

GRADUATE STUDENTS'

DISORIENTATION GUIDE 2019



THE UNIVERSITY
OF PENNSYLVANIA

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Entering graduate school is an exciting time; for many of us, we are pursuing our dreams and passions in a dynamic environment surrounded by like-minded collaborators. But unfortunately educational institutions often reflect the biases and problems of our times. One problem at Penn is simply the problem of simply navigating the complicated bureaucracy. When we arrived at Penn, we realized that we learned the most about how to do things not from administrators, faculty, or staff, but from fellow students. Our ability to figure out simple things like how to get paid or how to pay taxes hinged on being surrounded by knowledgeable-enough students.

On top of the opaque, complex, and sometimes counterintuitive bureaucracy at Penn is the fact that graduate students exist in a gray space between student and worker. We are not treated as customers like undergraduates at the institution are, but we do not have the protections that employees around the country and at Penn are guaranteed. This arrangement puts graduate students in precarious situations. No matter how brilliant and intelligent we are, we are often one serious illness, one lecherous professor, or one unexpected family emergency from jeopardizing our funding or enrollment.

We put together this guide to give everyone a leg up on getting through Penn. We did research, asked friends, and tried to come up with the best answers we could find for students across the various graduate schools (there are 12!) and try to bridge knowledge between students in different fields. Graduate school can be a tricky time, but in the end, we are as strong as we are together. We encourage you to join us in supporting graduate students as workers in the graduate student union GET-UP (Graduate Employees Together at the University of Pennsylvania), which will be putting together more resources for students, taking up issues related to healthcare and childcare, and working to end sexual harassment on campus. Learn more by emailing us at pennggetup@gmail.com. >>

THE DISORIENTATION EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE
GET - UP

DID YOU KNOW?

Many students won't receive their first paycheck until the end of September

FUNDING AT PENN

THE "MONTH OF POVERTY"

- At the beginning of the school year, many graduate student workers shoulder moving costs, living expenses, and security deposits for housing without an income.
- Those who are international, have families, or come from lower socio-economic backgrounds are particularly affected.

I arrived at Penn in debt because I was responsible for covering the costs of accommodation, international flights, living expenses, and class materials. I didn't receive my first paycheck until a month after the semester started. **For those of us who come from abroad, the financial burden can be staggering.** I'm at the end of my second year and I still haven't paid off that debt. —Gabriel Raeburn, School of Arts and Sciences


GUARANTEED FUNDING VS . TIME TO DEGREE COMPLETION

- On average, it takes more than 6 years to complete a PhD at Penn.
- Not all funding packages are equal: 5 years of funding are guaranteed at the School of Arts & Sciences, Annenberg School for Communication, & Wharton Business School, 4 years at The School of Social Policy & Practice, Graduate School of Education, and School of Design and only 3 at the Nursing School.
- Classes at Penn are often not guaranteed until a minimum enrollment has been met, which makes financial planning stressful and can lead to long-term mental health issues.

After my funding ran out, I was offered the opportunity to teach a course in the Architecture Department. The class got cancelled because of low enrollment, **but I still had to pay the University thousands of dollars** in tuition, fees, and health insurance. —Graduate Student, School of Design

UNCERTAINTY AND INSECURITY

- Graduate student workers are unprotected from uncertainty created by federal funding and policy changes and exposed to rises in cost of living.
- In lab sciences, loss of grant funding puts graduate student workers at risk being forced to leave their programs.
- Philadelphia's cost of living has risen at the second-fastest rate in the nation, but no school at Penn received a commensurate increase in their stipend.



What if my funding runs out before I complete my degree?

We strongly encourage you to ask your colleagues in later years how they got funding and pool together information and resources for later year funding with other graduate students in your program.

