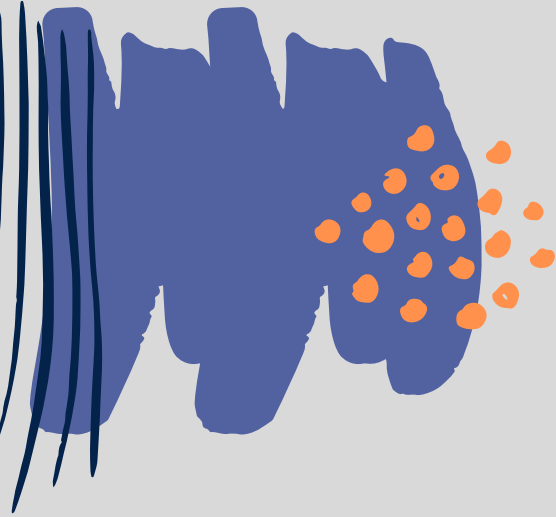


GSIG FALL 2020

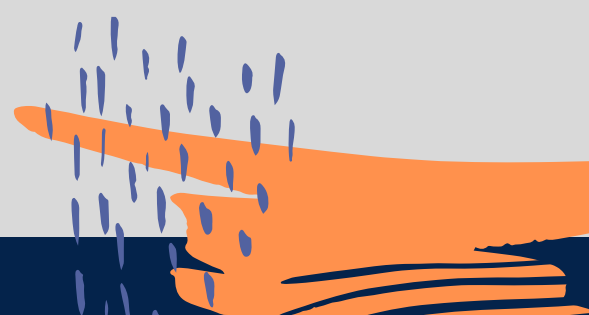
NEWSLETTER



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GSIG

GRADUATE STUDENT INTEREST GROUP



What Your Advisors Want You to Know

A letter written
by GSIG's
Regional
Conference Co-
Chair and
Faculty Liaison,
Dr. Monique
Luisi of
Missouri
School of
Journalism.

Please. Forgive the run on sentences that are about to come. But, they are fitting, and much like the days that we are facing.

Of all the things we wanted your graduate career to be defined by, we advisors envisioned many things. Since you first submitted your applications, we dreamed of fostering your budding expertise. We were prepared to help you navigate the research/teaching/service road. For you, we prepared to scour our mental, virtual, and stack-o-paper databases of conferences, journals, grant opportunities, and collaborations. We wished for your excellence.

What we got was: Coronavirus. Zoom-fatigue. Social distance. Social injustice. Fires. 2020.

So much remains to be seen, but these things from us to you still remain true.

1. We expect you to work hard and do your best.
2. There will be some days where you can't even.
3. Some days, neither can we.
4. You will have bad days. Own them.
5. You will have good days. Relish them.
6. Rejection sucks. We all face it, but it still sucks.
7. We're here to help. It may not feel like it (see #7), but we are invested in your success.
8. You can't do all the things, all the time, well. Be choosy.
9. Your journey is beautiful and worthy, and not to be compared with others at your expense.
10. *You deserve to be here.*
We want you here.
You deserve to be here.

For your advisors, for you, we know this is hard. So – frickin' – hard.

Yes, graduate school comes with the expectation of some late nights and long days, maybe a few tears (of joy hopefully), and degrees and accolades hard-earned. But no one signed up for a disease of pandemic proportions. We never imagined that we would be trying to manage hybrid environments and teaching you to navigate the same. Who guessed we would be preparing many of you for a job market that is frozen, awaiting a vaccine and a thaw? And, at the end of it all, we may not even have the precious moment of hooding you in-person.

....

So while we are navigating new, scary, and undesirable territory, we want you to know that it is still our honor and privilege to be at your service.

