

Graduate students: Sources of support now, colleagues later

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Several moons ago, I was a new graduate student at the University of New Brunswick (UNB). Eager to ensure my success in school, I attended the orientation meeting and soaked up all the available information from brochures and talks with veteran graduate students. Now I am in the position where new students look to me for advice about the graduate school journey; inevitably, I begin to reflect back on my own experiences. I could list websites, books, and bits of advice about perseverance and triumph and inspirational quotes best reserved for the insides of a greeting card. However, what sticks out in my mind amid the mountains of good advice was that I was never told that my fellow graduate students would be an integral element to my survival, offering a unique and invaluable form of support. Surprisingly, though, books and other information sources often do not discuss the importance of nurturing a solid working relationship with your student colleagues.

During a graduate school career, there are times when intelligence, dedication, and endurance will be tested; some days are dark and involve daydreams of quitting school to take up llama farming in Peru. Only your fellow graduate students, armed with similar experiences and perspectives, can truly understand. It's comforting to run to an adjacent lab to have a conversation or support session, without having to recreate a backstory or define graduate school lingo. Graduate students are also aware of what not to say during stressful times, that well-meaning and curious family and friends can

sometimes say (i.e., "When are you going to be done??"). Forming these relationships does not mean creating special activities for student bonding, although organizing events and get-togethers can be wonderful opportunities to do so. Often, I have found that my relationships with graduate students formed during our regular schedules: Bonding over the mental preparation for a presentation as we drove to a campus an hour away, or hovering impatiently over a boiling kettle for a quick fix of java. Sometimes words do not need to be spoken, but simply *knowing* that your peers are willing to provide you with encouragement and/or distraction is sufficient.

Despite different programs and respective goals, your fellow students can provide you with knowledgeable empathy, support and distraction to work through any trying times. Does this mean that you have to be best buddies with your fellow graduate students? No. What I am promoting is developing supportive relationships in your workplace, for we will all become colleagues after school. No doubt that many of you have heard of horror story departments where competition is thick and the natural Type A personalities of graduate students shine their dark sides. Although those individuals may get excellent grades, internships or grants, keep in mind that graduate school is about preparation for a future *career*. Taking the time to nurture collegial relationships will continue to pay benefits long after graduation and the marks on your transcripts fade – and help you avoid a career in llama farming.

