



# The FORUM

The Newsletter of the SPSP Graduate Student Committee Fall 2006

---

## Welcome Back!

*At the start of the school year, students are often filled with the nervous excitement of new responsibilities, classes, peers and assignments. It's a time when we can imagine all the possible ways we can make this our most productive semester and subsequently be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of things that need to be done. Despair not! This issue of the FORUM is filled with advice from fellow graduate students who understand the daily grind. Articles will offer information on conferences, teaching, mentors, procrastination, and recent GSC survey results. Hopefully the following articles will serve as an informative break and encourage you as you embark on another year.*

---

## Mentor Relationships: Making them work

While many qualities of a satisfying mentor-mentee relationship follow common sense, other strategies may not seem so obvious. Developing rapport and maintaining contact with a mentor can easily get set aside by students bogged down with more seemingly urgent duties. While being a good protégé takes effort, it is well worth the energy spent in establishing a productive relationship. This article will encourage you to seek out multiple mentors and actively cultivate these connections.

One specific relationship every graduate student has is with an advisor. The degree to which the mentor and the mentee invest in this union can produce varying results. Research has found that positive mentor relations lead to many benefits including development of professional skills and identity, increased satisfaction with training, enhanced networking, higher salaries, and more rapid promotion rates (Huwe & Johnson, 2003). Thus, the benefits not only extend to doctoral training, but to postdoctoral pursuits. When you graduate, the support of an attentive advisor can sometimes mean the difference be-

tween confidently marketing yourself to a variety of viable positions versus wavering among a few possible prospects.

Mentors were not all created equally and have diverse strengths to offer. It is a good idea to link up with multiple mentors who have similar research interests with you. At the very least, you will have another colleague, who can include an experienced graduate student, offering a different perspective than your advisor's view. For example, maybe you are interested in an applied career path, and your officemate is in the process of applying to public health organizations. Sometimes asking for career advice from your fellow students can be more insightful than asking an advisor who has not recently gone through the process. Similarly, maybe you are interested in obtaining a job at a liberal arts school, and another professor in your department has taught in such an environment. Setting up an appointment to ask questions about how to make your application attractive to those schools is one way to begin a relationship that could open doors in the future.

Developing that all important bond with your mentor starts with taking stock

of and cultivating certain personal qualities. In order to elicit your mentor's attention, it is important for you to demonstrate stability, interpersonal skills, and a focus on achievement. Students show in their applications to programs that they have produced tangible, positive results in the form of high GRE scores, high GPA, and promising experience and background. But not all students naturally have qualities that maximize their ability to fulfill their potential. It may be a helpful exercise to think about where your strengths and weaknesses lie in order to improve your contributions to a productive mentor-mentee relationship. But always be mindful that the success of the relationship depends partly on the mentor. While mentors may expect mentees to behave a certain way, no student should tolerate a mentor not contributing his or her fair share. It is best to see how your abilities fit with the qualities of the mentor.

One of the most important qualities of a proficient graduate student is the ability to handle stress. Graduate school is just the beginning of a career full of

*Continued on page 3*

# Avoiding Overstimulation and Exhaustion: Tips for Successful Navigation of Conferences

Attending your first (or twenty-first) conference can be exciting and anxiety provoking all at the same time. On one hand, it is an incredible chance to hear your heroes in the field talking about their brand new research fresh from the laboratory. On the other hand, it is easy to feel information overload when you are attending one academic talk after another for 10 hours a day. Not to mention the anxiety that being in the same building as the “famous” researchers whose work you admire and wondering if you will have to speak to them, or if you even should. Here is some advice for making the most of your SPSP experience whether you are a first timer or a conference veteran.

First, it is okay to feel anxious, everyone does. To avoid any EXTRA anxiety provoking situations here are a few tips.

- Stay in the main conference hotel whenever possible. Doing so allows you a little extra sleep time (which will come in handy!) and gives you an easy escape when it is time for a break. Split the hotel room with colleagues to cut costs.
- Take breaks when you need/want to. It is okay to skip symposium sessions (perhaps not the one your advisor is speaking at!) to sit outside, go for a walk, or just snooze in your room for an hour or so.
- Take care of the basics. Stay hydrated, use the hotel fitness room, eat well balanced meals, and get enough sleep.
- Come prepared. If you are presenting a poster, have it printed prior to traveling to the conference site. If you are giving a talk, make sure your slides are finished and your notes practiced.
- Look through the conference proceedings ahead of time. Highlight the talks you feel are

most important for you to attend and lay out your daily schedule. At the end of each day, look at your schedule for the next day and revise anything as needed.