FALLING FOR GSIG



**YOU WON'T
BE-LEAF
WHAT GSIG
HAS TO
OFFER**



NETWORKING
MEET AND COLLABORATE WITH
OTHER STUDENTS

CONFERENCES
SUBMIT PAPERS TO OUR
YEARLY OPEN CALLS

JOB SEARCH

STAY INFORMED
ABOUT OPENINGS
AND DEADLINES

JOB TIPS

ATTEND OUR
PRE-CONFERENCE
SESSION

LEADERSHIP

OPPORTUNITIES
FOR POSITIONS
ON THE BOARD

**FACULTY AND STUDENTS:
WHEREVER YOU ARE, WE WOULD LOVE TO CONNECT WITH YOU!**



[@GSIG_AEJMC](https://twitter.com/GSIG_AEJMC)



[AEJMC.US/GSIG](https://aejmc.us/gsig)



[@AEJMCGSIG](https://facebook.com/AEJMCGSIG)

3 Tips for Teaching During COVID-19

The 2020-2021 academic year presents unique opportunities to reflect on the teaching profession. Since March 2020, each of us have had to move beyond rote ways to delivering material and lesson plans and develop creative ways to engage students, keep ourselves inspired, and conduct research.

The pandemic and civil unrest call for us to engage with our material in innovative ways, capturing the zeitgeist of this time. After all, we are living through a historical time and keeping some type of record seems to apropos.

First, let us introduce ourselves as the new GSIG teaching chair, Eve R. Heffron, and co-chair, Lisa D. Lenoir. As GSIG teaching chairs, we are launching a new feature in our newsletter column, compiling ideas and thoughts from our members on ways to manage teaching loads in unprecedented times. We begin this journey with our top three. Please email Lisa D. Lenoir at ldlc2r@umsystem.edu to share your experiences. Each month we will print wisdom, inspiring quotes, and best practices. Happy teaching!

The following tips will be regarding the following three topics: Online Recordings, Zoom Fatigue, and Office Hours.



1

How to Conduct Better Online Recordings

We have all become too familiar with online lectures. However, students are still noticing a lot of little nuisances that may hinder their learning and are easily avoidable with a few simple changes!

LIGHTING

When recording lectures on Zoom or VoiceThread, make sure to have good lighting. Click here to check out this [Lighting Kit from Amazon](#).



BACKGROUNDS

Next, use a simple background that is free from clutter to avoid distracting students. Click here to check out these free, fun [backgrounds from Airbnb](#)!

AUDIO

Having high-quality audio is a vital component in recording lectures. If your students cannot hear you or if you sound muffled, it defeats the purpose of the lecture altogether. Amazon has great deals on microphones for recording lectures. Check out this highly recommended [Blue Yeti microphone](#)!



SCRIPT

Write a script or have bullet points prepared to reduce the number of attempts needed to successfully make a recording. This will help to organize your thoughts ahead of time. You will also have something to reference if your mind goes blank midway through recording.

2

Self-Care to Combat Zoom Fatigue

Self-care is extremely important even when we aren't in the midst of a pandemic. Here are some simple recommendations to alleviate Zoom fatigue.

One of the simplest, but most often ignored recommendations is to move your neck and body on and off screen. Try moving your neck around, even when you are on Zoom calls. Position the Zoom call, so you are at a comfortable angle. Stand up and move around as often as you are able. Give yourself breaks and stay hydrated. Check out the Bingo board below for more self-care activities to conquer!

Self-Care Bingo

WHICH HAVE YOU DONE?

TOOK A SHOWER	GOT DRESSED	CAUGHT UP WITH FRIENDS	PROCESSED MY FEELINGS	NOTICED THE GOOD IN MYSELF
MEDITATED	ATE GOOD FOOD	LISTENED TO MY BODY	HAD FUN	ASKED FOR HELP
TOOK A MUCH NEEDED BREAK	DRANK WATER	<i>Free</i>	TOOK A SOCIAL MEDIA BREAK	TREATED MYSELF
DID A GOOD DEED	GOT 8 HOURS OF SLEEP	TAMED NEGATIVE THOUGHTS	HUGGED MY PARENTS	DROPPED A BAD HABIT
TOOK A MENTAL HEALTH DAY	SPENT TIME WITH NATURE	DE-CLUTTERED MY SPACE	WROTE DOWN MY THOUGHTS	GAVE MYSELF GRACE

3

Adapting to Virtual Office Hours

Classes and teaching styles have been adapted all throughout the pandemic. One of the areas that may impact student-teacher relationships is office hours, or a lack thereof. Pre-COVID, students were able to stop by instructors' offices with questions or even to say hello. These relationships are crucial to students who need mentors to guide them, who need personalized letters of recommendation, or who simply need a little extra help in the class.