I'm living off of savings while I write my dissertation. I'm also supporting my wife through a masters' degree, and if it weren't for assistance from our families we wouldn't be able to pay our rent. [...] **I sacrificed financial security for my degree.** Unless my wife can find a job next fall, we'll be running out of money around September. —Aaron Freeman, Linguistics, School of Arts and Sciences

MENTORSHIP AND ADVISING

The process of seeking a faculty mentor or advisor varies across the disciplines, according to the stage we've reached in progress towards our PhDs, and also according to our personal situations. In some disciplines, we enter with clearly delineated research projects and are attached to specific faculty PIs. In others, we enter without a defined research project, but with a definite historical or theoretical area of interest and with one or several potential advisors in mind.

The University of Pennsylvania provides the following guidelines for students, faculty, and administrators about advising and mentoring PhD students: <https://catalog.upenn.edu/graduate/academic-resources/advising-mentoring/>.

HIGHLIGHTS

INTRODUCTION

- "While some graduate groups may assign an advisor to a student upon admission to the program, in many graduate groups the responsibility for finding a dissertation advisor rests with the student."
- "A student undertaking dissertation work needs an advisor who will be not only academically competent in a particular area but also willing to act as the student's advocate when necessary."

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- “There is a significant power differential in the student/advisor relationship, but the very nature of the relationship and the academic enterprise requires that ideas and assumptions may be challenged.”
- “Not all conflict can be resolved informally. If you have tried your best but you have not resolved the issue, follow the recommended route to a more formal resolution.”
- “Recognizing that issues of bias, harassment and/or violence can be particularly sensitive, Penn provides several Confidential Campus Resources that can help students sort through options and decide whether and how to make a formal report.”

SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

- Be proactive.
- Set expectations and communicate clearly with your advisor to figure out what you need as an advisee and what you need from your advisor.
- Try to find other faculty members that you can also ask questions and bounce ideas off of.
- Ask students further along for advice on navigating relationships in your specific department.

For related resources, see sections on Intellectual Rights, Reporting Sexual Misconduct, and Mental Health

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AT PENN

When my adviser came onto me, it was in a public, professional setting and I was humiliated. He had been drinking and never brought it up again, so I'm not even sure he remembers. I went to my grad chair but was told that if I made a formal complaint, my anonymity would not be guaranteed. My grad chair told me that since I am graduating in December and will need letters of recommendation from my adviser for the job market, **I should "think carefully" about filing a complaint because it might affect my career. I didn't know where else to turn and felt completely alone. As it stands now, nothing has changed, and no concrete actions have been taken.** — Graduate Student, School of Arts and Sciences

The organizational culture and structure of Penn and academia in general lead to a tolerance for sexual harassment through risks related to reporting, lack of transparency and sanctions, and fear of retribution and not being taken seriously. Failure to appropriately address cases of sexual harassment in the past at Penn and acting only in response to the pressure of student organizing has given students the message that the university does not prioritize preventing and actively responding to sexual harassment. In Spring 2019, Penn released a new sexual misconduct policy that continues to uphold a climate permissive of sexual misconduct. Additionally, the administration failed to communicate what changes resulted from the comment period and who was involved in drafting the policy. This process speaks to the opaque and unresponsive nature of Penn when it comes to crafting policies that will protect victims of sexual misconduct and shape a healthier campus culture.

If you would like to join the movement for more equitable learning and working environments on campus, please contact Penn Coalition Against Sexual Misconduct (CASM) at penncasm@gmail.com

DID YOU KNOW ?

- Confidentiality protections are not as robust if you report sexual harassment as opposed to other forms of sexual misconduct.
- There are no clear guidelines of who receives training and when for receiving reports of sexual misconduct, and University-sanctioned trainings often focus on liability instead of supporting survivors.
- There is no clear system for tracking patterns of sexual harassment to identify and appropriately sanction serial offenders.
- Sexual harassment is treated in legalistic terms that do little to protect people who come forward.
- There are no clear appeals process in sexual misconduct hearings if you feel you've been treated unfairly or that the investigation or hearing has been biased.
- Deans are still involved in investigating instances of sexual harassment perpetrated by faculty, despite their inherent conflict of interest as representatives of the university's interests.