Let's face it. Socializing is what conferences are for! No matter how shy or nervous you are, for the 3 or 4 days that you are at a conference you must be social. A lot of the anxiety people feel about attending conferences stems from feeling as though they do not know many people. If you socialize early and often this source of anxiety dissipates. Does that mean you have to approach every single famous person in the room and have an intense discussion about their latest research findings? Of course not, save that for when you are on the job market. Instead here are some hints to get your socializing jump started.

- Introduce everyone you know to everyone else you know even if they have nothing in common. They will be grateful to you, and they will remember how socially generous you were and return the favor.
- Attend poster sessions and introduce yourself to people who are presenting. This is a great opportunity to get to know other graduate students who are doing similar work and will be your future colleagues.
- Accept any offers you can for shared meals, especially if it means meeting new people.
- Ask your advisor or other faculty members you know to introduce you to people you really want to meet. It is less intimidating to be introduced to someone than it is to have to introduce yourself.
- Finally, attend events specifically geared towards graduate students! The mentor dessert

the GSC sponsors each year is an excellent opportunity to speak with an expert and other graduate students with similar interests in a less anxiety provoking atmosphere than having to introduce yourself and seek out the experience on your own.

Be an active learner, but remember there are not comprehensive exams at the end of the conference.

- Bring a notebook and pen to symposiums. Jot down research ideas, questions, or people's names, but do not try to write down everything you hear. Take this opportunity to listen and let ideas flow. You can always email people up and ask for the conference presentation or additional publications (and these are nice reasons to follow up with people you'd like to stay in contact with after the conference).
- Attend at least one session that sounds interesting but is not directly related to your current research interests. Some of the most interesting and fruitful ideas come when we consider new perspectives.
- During presentations, pay attention not only to the content but also the way the information is presented. Incorporate what you learn into your own presentations.

Finally, make time to have fun. Go to dinner with people you have not seen in a long time, explore the host city, sit by the hotel pool, or take a nap. This assures that not only will you have made the most of your conference experience, but you also made the most of your little bit of free time away from the daily grind.

-Lavonia Smith-LeBeau

## Mentor Relationships: Making them work (cont. from page 1)

competition and evaluations. Students should strive to show their mentors that they can handle feedback and new challenges. Showing stability also translates into being dependable and accountable as opposed to defensive or distant. Mentors will then be able to invest as much time as possible into your research endeavors and professional development. It is also important to possess adequate interpersonal skills by being conscientious and flexible. The student needs to take into account how s/he fits into the mentor's time and goals. Recognizing that your mentor is a human being, not just a stern gatekeeper or a stressed workaholic, is important to managing this connection. Lastly, students need to show a strong commitment to their mentor and collaborative achievement. This includes making progress from feedback given, being willing to independently solve a problem, and communicating issues clearly. No one expects a student to enter graduate school and be a superstar right from the start. Overwhelmed, overworked students experience self-doubt, depressed mood, and physical stress. But what a mentor wants to get a feel for are the underlying qualities that will see you through the training process successfully.

There are a number of strategies to maintain a positive relationship that you can work on. First of all, students should always try to responsibly follow through on work commitments which serve to validate your credibility. In the event that it is not possible to submit quality work on time, most mentors would prefer an honest discussion of a revised time line. Open and direct communication contributes to fruitful relations. Another strategy to maximize your time as a graduate student is to accept increasing levels of responsibility. As you progress, you should acquire skills that will allow you to take on more independent roles. Certainly you should not agree to more than you can handle, but you can show your mentor a willingness to increase your self-confidence by taking on new challenges. Lastly, students can work on increasing their network of mentors. Having multiple mentors to draw help and inspiration from will only allow students to obtain the most informative guidance. But remember, while every mentor-mentee relationship has its ups and downs, in the end both parties are concerned with your success. So keeping a positive perspective on your interactions and keeping in mind the goals you came

to graduate school with will help keep you motivated.

