WORKING WITH YOUR RESEARCH ADVISOR

A few do’s and don’ts
(and things to keep in mind)

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Department Head
YOU

ARE INCREDIBLY LUCKY
You are receiving a graduate education and it doesn’t cost you anything!!

- Out-of-State tuition: $15K/semester or $45K/year
- Many programs do not come with institutional support and charge the full out-of-state tuition
- Cost of health insurance: Check healthcare.gov (Obama care)

You are being paid to earn a graduate degree and are destined to end up with a high-paying job

Indeed, you are so lucky!!
FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Full time GTA support is usually guaranteed for two years. A full time GTA appointment formally corresponds to 20 hours a week (give or take). The remainder of your time should be spent on courses and exam preparations. Extensive involvement in research before passing the PhD qualifying exam is strongly discouraged.

- After passing the qualifying exam, find a research supervisor asap. Half-time GTA/GRA arrangements are possible for a limited period of time.

- Students are expected to secure a full time GRA position after their third year. Continued GTA support beyond the third year is decided on a case-by-case basis. These decisions are based on your past performance as a GTA, and the reasons behind the absence of GRA support.

- GTA positions come with tuition waivers. Once you are a full time GRA, your research advisor will pay your tuition.

- **GRA’s are paid from highly competitive research grants.**

- The cost of one GRA is taxed with university overhead. Your advisor pays at least $45K/yr for stipend, tuition, health insurance, and overhead to support you. **Don’t disappoint your advisor with a lack of effort.**
FINDING A RESEARCH ADVISOR

➢ Start familiarizing yourself with research in the department ASAP.

➢ GET TO KNOW THE FACULTY and ASK QUESTIONS. You are a commodity so they love to talk to you.

➢ Once given a chance by a potential research advisor, don’t blow it. Sometimes the advisor’s research is not fully in line with your initial expectation. Then remember this: it still is a golden opportunity and you won’t get many of those.

➢ You may change research advisor no more than two times (my policy).

➢ If things don’t work out between you and your third advisor, get out with a masters degree.

➢ Remember, you must pass the comprehensive before the end of the third year. There is no time for leisurely ‘advisor hopping’. Get your act together on time.

➢ If you want to work with an ORNL staff scientist, please see me (or Dr. Breinig) first. There are some caveats and it is strongly preferred that you work with a UT professor if given the opportunity.
YOUR CAREER AS A RESEARCH SCIENTIST STARTS HERE:

- Scientific research is not your typical nine-to-five job.
- Only people that are ‘driven’ succeed. **A PhD is not enough.**
- It is a very competitive world. It is “publish or perish”. Start work on improving your writing skills, **NOW!**
- Research grants typically have a three year cycle. Slow research progress jeopardizes grant renewals.
- If your advisor loses the grant, your GRA stipend is in jeopardy.
- Be a team player. You have a responsibility towards the success of the grant project.
- Responsibility entails: Hard work, being inquisitive and creative, being mature, taking initiative.

**WORK HARD**