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

One strategy is to change your office hours policy to "by appointment only." If this is the strategy you choose, take some time during the first class to explain to all of the students your instructions and expectations for your office hours. Let them know how to schedule an appointment with you and explain that you will do your best to reply to emails within a 24 hour window.

INCREMENTAL OFFICE HOURS

Another strategy is to assign 15-30-minute increment office hour meeting blocks through your learning management system, iCal, Google Calendar, or youcanbook.me. Virtual meetings can be challenging for some. This can be used as a way to mentor students about virtual interviews and protocols, hopefully helping to alleviate the pressures of performing in this space. Create a relaxing experience. Short meetings allow them to practice in this online environment.



WHAT IS PF&R AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TODAY ?

As graduate students, research and teaching make up much of what we do during our experience within our respective universities, however, at the core of every interaction we have with our colleagues, paper we produce, students within our classrooms, and indeed our ability to freely pursue our scholarship lies PF&R. But what exactly is PF&R?

GSIG's PF&R Chair, Matt Blomberg asked this question to AEJMC leaders, Dr. Jerry Crawford and Dr. Katie Foss. Dr. Crawford, PF&R Chair for AEJMC, and Dr. Foss, Head of Council of Divisions for AEJMC, walked us through the concept.

The following interviews have been adjusted for clarity and length.



Dr. Katie Foss
Professor,
Middle Tennessee State University



Dr. Jerry Crawford
Associate Professor,
University of Kansas

Q: What is PF&R?

PROFESSIONAL FREEDOM + RESPONSIBILITY

FREE EXPRESSION

DIVERSITY +
INCLUSION

PUBLIC SERVICE

MEDIA CRITICISM +
ACCOUNTABILITY

ETHICS

Katie: PF&R refers to Professional Freedom and Responsibility, which encompasses five areas, including free expression, ethics, and diversity. In addition to PF&R chairs within individual DIGs, AEJMC has a standing committee on PF&R. All groups are required to address the tenets of PF&R through their programming and events. The components defined through PF&R really underscore our purpose as an organization for journalism and mass communication educators. Technology can and does change, but the values and critical thinking skills we teach remain a constant. Graduate students should learn and embrace the tenets of PF&R as emerging scholars and educators so that they understand why we study and teach others about our discipline.

Jerry: It is important is that graduate students understand their rights within the academy and as part of their professional careers and endeavors. PF&R will stand with you as you begin your teaching and your professional paths. There can be times when, for example, you will be in a classroom and possibly have your students question your teaching or administration question your techniques. You may want to publish, appear in the media, etc., outside of your role. What are your rights? What are your responsibilities?

Q: PF&R has several focuses, including academic freedom and diversity. Can you talk about the areas and why they matter, especially in regard to AEJMC divisions?

Katie: These tenets are connected to why we study and teach issues related to media. As educators, we are connecting with future media producers, who need to know why diversity in media messages matter and how to achieve it. They also need to learn about free expression and its professional reach. These concepts also help to interpret and discern news and entertainment content in the various ways carried across the individual divisions, interest groups, and commissions.

Jerry: You can look at these as either "surface-level" or "provable/assessable-level" paradigms. What PF&R looks for are "This is what we will do," and "This is how we have/can assess what we do." Academic freedom is important, not only in the classroom, but also as part of your research and professional endeavors. Regarding diversity, this is a question with way too much area to answer in a short space. Diversity is of thought; of culture; of identity; life. Of course, it involves religion, sex, "race", etc. However, it is also "geographic". For example, ACEJMC has a Diversity Standard (Standard 3). But it is not concrete. When I started in academia (My dissertation was on ACEJMC accreditation) there were twelve standards, there are now nine and may be eight soon! When you look at, for example, "diversity of faculty and students". This will/can be different in a place like the University of Idaho and the University of Southern California. Why? Well, look at the population (geographically). Are we looking at, for example, people of color? If so, does that mean American born or does it also include international? Does a school actually require someone to "declare their gender identity"? What PF&R does and examines, again, are what are the "stated goals" and then can these goals be "quantified/assessed"?