Every graduate student's probability of meeting career goals to some extent depends on the student's advisor and mentors. Investing in a relationship can lead to a lifelong tie that will serve you beyond your school years. How you handle conflicts and manage your productivity is tied to strategies for maintaining good relations. Even though you may think you are yoked to your advisor, you can still seek out other mentors to counsel you. But more importantly, despite all the things in graduate school that are out of your control, your ability to contribute to your mentor relationships is yours to focus on and refine.

Huwe, J. M. & Johnson, W. B. (2003). On being an excellent protégé: What graduate students need to know. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 17*(3), 41-57.

Elizabeth Lee

## 2007 SPSP Mentoring event: Tell us what you want and who to invite

The GSC is delighted to announce that we will once again be hosting a mentoring event at the 2007 SPSP conference. This event has been hugely successful in the past, with participation (both from mentors and students) growing each year. Therefore, in hopes of continuing our success and in getting a jump start on planning this year's event we would like to ask for some suggestions from our fellow graduate student members of SPSP. As we have done in the past, we

intend to incorporate your wants and needs into the planning for the mentor event so let us know.... Is there a particular Social or Personality Psychologist that you would love to meet? Is there a new (or old) research topic that you would like to discuss with an established researcher and graduate students with the same interests? Or are there any professional development issues you would like to talk about with those who have been there before? Send your

suggestions/requests (for mentors or topics) to Lavonia Smith LeBeau (lxs932@psu.edu) and then watch your GSC listserv emails, the SPSP GSC webpage, and future issues of the FORUM for more details regarding the mentoring event. As a reminder, registration for this event goes out through the GSC listserv and the event fills up fast, so make sure you have signed up with the listserv (<http://www.spssp.org/student/>) so you do not miss out.

# An Introduction to Teaching: Grad student experiences

For any graduate student considering academia as a future career path, gaining valuable teaching experience is important. In addition to looking good on a resume, teaching is a skill that improves with experience. Many students wishing to teach later on as a profession often begin by finding opportunities as teaching assistants and lecturing undergraduate courses. Others apply for part-time teaching positions at local community colleges. Exploring the teaching resources your university has to offer is an important step as well. To date, many programs offer teaching classes and seminars on how to become an effective teacher and plan a course. Fellow graduate students who have undergone the teaching process are also an indispensable resource, as are mentoring professors or faculty. Time and time again, students find that taking advantage of teaching opportunities while in graduate school can provide an ideal platform to hone future teaching skills. It may also help students determine if teaching is something they enjoy doing or not.

Finding and securing a teaching position while still enrolled in graduate school depends on many factors. Students must be willing to seek positions outside their college or university. Also be prepared to apply for teaching a class that might not be a first choice pick. In addition to these suggestions, the following is a list of tips and experiences from graduate students currently teaching classes who are on their way to pursuing academic careers. Their insight may serve to provide a better idea of what to expect from the teaching process, as well as help answer questions on how to get started.

- *Create a simple but comprehensive course syllabus.* As well as explaining course content and grading procedures, a good syllabus will communicate to students the goals of the course, provide an outline of the class for students to follow, explain the details of assignments and lectures, and supply instructor

contact information and office hours.

- *Know the course content backward and forward.* Although perhaps somewhat obvious, graduate students have found that it is crucial to be an expert (or at least appear to be) regarding the subject matter you are teaching. Students ask questions, and preparation is key. Often, sitting in on a class similar to the one you will be teaching is helpful to both review the content of the class and provide an example of how other teachers outline lectures around the material you will be covering.
- *Give yourself plenty of time to create and rehearse class lectures.* Although some graduate students are comfortable teaching a class without doing a “dry run”, the vast majority feel the need to design and practice course lectures well in advance. Initially, it is frequently time-consuming to construct notes, overheads, and slides, so give yourself enough time to create comprehensive and professional materials for class. Additionally, practicing allows you to find typos and become more familiar with the topic you are teaching. It may also serve to alleviate anxiety or nervousness, as well as help you arrive more prepared and confident to class. You may wish to run through every lecture for the course dozens of times before the first day of class has even arrived or simply review your notes for each day’s lecture the night before. The important point to remember is to be honest with yourself and allocate as much time as you need to prepare.
- *Create a positive rapport with your students.* Not surprisingly, graduate students find that a sense of humor, enthusiasm, patience, approachability, and sharing personal and practical examples all help them connect with students in their classrooms.

