

Editorial Preface

Reflections and Strategies for Graduate Students

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INTRODUCTION

Students enrolled in Masters of Science in Applied Geographic Information Sciences and similarly named degree programs are often career orientated. Those employed in industries that utilize geospatial technologies hope to increase their academic and technical credentials to enhance advancement opportunities inside or outside their current place of employment; whereas, other students have little “real world” employment experience—at least pertaining to geospatial technologies. Some of the students are attending full time while others are remaining employed, so their time is precious and devoting extra hours to studies is difficult. Students already employed or with limited financial resources are tied to programs within reasonable proximity of domicile or employment. For example, if students would prefer to attend program X, but must attend program Y because of distance constraints, then a program could accumulate students without the excitement to excel. Such students often select those courses offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays afternoons to minimize miles, time, and cost constraints or alternately, enrolling in evening or online courses, so as to maintain regular hours on the job. Both these options can test students’ stamina and commitment to completing the program. Herein are some personal opinions that might help potential and existing students get the most out of their graduate experience.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESS

Here are some reflections to consider if enrolled or enrolling in a graduate program specializing in applied geographic information science. Realize that geographers investigate at the intersection of content knowledge, spatial perspective, and geographic (geospatial) skills. One should not focus just on geospatial skills—that is just learning geospatial software, but also possess a subject knowledge base, whether it’s urban planning, forestry, environmental geography or other systematic field, and a sound understanding of geographic perspectives (distance decay, central place theory, modifiable areal unit problem, spatial autocorrelation, etc.). Remember that applied geography is an approach to analysis that helps decisions-makers identify solutions to problems. In this day-and-age using geospatial technologies is a necessity because of the enormous data requirements to capture and analyze the real world in an electronic environment. Focusing on software and technology training doesn’t qualify one to manage and analyze complex geographic questions. For example, someone using ground penetrating radar (GPR) is not necessarily conducting geographic research—geography involves distribution, patterns, connections, and interactions between people and environment.

While it's important to distinguish oneself with a focus, don't be too narrow in interest as certain industries (petroleum) have an ebb and flow. Read across a range of topics in journals such as this one (Albert, 2014), *Applied Geography* and *Papers in Applied Geography*, and other geography or related journals. Read peer-reviewed articles on a daily basis even if not assigned—mark up these papers with questions and comments. After reading the body of the text, examine the references and search for other potential reads. Note the different citation styles between journals and mimic the number, quality, and meticulous formatting of citations in your own research papers. Graduate students should attend or participate in regional and national conferences to explore current themes and network with others in their field of interest. It is important that graduate students demonstrate and increasing independence with course assignments. Let me suggest that first semester graduate students enroll in a research methods course; one student of late conveyed to me that this course was a real “eye opener.” Finally, don't be arrogant, and this applies to professors as well. Knowing that you don't know is a sign of intelligence, so ask questions, dig for answers, take advice, and forge ahead.

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Best regards,
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