"Academic freedom is important, not only in the classroom, but also as part of your research and professional endeavors."

Q: How should graduate students embed PF&R into their research, teaching and graduate student life?

Katie: The first step is to define what these tenets look like in practical application in research, teaching, and graduate student life. Much of our critical media theories draw from these tenets in justifying the scholarship itself. If you are teaching in a ACEJMC-accredited program, many of the nine standards overlap with the PF&R tenets, thus demonstrating their importance. All grad students should aim to understand, demonstrate, and celebrate free expression, ethical behavior, diversity, critical thinking and the other PF&R areas in what they think, talk, and write about as they progress through their programs.

Jerry: This is the thing - if you are a serious scholar, you are already doing this. If you are leaving out specific populations in your surveys, interviews, readings, voices, then your research will not meet many of the peer-reviewed publications needed to further your research stream. You need to go beyond your possible comfort level and reach out to people/cultures/thinking outside of your own to be a strong researcher. Possibly do more collaborative research with areas outside your own - which will strengthen your work. While creating your surveys (especially during COVID-19 and we are not able to do many face-to-face focus groups or in person interviews), share them with your mentors/committees to ensure you have thought of the unexpected.



Q: Do you have any closing thoughts or advice regarding PF&R for us?

Katie: PF&R should absolutely be considered an integral part of teaching and research throughout the divisions and interest groups of AEJMC. Its distinction in DIG chair positions and as a standing committee is not an indication that it should be a stand-alone entity, but that it is so important that we cannot overlook PF&R in all aspects of our organization.

Jerry: PF&R is and should be infused in all areas of academia! Remember, not just teaching and research but also the professions. Also, be as involved with AEJMC divisions and mentorship opportunities as you can, but do not overextend yourself. Find a solid mentor.

AEJMC's Recommended PF&R Guidelines

I. Free expression should be nurtured and protected at all levels.

II. Ethical behavior should be supported and promoted at all times.

III. Media criticism and accountability should be fostered.

IV. Racial, gender and cultural inclusiveness should be encouraged and recognized.

V. Public service contributions should be expected of all AEJMC members.

VI. AEJMC programs and faculty should make every effort to insure equal opportunity for students to enter student contests.

The full list of recommendations can be found [here](#).

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT



**Dr. Shannon Kennan,
Assistant Professor**



**Dr. Michelle Baker,
Assistant Professor**

Higher education leaders have grappled with complex questions related to safety, access, teaching and learning, and budgets since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States in March.

At Penn State's Bellisario College of Communications, Drs. Shannon Kennan (SK) and Michelle Baker (MB) have worked at the forefront of adapting courses to online and/or emergency remote learning models. Kennan started her role in Fall 2011, while Baker joined the Penn State faculty in Fall 2018 following stops at Juniata College and Lock Haven University in Pennsylvania.

Brian Delaney, GSIG's membership and recruitment chair, interviewed Dr. Kennan and Dr. Baker about their roles and advice they had for graduate students who may find themselves teaching online in the weeks, months, and years to come.



PennState
Donald P. Bellisario
College of Communications

BD: Dr. Baker, you are the Director of Online Programs for Strategic Communications and an Assistant Teaching Professor. Dr. Kennan, you are the Director of eLearning Initiatives and an Assistant Teaching Professor. With regards to the online component of your dual roles, how do they coexist within Bellisario?

SK: I was the only person doing this role, starting in 2011 and then as our programs expanded we needed somebody else to come in and help manage things and that's when we brought Michelle in because we had a new master's program that was launching in strategic communications. So we brought Michelle in specifically to work with the Masters program and take on the bachelors program in strat comm so she does those two programs and then I do the rest of the portfolio. That's how we separate things out.