- *Learn the names of your students as soon as possible.* Whether the class is 25 students or 250, it is important to make an effort to match student names to faces whenever possible. In addition to fostering classroom participation, learning who students are also facilitates that all-important teacher-student relationship. Read over the class roster several times before class, ask students to give a brief introduction of themselves on the first day, call students by name, or print a “map” of the classroom’s seating arrangement and ask students to fill in their names where they are seated.

When teaching a course, many graduate students have also found that arriving early to class and staying late to talk with students is a good idea. It is important to remember that simple things such as rewarding student contributions in class, smiling and having a sense of humor, as well as showing a genuine interest in your students will both encourage classroom participation and help develop your skills as a future professor. In addition to these experiences, many graduate students also enroll in teaching classes or programs such as Preparing Future Faculty (PFF). More information about Preparing Future Faculty and other teaching resources can be found at [www.apa.org/ed/pff.html](http://www.apa.org/ed/pff.html). The American Psychological Association (APA) and other psychological associations also frequently offer preconference workshops and seminars where students can learn the basics of teaching a course.

Graduate school is the foundation for students’ future careers. If teaching seems as though it may be included in those plans, it is important to seek out opportunities to practice a skill set that may not always strictly be learned in the classroom. Practice makes perfect, and graduate school can serve as an excellent podium to springboard any future teaching career.

Vanessa Hemovich

## President's Corner

Hello fellow graduate students! I hope your semester has started well. The Graduate Student Committee has had a very busy summer, culminating with the SPSP executive committee meeting in August. As in previous years, the executive committee has been very supportive of student members and the initiatives put forth by the GSC. I would like to share some areas of discussion from this meeting that are of special interest to students:

### **Symposiums at the 2007 Conference**

The executive board is actively working

towards having multiple symposiums tailored to be of interest to graduate students. Of note, the training committee is sponsoring a symposium on academic writing and the GSC is sponsoring a symposium titled "Advice I Wished I Had Received in Graduate School".

### **Non-Academic Career Support**

The executive board is committed to expanding available information and support for students who choose a career path in a non-academic setting.

This is an area that will get considerable

attention in the coming months, and you can expect more on this topic soon.

### **Summer School**

Plans are well underway for the 2007 SPSP Summer Institute in Social Psychology. This intensive program will take place next summer in Austin, Texas. The institute will feature many exciting classes with prominent researchers, allowing for unique educational experiences. It's a biannual event, so plan to take advantage of this opportunity while you can!

John Edlund

## Avoiding the Pitfall of Procrastination

The summer is over; classes, teaching responsibilities, and meetings have all returned. Often after a long break, one piece of the work puzzle to lag behind the rest is the motivation to actually do the work. The longer you wait, the harder it gets to do and the more work piles up. We all know about procrastination: delaying work, working on low-priority tasks instead of the one big one looming over our heads, or incessantly checking e-mail instead of writing that article.

About 20 percent of Americans classify themselves as chronic procrastinators (Marano, 2003). Contrary to public opinion, procrastinators aren't just lazy. According to Dr. Joseph Ferrari, a Psychology Professor at DePaul University, cognitive distortions such as overestimating time to perform tasks and our future motivations ("I'm sure I'll want to read those articles tomorrow"), and the belief that we will work better if we are in the mood play a large role. For some people, it may be that they work better under pressure (the arousal procrastinator) and need the pressure of a deadline to act. For others, it may be that they fear making a mistake and would rather not act than do so incorrectly (the avoidance procrastinator). Sapadin and Maguire

(1996) have identified six distinct styles of procrastinators: *the perfectionist* who can't stand to do something if it isn't going to be perfect, *the dreamer* who can't stand the details but loves the ideas, *the worrier* who fears changing, *the defier* who hates expectations and deadlines, *the crisis-maker* who finds problems in any project and *the over-doer* who just takes on too much to every finish anything on time. Any of these profiles sound like you? You can also go to ([www.drsapadin.com/quiz/quiz\\_beat.php](http://www.drsapadin.com/quiz/quiz_beat.php)) to take a quiz to find out which kind you are.

