

Assistant Vice-President, Ben Bradshaw's welcome message to incoming graduate students.

University of Guelph New Graduate Student Orientation, Fall 2020

Transcript:

Hello everyone and welcome to graduate studies at the University of Guelph. My name is Doctor Ben Bradshaw and I serve as the Assistant Vice-President for Graduate Studies here at the University. Normally I'd be welcoming you at a live graduate student orientation event, but this year we've had to move orientation online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the next few minutes and using a few slides that I've prepared, I'd like to outline graduate studies at the University of Guelph and offer you a few tips for your success.

Much of what you will learn during this graduate student orientation is available on the graduate and postdoctoral studies website, and I encourage you to go there regularly throughout your degree program.

And for international graduate students in particular, I encourage you to regularly visit the Guelph International website, which will be your home especially for student life events.

This slide offers you a snapshot of graduate studies at the University of Guelph as of last fall. You can see that we had well over 3000 graduate students spread across all 7 colleges and of those graduate students 19% were international. That's a deliberate effort on our part to grow our international student populace in light of their obvious contributions to the research enterprise. We also can see that there are a greater number of female students than male, and those that identify as something other. You can also see that about 2000 of our graduate students are Master's studying a Masters program and about 1000 are completing a PhD.

At the University of Guelph we offer a number of different graduate degrees and I'd like to outline those and give you a sense of what their expectations are in terms of their outputs and their timing. Starting first with a graduate diploma, these are typically completed based on just courses that range anywhere from four to six in total and are completed over two to four semesters. We also offer a Master's by coursework exclusively, and these programs are typically completed in anywhere from three to six semesters. Some of those Master's by coursework will substitute a major research paper for two of those courses, and that major research paper is typically about 60 pages in length and involves only limited primary research. Many of you will be starting a Master's by coursework and thesis, and that thesis replaces much of the coursework. Indeed, some programs may have as few as three courses coupled with a thesis. At the Master's level, a thesis is typically about 100 pages in length if it's a monograph or about 80 pages in length if it includes one or two manuscripts which are ready for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Unlike the major research paper, a thesis involves a great deal more primary research and is typically empirically robust.

Finally, we have doctoral degrees and the doctoral degrees typically take anywhere from 9 to 12 semesters to complete and manifest in a monograph that is anywhere from 150 to 250 pages in length, or if you're going with the manuscript model, 3 or 4 publishable manuscripts, and that would run in the order of about 150 pages in length. Compared to the Master's thesis, a PhD is always more theoretically robust and certainly empirically significant as well, and most importantly should advance knowledge within a subdiscipline.

Please allow me to take just a moment to speak to those of you who have chosen the University of Guelph to complete a PhD. We are honored that you've joined us for this purpose. I'm sure you're asking yourselves what is my expected outcome with a PhD? Unquestionably, this is a period of transition in all universities around training of PhDs and many are asking whether we're best to train you for the Academy or to train you for the non-academic professional workplace, please know at the University of Guelph we are committed to supporting both these ends.

Some of you are already aware of your intended final place, but others may not be so sure, so you'd be wise to do both important work within your subdiscipline, but also to develop those professional skills that you need to be successful. Many have overstated, if you will, the challenge of securing a University position post-PhD. The most recent evidence we have from Ontario, which tracked PhD graduates from 2009, found that by 2015 50% of them had work within the academy; 30% as tenure track faculty members and another 20% who are working as full-time researchers. So, for those who have heard figures as small as 12 or 14% of PhDs who go on to join the professoriate, please know that this is an exaggeration. At the same time, you have to be smart enough to know that not all of you will be securing academic positions, and indeed not all of you wish to do so. So now is a good time to be thinking about what you need to transition from the academic environment with a PhD in hand to a non-academic environment.

In support of making that transition, the University of Guelph has for a long time invested in the provisioning of professional skills development for graduate students. We recently completed an exercise to itemize all those efforts and to ensure that we're communicating them to you effectively and all of that information is available to you through the Grad Pathways website, which I would encourage you to visit. There you'll find links to LinkedIn Learning, and the Aurora service, which we subscribe to as a means to provide guidance for those of you interested in transitioning from academic to professional workplaces, and interestingly, that guidance comes from recent graduate students who successfully have made that transition.