RESOURCES

Reporting:

- Title IX Office (Internal)
- Department of Public Safety (Criminal)

Non-confidential Support:

Trusted faculty and staff

Confidential Support:

Penn Women's Center, Penn Violence Prevention, Counseling and Psychological Services, Office of the Chaplain, LGBT Center, Office of the Ombuds, African American Resource Center, Student Health Services

Scan the QR code for contact information via Penn Violence Prevention.



REPORTING RACIAL BIAS ON CAMPUS

"After a racially motivated incident between students and a department administrator, I spoke to the administrator about what occurred. This administrator wields a significant amount of institutional power within the department, including overseeing finances such as stipends and reimbursement for graduate students. Since our conversation, my reimbursements have been delayed significantly despite multiple emails and other forms of communication. **It is clear that the delay in processing is related to this incident and I am concerned about being further racially discriminated against by this administrator.**"—Graduate Student, School of Arts and Sciences

What Happens If You're the Victim of Racial Bias?

While the University of Pennsylvania claims diversity and inclusion as one of its key values, often the experiences of graduate students of color show how much work the institution needs to do on this front. If you are a victim of racial bias or harassment, all procedures are handled through the Office of Affirmative Action & Equal Opportunity Program. There is no single grievance procedure.

- You can submit a bias motivated incident report online here: <https://diversity.upenn.edu/diversity-at-penn/bias-motivated-incident-report> (Anecdotally sometimes these reports are *never responded to by the university.*)
- You can file a student grievance that specifically deals with violations of Title VI, Title IX, or the Rehabilitation Act via the Office of Affirmative Action.
- You can file an academic grievance, which only pertains to your performance in classes, but these are through each school.

Seems confusing? It sadly is! Strides on campus around race, harassment, and diversity issues have been made by the often uncompensated and under-recognized work of affinity groups, such as BGAPSA, LAGAPSA, and PAAGSA. Most graduate students who have gone through this process recommend drawing on their support and finding an administrator in the OAA who you can talk to directly.

UNDERGRAD ORGANIZING AT PENN

There is a long history of activism among undergraduates at Penn addressing a wide variety of issues, both on and off campus. As their teaching assistants, supervisors, and fellow students, graduate students can support undergraduates in their intellectual and political development and education and contribute to these organizing efforts. Some of these include:

PILOTs at Penn

As technically a non-profit organization, Penn does not have to pay property taxes. Many entities, including other Ivy League universities, instead offer to pay payment in lieu of taxes (PILOTs) to support their municipalities. Community and Penn activists have fought for Penn to pay millions of dollars in PILOTs to help support the city of Philadelphia, such as its school district.

Penn & Slavery Project

Despite previous denials of any involvement with slavery at Penn, a group of undergraduate researchers have spent the last couple of years demonstrating that this is not true, prompting statements from President Amy Gutmann and further research.

Student Action Labor Project

This group fights for the rights of workers at Penn, including but not limited to the dining hall workers and security team workers who we all encounter daily as we navigate our lives across campus. They organize political education and advocacy events.

Fossil Free Penn

FFP pushes Penn through direct action and education to divest from the fossil fuel industry. They highlight how Penn's involvement with fossil fuels counteracts efforts against climate change.

Penn Association for Gender Equity

PAGE promotes gender equity and justice for all women at Penn with inclusive programming and the creation of spaces for marginalized women.

DID YOU KNOW?

Around 1/3 of graduate workers at Penn come from outside the US

FACT SHEET FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

1 VISAS

- Depending on where a student is from, a visa can cost **hundreds of dollars**, not including the added expenses of traveling home.
- Some graduate employees haven't been home in years because of the expense, fear, confusion about their status.
- Since the options for seeking employment are **restricted by their visas**, if funding for an additional year of study is not guaranteed, international students must prove to have **funds in the bank sufficient to support them an entire year** in the US, or they will be forced to return home.