A number of psychologists (Ferrari, Johnson & McCown, 1995) have suggested strategies for getting back in the groove of work and avoiding procrastination. Here we present some suggestions adapted from their book *Procrastination and Task Avoidance: Theory, Research, and Treatment* to get you back on track this academic year.

1. Make a list of everything you have to do. Be careful about this as making lists in itself can often be a form of putting off doing work. So make a brief list including a priority and due date for each item.
2. Write an intention statement and

stick to it. Have goals for the day or week and try to accomplish everything on your list. If you can't accomplish everything, you may be setting unrealistic goals. Use that knowledge to reevaluate your goals and how much time you think they might take to accomplish. A good rule of thumb is to estimate how long you expect a task to take and then double it.

3. If tasks are scaring you because of their size (or their possible impact...such as a dissertation), break the task down into more manageable chunks and work on only one chunk at a time. This will reduce your anxiety and also keep you focused on the chunk that you are working on without being overwhelmed by the whole project.
4. Make your tasks meaningful. Figure out what the ultimate goal of the task is and use that as motivation. If you have a pile of data to enter, remind yourself that the final outcome will be a publication. You can also use more tangible reinforcements, such as promising yourself a reward for completed work. This reward can be as simple as going out to dinner or just taking a short break during the day.

*Continued on page 6*

More at [www.spasp.org/student](http://www.spasp.org/student).

## Procrastination (cont from page 5)

5. Eliminate tasks that you know you will never do. By keeping these tasks on your list they will just be a source of anxiety and take your energy away from what really needs to get done.
6. Use the 15-minute rule. Even if you don't want to do something, try it for just fifteen minutes, and then decide if you want to continue doing it or would rather stop. More often than not, this strategy will work. Once a task is started, it is easier to stay involved.
7. Watch out for time killers, little tasks that seem productive, but really are just a way to avoid doing a more pressing task. Activities that could be construed as work-related, such as looking for jobs when you are still a few years away from being on the market or looking up articles by other students in your program may make you *feel* like you aren't wasting time, but they are just as detrimental as

playing another game of solitaire or minesweeper.

8. From virtual sticky notes to work-flow programs, there are a number of computer programs to help you if organization is an issue. But these programs will only work as well as you let them. Make the effort to take a few minutes at the end of each day to organize and plan for the next day so that you can hit the ground running.

So if you are having a hard time getting back into the swing of things, try out some of these tips...and get back to work!

### References

- Ferrari, J.R., Johnson, J.L., & McCown, W.G. (1995). *Procrastination and task avoidance: Theory, research, and treatment*. New York: Plenum Publications.
- Marano, H.E. (2003, August 23) Procrastination: Ten Things To Know. *Psyched for Success*. Retrieved July 6, 2006 from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/pto-20030823-000001.html>

Sapadin, L. & Maguire, J. (1996). *It's About Time!: The Six Styles of Procrastination and How to Overcome Them*. New York: Penguin Books.

### Resources

Ellis, A., & Knaus, W.J. (1979). *Overcoming Procrastination: Or How to Think and Act Rationally in Spite of Life's Inevitable Hassles*. New York: Penguin Group.

- <http://www.hottnotes.com> (a virtual stick-note program for making lists of tasks)
- <http://www.mylifeorganized.net> (a to-do list with priority for each task)
- <http://www.webjillion.com/archives/2005/08/01/free-software-temptation-blocker/> (a program for the chronic internet user that will block out certain programs for a specified period of time)

David Portnoy

## Important Submission Dates!

Be sure to apply for the 2007 Student Travel Award Competition if you have a poster or symposium paper accepted! The application is due October 15, 2006. Please see the full announcement ([www.taramillerevents.com/spsp2007/awards.htm](http://www.taramillerevents.com/spsp2007/awards.htm)) for further details.