MB: It was really balancing the administrative piece related to these programs, which for me was mostly curriculum development because the program was just launching when I came on board the College of Communications here. So classes were still being developed as we were bringing the students into the program, so I found myself wearing a lot of different hats, which was sometimes helping to shepherd the professors through the process of developing classes was either the first time or maybe the second time they had ever written an online class.



Then I was also working in an admissions function and helping to bring applicants into the program and also advising our current students. All the while teaching classes. It was very busy, especially in the beginning, just trying to get the programs launched. So we're in a very good place. Now we are a couple years out from the launch and we graduated our first graduates in August 2020.

BD: At some point in the next year or two, things should go back to the routine of balance of campus courses and online courses, for everybody. When that happens, what advice do you have for graduate students in terms of how to approach teaching online. What are some of the most effective strategies they can use as online instructors?

SK: So when I'm talking to grad students, I usually start by saying that teaching online is not for everyone, and that there are reasons why some people do not like to teach online and they are very valid reasons. So the first semester for anybody that is teaching online, there's a lot of growing pains... Instead of doing all of your work as you go through the semester, there is a lot of work that happens up front, and then a lot of focus on feedback with students and timely responses...

So what I tell students is that it's up to them to create the culture in the class. That they should use their own personality to do that... being true to themselves is really the most important thing, and then finding their own voice as an online instructor.

They need to feel confident about it, make it theirs, and also focus on the fact that students in the class are not looking at them as graders, they are looking at them as the teacher, the professor, and they want that level of expertise and guidance and contribution.

"THEY ARE LOOKING AT THEM AS THE TEACHER, THE PROFESSOR, AND THEY WANT THAT LEVEL OF EXPERTISE AND GUIDANCE AND CONTRIBUTION."



MB: ...teaching presence is really important because a lot of times when students are in an online environment, they're by themselves.

I don't think that graduate students have thought through that notion because oftentimes, at least here at Penn State, all of our grad students are residential. So they're used to coming into a classroom, they're used to being with their cohort, and I think that getting graduate students to somehow put themselves in the shoes of the students that they're teaching in the online environment

I think can be really helpful for them, almost the emotional or (affective) piece... It's important to really give them a sense of what some of these students who are taking classes online might be going through. That's very, very different from what their experience was of being an undergraduate student or a graduate student.

SK: Going back to when I was a grad student teaching my first online course and how extremely overwhelmed I was. One thing that it might be really helpful for grad students to know is that the first time is by far the worst because everything is new and you not only have to do all of the work that the students are doing in reading the textbook and reading all the lessons and making sure you know what the assignments are for, but then you also have to grade and all of that...

"It's important to really give them a sense of what some of these students who are taking classes online might be going through."

"One thing that it might be really helpful for grad students to know is that the first time [teaching a course] is by far the worst..."



A General Guide To Comprehensive Exams

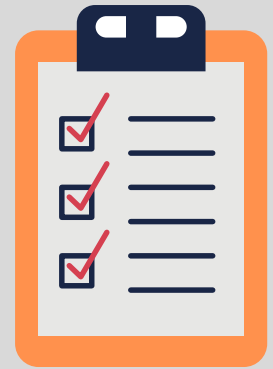
GSIG Research Chair, Erika Schneider, recently completed her comprehensive exams. She gathered insight from six other contributors to create a master list of tips and strategies for defeating your exam.

We are in the midst of Comps Season, where future doctoral candidates around the country are studying for what they hope is the last test of their professional career. Whether you are studying for comprehensive exams, are currently comping, or have comped, you probably feel something when you think about this glorious rite of passage. If the feeling resonates with exam anxiety, you may be in the majority.

The exams, also known as “comps” or “quals” take different forms in each program. They serve as a gateway to a doctoral degree and test your mastery in a specific area. Comps can take place over a course of days or weeks, and can be written, oral, or both. Typically, you build a committee in advance and each member contributes a thought-provoking question on the day of the test that you might spend several hours answering. How do you know what to study? Many might answer that you will never feel fully prepared, but most programs allow you to study a reading list, which contains literature to study. If the committee is satisfied with your answers, you may finally have the honor of updating your email signature and business cards from “Doctoral Student” to “Doctoral Candidate.”