"After being admitted to Penn as an international student, I had to apply for a student visa. Altogether, the costs of application amounted to \$600 between the SEVIS fee, the application fee, and, what surprised me the most, **paying \$100 to UPS to get my paperwork (I-20 form) sent to me from Penn.**"—Graduate Student, Wharton

2 INSTITUTIONAL OPACITY AROUND TAX REPORTING AND RESTRICTED ABILITY TO WORK

- Filing taxes as a graduate student is difficult enough: Penn offers international students absolutely no information or advice on how much of their stipend is taxable, nor on how to pay taxes.

3 HIDDEN COSTS . . .

- Many international graduate workers are encouraged to rent on-campus, dorm-style apartments, **which cost almost \$4,000 per year more than off-campus housing**
- Many graduate workers must take and pay for **mandated English-language tests** before working as teaching assistants or course instructors .
- International graduate students with spouses or children may have to **support their families entirely on their stipends**, as spouses are often not legally able to work in the US. Penn offers **no information or support** regarding immigration logistics for couples and families.
- International graduate student workers are required to have a series of specific **vaccinations on arrival in the US**: Penn threatens to withhold the funding if students do not comply.

"The Student Health Service wouldn't accept my official medical records as they were from South Africa, **so I had to have my vaccinations all over again** – and I had to pay for them myself."

—Graduate Student, International Relations

Many international students pay a higher rate of taxes than domestic students during their first year.

P A R E N T I N G A T P E N N

"Penn's partnership with Aetna doesn't align with the designated purpose of the PhD family grant. When enrolling a dependent through Aetna you have two options, which is to either pay the full amount up front or pay approximately \$500 first and the rest in automatic installments of about \$290. **If you miss even ONE payment, your dependent's insurance is automatically cancelled, which is what happened to us.** Furthermore, the PhD family grant isn't disbursed until the end of fall term, with half given in fall and half given in spring. **At that point you're reimbursing yourself for healthcare costs** and/or you couldn't afford to enroll dependents and missed open enrollment for state/other options." —Graduate Student in the Graduate School of Education

Provost Vincent Price claims that graduate students at Penn "do not have to choose between having a family and pursuing an academic career." However, grad students who need childcare for their dependents confront astronomical costs with limited financial support. Shortly after GET-UP went public in March, Penn announced that it would "commit \$1M in annual funding for need-based grants to PhD students in good standing to help defray the costs of extended health insurance, as well as dependent insurance and daycare for PhDs with spouses and children." While GET-UP welcomed this added financial investment in supporting graduate student workers with families, it is not enough.

Some issues around being a parent at Penn include:

- There are no leave options for master's students or undergraduates, and leave options for doctoral students don't include logistical or academic support.
- Professional doctoral students (e.g., EdDs, DSWs) are not eligible for these grants, further contributing to financial and institutional disparities they face.
- Penn's Children's Center has a long, often years-long, waitlist and can be upwards of \$20,000+ a year for an infant.

Issues (continued):

- Your child will not be covered by the Penn Student Insurance Plan; you will have to purchase insurance for them, and it must be done within a month of the baby's birth.
- Penn does not have lactation rooms in every building, and there are no changing tables in men's bathrooms.
- While grants through Penn exist to help defray the costs of childcare, they are not guaranteed and are disbursed at the end of each semester, so families are left with footing the bill upfront.

Advice from current Penn grad parents:

- If you are off funding, there is no paid leave available. Save accordingly and meet with a financial aid officer.
- Get lots of stuff in the pipeline before baby arrives (writing, panel-planning, special-issue organizing, conference abstracts, grant proposals, etc.).
- Apply for a Family Grant through the Family Resource Center (though not without issues indicated above).
- Not everyone in academia will understand what it's like for you to be a parent. Make sure to cultivate a community of people who will be compassionate and support you.
- You can get a free Medela pump kit to hook up to pumps around campus from Penn Women's Center. However, you will still need to get an actual pump yourself (which should be free covered by the Affordable Care Act).
- Penn provides a discount to care.com and some support for emergency childcare.
- General Philly resources include Buy Nothing Facebook groups, The Nesting House, La Leche League (breastfeeding).