### Upcoming Submission Deadlines

American Psychological Society	TBA
Eastern Psychological Association	TBA
Midwestern Psychological Association	11/1/2006
New England Psychological Association	TBA
Rocky Mountain Psychological Association	1/15/2006
Southeastern Psychological Association	10/3/2006
Southwestern Psychological Association	11/14/2006
Western Psychological Association	11/15/2006

*All content in this newsletter was written by members of the 2006/2007 SPSP Graduate Student Committee. Elizabeth Lee served as editor. Layout and design were implemented by Camille Johnson.*

## International Concerns and Conference Survey: Results and a New Website!

Sincerest thanks to everyone who participated in the GSC's latest survey! The survey was aimed toward understanding some of the characteristics of student members and improving the resources we provide. In the first part of the survey, we asked international and U.S. graduate student members to answer questions regarding international work/study. In the second part of the survey, we asked for information on students' conference involvement.

**Participants:** The total number of respondents was 118 (58 international, 60 U.S.). The modal number of years students had been in school was 3 years and the range was from 1 to 6 years. The majority of respondents (73%) were female. International respondents represented a wide geographic area with 40% from Europe, 26% from Asia/Middle East, 22% from Canada, 7% from Australia, and 5% from South America.

### ***International concerns survey***

Approximately one third (34%) of international respondents were studying in the U.S. Most (76%) either planned to or have considered doing a post doc position in the U.S. and fewer (45%) either planned to or considered working in a U.S. academic position. U.S. students were also interested in work or study abroad. Some students (28%) planned to or considered study abroad, half (50%) planned to or will consider a post doc abroad, and about half (54%) planned to or considered work abroad. It appears that there is a sizable interest in international work or study for both student populations.

Lastly, the survey asked for feedback on information the GSC could provide. Suggestions included offering an FAQ on international travel, an online networking forum, professional development tips, study/work announcements, and especially funding information.

**Outcomes:** The immediate outcome of the international work/study survey was the establishment of a website for

students within the U.S. or abroad to access pertinent links. The website is broken down into a section geared for international students interested in work/study in the U.S. and a section focused on U.S. students interested in work/study abroad. There are links to funding sources, traveler information, VISA regulations, school and program lists, conference calendars, job searches, international psychology associations, relevant APA links, and much more. The website will be linked to the SPSP website ([www.spssp.org](http://www.spssp.org)) soon! Thanks go out to those who offered suggestions for the website. If you have questions/suggestions about the survey or the website, feel free to contact Elizabeth Lee ([eal178@psu.edu](mailto:eal178@psu.edu)). Also some exciting plans are underway to establish scholarships for international students hopefully in time for the SPSP conference in 2007. So keep an eye out for an update on that initiative in future FORUM issues.

### ***Conference involvement survey***

The intent of this survey was to compare characteristics of international students' conference involvement with that of U.S. students. Almost half (47%) of international respondents and a little more than two-thirds (68%) of U.S. respondents attended SPSP this year. International SPSP attendees spent an average of \$1050 (U.S. dollars) total on conference costs while U.S. attendees spent an average of \$750. The modal response of all respondents for number of conferences attended per year was 2 conferences. Comparing attendance at the APA conference, few international respondents (5%) and some U.S. respondents (17%) have ever attended APA. The SPSSI conference was more popular with about a quarter of international respondents (24%) and some of U.S. respondents (5%) reported attending it. Some international respondents (17%) and most U.S. respondents (63%) have ever attended regional U.S. conferences. Regarding

more dedicated involvement, one-third (31%) of all respondents have been on an organizing committee for some kind of conference event. These encouraging results suggest there is a healthy level of international and U.S. student involvement at conferences. The more diverse the backgrounds of students attending conferences, the more students can gain insight on different perspectives from each other's work. Hopefully, the results from this past survey have been interesting and informative. The GSC strives to be receptive to the concerns of and to provide as much support as possible to all graduate student members.

Elizabeth Lee

## Current GSC

### President:

John Edlund  
[jedlund@niu.edu](mailto:jedlund@niu.edu)

### Members-at-Large

David Portnoy  
[david.portnoy@uconn.edu](mailto:david.portnoy@uconn.edu)

### Elizabeth Lee

[eal178@psu.edu](mailto:eal178@psu.edu)

### Lavonia Smith-LeBeau

[lx932@psu.edu](mailto:lx932@psu.edu)

### Vanessa Hemovich

[Vanessa.Hemovich@cgu.edu](mailto:Vanessa.Hemovich@cgu.edu)

### Past President:

Darin Challacombe

[djchallacombe@scatcat.fhsu.edu](mailto:djchallacombe@scatcat.fhsu.edu)