go for the biggest grants you can, NSF fellowships, etc.

Publishing
If you intend to stay in academia (research) then you MUST publish
Balance those little descriptive papers with larger ones sent to major journals
Aim high, publish high! Reviews can be very helpful

Take control of your own future
Seek advice, don’t expect it to come to you
Remember, you will make things happen for yourself!

Learn to become a Professional
When writing notes, memos, or letters, make them formal and complete, do not make them look sloppy with poor grammar, typos, etc.
Become involved in leadership positions within your department, graduate school, or scientific societies

Find a hobby to do outside of your schoolwork
This may sound counterintuitive, but it seems that the most productive people are also busy with other things.
Take trips now and again to get away, reflect, and refresh yourself

Don’t take yourself or anyone else too seriously!