DID YOU KNOW ?

It is not uncommon for Penn to enter into multi-million dollar research partnerships with companies like Pfizer, who then profit from the work of low-paid yet expert graduate students

I N T E L L E C T U A L P R O P E R T Y R I G H T S

What rights do I have over the work I produce at Penn?

Penn is a renowned research institution, which relies on the work of doctoral, post-doctoral and faculty employees. Penn's prestige and its ability to attract new students and grants depend on the research of its graduate employees. **Penn also generates revenues from graduate students' marketable research.**

WHEN IT COMES TO PROPERTY RIGHTS AND ROYALTIES TO PENN-LICENSED KNOWLEDGE AND GOODS, THE PENN LEGAL TEAM HAS THE UNIVERSITY'S BACK. BUT WHO HAS THE BACK OF THE GRADUATE RESEARCHERS WHO HELP TO MAKE NEW DISCOVERIES, AND WHOSE CAREERS DEPEND ON PRODUCING THEIR OWN ORIGINAL WORK?

In many non-STEM fields, **co-authorship is not the professional convention:** the lines between research assistant and ghost writer can become **blurry**.

In these cases, there are **few resources** or clear rules to protect grad employees' rights to their own work.

When STEM graduate student workers give up their intellectual property rights, they have little say in the matter. Before starting their research, most STEM graduate student workers relinquish their rights to their intellectual and tangible research property. On arriving at Penn, graduate student workers must sign Penn's **Patent and Tangible Research Property Participation Agreement**:

- The **inventions** and **tangible research property** included in these clauses are **not limited** to those produced as a Penn employee, or even as a Penn student.
- Through this **mandated agreement**, Penn obtains ownership over **everything produced** through the substantial **use of university resources** including **independent research** not conducted under a PI, i.e. nearly anything produced in a Penn laboratory.



In **the social sciences**, when students create IRBs, **their advisors are technically PIs and thus owns the students' data**. While this issues of ownership often does not come up, it could if the relationship soured.

WORKERS' SAFETY AT PENN

"As a former lab safety officer, I am very aware of the inadequate manner by which the university addresses safety issues for grad students working in labs. In the Chemistry Department, instead of going to Occupational Health if we are hurt on the job we have been told to go directly to the emergency room. While Occupational Health staffs physicians who have knowledge of chemical incidences and the effects on the body, the ER has no such expertise. The current procedure also involves students paying for our own emergency care expenses as the university has explicitly told us that graduate students do not get workers' compensation if hurt at work." — Graduate Student in Chemistry, School of Arts and Sciences

Many graduate student workers at the University of Pennsylvania, mostly in STEM, carry out dangerous work that could go wrong and cause injuries, such as burns. When an employee at Penn is injured on the job, they report their injury immediately to Occupational Health and are able to file for workers' compensation to cover their medical expenses and any necessary leave time. But Penn's graduate student workers, especially those who work in labs, face daily safety hazards without any of the security that a workers' compensation policy could provide. Because Penn considers its graduate students to be **students rather than both students and workers, Penn need not, under Pennsylvania law, provide us with the same safety and security that it provides its other workers.**

Unfortunately, there are not currently resources that we can provide to help you navigate this issue, should it come up. Issues like these are one of the reasons why it is important for graduate students workers to have a space to organize **as workers and advocate for ourselves around worker's safety issues like worker's compensation.**

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING

University of Pennsylvania's Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) offers programming, trainings, workshops, and resources to graduate student workers who are learning to teach: <https://www.ctl.upenn.edu/>

HIGHLIGHTS

Resources for Graduate Students

Programing includes TA training, the CTL Workshop series, and Teaching Certificate

<https://www.ctl.upenn.edu/programs-and-services-graduate-students>

The Logistics of Teaching at Penn

Information about working with the registrar's office for scheduling and organizing classrooms as well Penn's Academic policies

<https://www.ctl.upenn.edu/logistics-teaching-penn>

Professionalization

In addition to trainings, the CTL provides job market consults by appointment.