As a recent comper, I saw an opportunity to start a conversation about strategies for studying and tips for taking the exams. An open call was sent out through a survey on GSIG’s social media platforms and through board members. The following insight was provided by six anonymous contributors.

Communicating with Your Committee



Reading List.

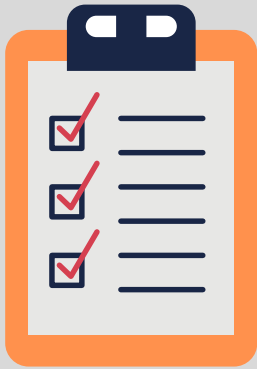
The process of developing your reading list may look different at your institution, but several responses expressed the benefit of working with each committee member and contributing readings yourself. This might take the form of pitching readings that you have previously read, readings from past syllabi in your coursework, or readings that you've been wanting to read, which might make them something you look forward to.

Individual Meetings.

After you've conquered the reading lists, all of the respondents recommend scheduling individual meetings with members to review the lists and discuss your general dissertation plans. Ask questions about expectations or offer a writing sample to ensure you are moving in the right direction.

One respondent said, "Ask them what they think is most important to know about the topic. Ask if they've done research related to it, and if they could, what they might do differently."

If you cannot get a meeting, it can be helpful to ask others in your program who have had this committee member about what kind of questions they ask.



Tips for Retaining Information

Create annotated bibliographies.

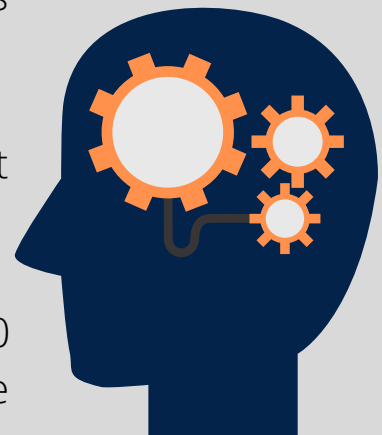
Create outlines that identify key takeaways of an article. Summarize the purpose, method, results, and findings into one paragraph. From there, you might create flashcards to test yourself. Consider integrating the readings into a citation manager and organizing these with folders and subfolders.

Draft an answer and memorize the citations in this order.

Your answer will probably involve telling a story through prior research to position a purpose for your research trajectory. Try to anticipate the direction of a question and make connections with the readings in your list. One respondent noted that they grouped readings by how they wanted to use it in an answer (“e.g., cite for definition, as an example, or as a theoretical framework”). Another recommended creating a literature review of the readings in plain-English to help prepare an answer. Building on that, another added that if you practice writing an answer, time yourself to get an idea about how you might function against the clock.

Once you are in the exam room, participants recommended the following strategy:

- 1.** Draft an outline with subheads and relevant citations (recommended between 10-30 minutes).
- 2.** Write out the content (bulk of the time).
- 3.** Review and edit (recommended between 10-30 minutes). While you review, circle back to the question being asked and ensure you are hitting the nail on the head.



Determining the Order of Questions



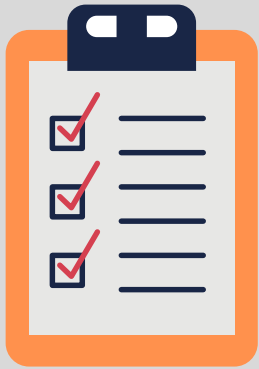
In most cases you have the ability to determine the order in which you receive questions from each committee member. Do you get what you anticipate to be the hardest over with first or use the first test day to ease into the process? Here is insight from both perspectives:

Hardest first: Ripping the band-aid.

Several responses remarked a notable “burnout” period, where they began to lose steam mid-week, and were pleased they had conquered the hardest first. One response noted that they anticipated that their hardest question would be derived from their first class in the program. “I felt the most nervous about trying to recall information I had learned three years ago, so I figured positioning this question first gave me the most time to review the material and really focus on complex concepts. I put my easiest subject last, which was my outside area,” they said. In hindsight, they were pleased with this decision to end on an easier note. “I definitely advise ripping the band aid off when scheduling, and, if possible, allowing at least 2 days in between exams to give yourself time to recharge!”