And for those of you who worry that our learning outcomes that we expect of you through a graduate degree are dissimilar to what employers are looking for, let me reassure you that in fact there's a great deal of overlap. You can see that our 2013-defined graduate learning outcomes bear some resemblance to what employers are increasingly looking for from recent graduates. The ability to communicate, the capacity for leadership, exercising creativity, and on occasion, even entrepreneurship, being able to mobilize knowledge and of course display

the highest level of ethics. So, while you're completing your graduate degree with us, whether it's a Masters, PhD or graduate diploma, please lookout for these opportunities to develop the professional skills that will make you successful within the Academy and beyond.

One of the most significant tips I can offer you today is to think quite deliberately about why you're here. What is it that you expect your graduate studies to enable? A graduate degree is a significant investment, especially for those of you who are completing a PhD, so it's important that you know why you're doing the degree. What is it that you're seeking to get out of it? It's not only for your motivation, but to be able to direct you to particular resources while you're completing your degree. And please know that there's a variety of reasons why one might pursue a graduate degree. For some of you, it may all be about knowledge advancement, especially from PhD students, and your vision is authoring, first-authoring in particular, a journal article that will change the way we think about a phenomenon. For some of you, it may be that you've been working for awhile and you're looking for a chance to draw on other elements of your cranial capacity and to ultimately think for awhile and that too is a legitimate reason for pursuit of a graduate degree. Some of you may be excited to mobilize existing knowledge, recognizing that that's one of the barriers to improve practice in a whole number of areas of society and governance, and that too is a legitimate activity. Some of you may be on a track towards being an academic, and so you want to do everything you can to achieve that goal. Some of you might be simply interested in learning and are taking a number of courses in a course-based program because you want to expand your knowledge base, and others might be of course thinking about advancing their professional career opportunities, and we have a number of programs that are oriented to that end, so please think about why you're here and then you can better develop a plan of study that will enable you to achieve that.

So, you already heard one of my most important tips and I really suggest that indeed you think about why you're here, and then you strategically plan and execute for that end game if you will. But I have a few other tips I'd like to offer you quickly. One is to read the graduate calendar, and in particular that section of the graduate calendar which focuses on the responsibility of advisors, advisory committees, and graduate students, and offers mediation procedures in those rare occurrences where a graduate student might run into conflict with an advisor. That section of the graduate calendar is available online, as is the entirety of the graduate calendar, and really in the first month you're wise to read that. You should also get to know your graduate program assistant and coordinator at the department level, and I know that most departments will be reaching out and offering some kind of an orientation event equivalent to this, during which you'll probably meet your graduate program assistant and your coordinator. In the case of the coordinator, this is the faculty member who's got a teaching release in order to ensure that all of you are functioning effectively within your graduate studies. The graduate program assistant is an administrative assistant who can help you to complete the many forms that are required for the completion of a graduate degree. And certainly reach out to both the graduate program assistant and coordinator whenever you have questions or concerns; do so early.

The other group that you must connect with is the Graduate Student Association, not just when you need help, but to reach out to them to hear about some of the events they're running and graduate student life. I encourage you as well to access resources I've already identified; some of our professional development resources, but also to look to the Learning Commons, which is available through the library through health services, the gym and the athletic facilities. I know that when COVID-19 ends we all want to get back to a little bit more activity. So I encourage you to practice work- life balance wherever you can, including getting outside and recognizing that while we certainly want you to treat your graduate degree as a professional undertaking, you don't need to dedicate 70 plus hours a week to it. You need to practice work-life balance. And finally let me suggest that it's really important that you're ambitious in your studies, but also think about the ways in which your studies might connect with the wider world.

Let me offer you a couple of examples of the ways in which our current graduate students have sought to connect to the world as a complement to their own graduate studies. The first is Aaron Fairweather, who is featured in a CBC article recently because of his discovery at the Kennedy Lakes of an extremely rare slave-making ant. This kind of identification of rare species was a complement to his doctoral studies, and something that Aaron very much enjoys. Much of his additional or complementary work is featured in his Twitter feed, which I encourage you to check out @InsectAaron.

Here is another wonderful example of one of our graduate students connecting with the wider world. Danah Elsayed was successful in a SSHRC Storytellers competition where she converted her own thesis into a form that was far more accessible for the wider world. She is one of those finalists that will compete for a coveted prize. It's a great example of seeing the ways in which your perhaps even narrow research interests might connect with those across the country and across the world who will have an interest. So, I encourage you to do that.

That's it for my suggestions. Thank you so much for taking the time to join in this graduate studies orientation for Fall 20. Again, I wish I was doing it in person, but this will have to suffice and I know that there will be a day soon when we can all be on campus and I'll be able to run into you somewhere on campus or an event, and I very much look forward to that. Cheers.

[End of Transcript]