<https://www.ctl.upenn.edu/consults-job-market>



CENTER FOR

teaching & learning

MENTAL HEALTH

IS GRAD SCHOOL A TOXIC ENVIRONMENT?

"Any time I didn't spend in lab was time I could have been in lab — time that a good graduate student would have spent in lab. I felt guilty all the time. Our studies aren't supposed to be work, they're supposed to be our lives. That mentality made me sick. The prevalence of mental illness among graduate students suggests that it makes others sick too."— Graduate Student, Bio-medical Graduate Studies

THIS STUDENT'S EXPERIENCE SEEMS SADLY FAMILIAR ACROSS MANY UNIVERSITIES. DOES PENN'S CULTURE COMPOUND THE PROBLEM?

- **CAPS**, Penn's main resource for mental illness, is oriented mainly towards undergraduates and unequipped to deal with the unique difficulties faced by graduates.
- Mental illness is still **highly stigmatised**: students often find it difficult to discuss 'personal' concerns with their advisers, and worry about appearing weak and unequipped for the challenges of grad school.
- Many grads who do seek help find that therapists have **no availability** or simply don't respond at all, which can make students lose faith in the process and even put them off seeking help altogether.
- **Latent learning difficulties** can become more pronounced in the high-pressure environment of grad school: diagnoses of ADHD and anxiety are often regarded with skepticism.

DID YOU KNOW ?

- A 2015 study at the University of California-Berkeley found that **47% of their PhD candidates met the criteria for depression.**
- When a graduate student takes a medical leave of absence, Penn deprives them of subsidized health insurance and their stipends, effectively **cutting them off from the resources** they need to pursue treatment.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much do I have to pay for counselling?

Depending on the treatment, the Penn Student Insurance Plan (PSIP) charges a co-pay of \$10 or \$30 for in-network treatment.

Can I register my domestic partner as a dependent on my health insurance?

Yes, but the fees are around \$800 per semester: many choose to buy insurance elsewhere.

Where do I find a therapist?

The Student Health Service keeps a list of trusted practitioners on their system – but this information should be online and available to everyone.

MEDICAL LEAVE

A PENN STUDENT'S

EXPERIENCE

“We’re . . . cut off from our sense of vocation.”

“From the time I arrived here, I’ve seen fellow grads stigmatized and bullied inside and outside of classrooms, cut off from their department, and thrown into vicious cycles of anxiety and depression by a culture that prides itself on “rooting out” grads with mental disabilities and punishing them.

The usual response is that we need to take a leave or take time to ‘work on’ our mental health — which mean that grads struggling with grief, with major depressive disorder, with anxiety disorder, trauma, bipolar disorder and beyond are often made economically precarious and are cut off from healthcare, counselling and sources of institutional support, ostensibly in the name of healing.

We’re also, of course, cut off from our sense of vocation — from job pride, solidarity with fellow graduate students and peers, teaching, and from our research. Without any standard grievance procedure, grads on leave for mental health reasons (whether we chose it or not) often have no clear way of knowing how to come back — and face the burden not only of finding temporary jobs and sources of health insurance, but, often, having to piece together entirely new mental health support systems when our extant (and already meagre) support is cut off.

Worse yet, I’ve found that, while on leave, I’ve been expected not only to keep up with my graduate school duties, but to literally perform being a graduate student without any of the financial or structural support; and to prove my readiness to return via invasive questioning about my mental health ‘progress’ — when the administration knows full well I’ve been stripped of my insurance, sent into a deep depression by being removed from my teaching and my graduate work, and made unable even to afford counselling.” —Anonymous Graduate Student

TO GET INVOLVED

Please email us to attend
one of our meetings!

GET UP (Graduate Employees Together at
the University of Pennsylvania)

penngetup@gmail.com

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