Easiest first: It’s a marathon.

Others felt easing in with the easiest might help maintain stamina through this marathon. One respondent felt satisfied with taking the first few days to get comfortable with the process since they had no idea what the questions would look like or how they would function under the pressure of time. Another added, “Basically, I created a narrative based on all of my readings and the easy questions warmed me up for the harder ones.” Another important note is that you might believe you know which will be hardest and easiest, but you do not know what you’re up against until you are in the exam room. Mentally prepare for anything and choose a strategy that best fits your situation.



Comping During COVID-19?

In a world accommodating to a global pandemic, how to take your exams may look a little different. One respondent shared their experience. “The virtual exam format culminated in having 8 hours per 4 exams, each on separate days. My Chair would email me the question, and as soon as I opened it, it would trigger a “read” receipt. The exam would be due exactly 8 hours later.” If you have to orally defend over a video-conferencing platform, they also offered two pieces of learned advice that upholds standards related to the traditional, in-person defense:

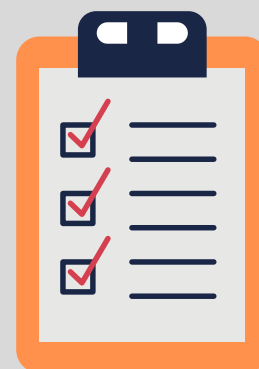
Make it real.

Find a way to prop your screen up and stand while you present. “Standing gives you more confidence, a different voice inflection, and it makes it feel more “real” than simply hunching over a laptop screen,” they noted. This, along with professional attire, may help you feel prepared and presentation-ready.

Show your gratitude.

Try to find a way to provide your committee with an act of appreciation. For instance, the respondent took it upon themselves to send e-Starbucks gift cards as a small token of appreciation to their chair. Even though it wasn’t necessary, they found a way to express gratitude, and committee members seemed grateful and impressed. They noted, “In my case, I felt like snacks were just the icing on the cake, but in no way would they have substituted for not being fully prepared and ready for a defense--virtual or otherwise.” Although this may not be right for everyone, considering cultures, traditions, and logistics, it never hurts to send a personalized email or card to thank your committee members for their time.

What We Wish We Had Known



First, recognize the purpose of the exams and what this achievement means. Several responses stressed that you need to understand why they are important. Others recognized the mental stress in social aspects and a feeling that many academics are all too familiar with: Guilt. When you have a reading list, it can be difficult to justify doing anything other than study it. Remind yourself that it is okay to balance your life with hobbies unrelated to academia and enjoy time with those outside of your program. And, if you should receive grief from your cohort or professors, protect your mental health.

Another added, "That I needed to be more protective of my mental health. Specifically, I needed to surround myself with more positive energy and people. Venting is good, but there was a lot of fear in my cohort, and a few select profs who would comment if he saw us not studying. This made me very uneasy and sick."

**"You can
do this!
You will
find your
day after."**

One respondent expressed another strategy for preparing for exam day: Prepare for the day after exam day. "You have crested the mountain, and while it is not necessarily all smooth sailing from here, the hardest part is arguably done and in your rearview mirror. Envision that day after. Plan something fun for it," they said. Celebrate yourself, and any occasion you might have missed while your nose was in a book. If you are currently studying, think about the end goal. "You can do this! You will find your day after."



Finishing Up Your Exams

Oral Defense Component.

If you have an “Oral Defense” component Once you’ve completed the written portion, jot down notes in areas where you did not feel confident. One piece of advice said, “Be prepared to acknowledge that what you may have written wasn't perfect, but that you're able to elaborate on what you said.” Another added, “Submit to what you don't know and confidently pivot to what you do.” Above all, respondents expressed focusing on owning your oral defense - “Be fearless” and “You've got this!”

More words of wisdom said to remind yourself that you are an expert in your area. “Remember that you are here for a reason and that your Chair would not have let you get this far if you are not ready and do not know your topic inside and out.”

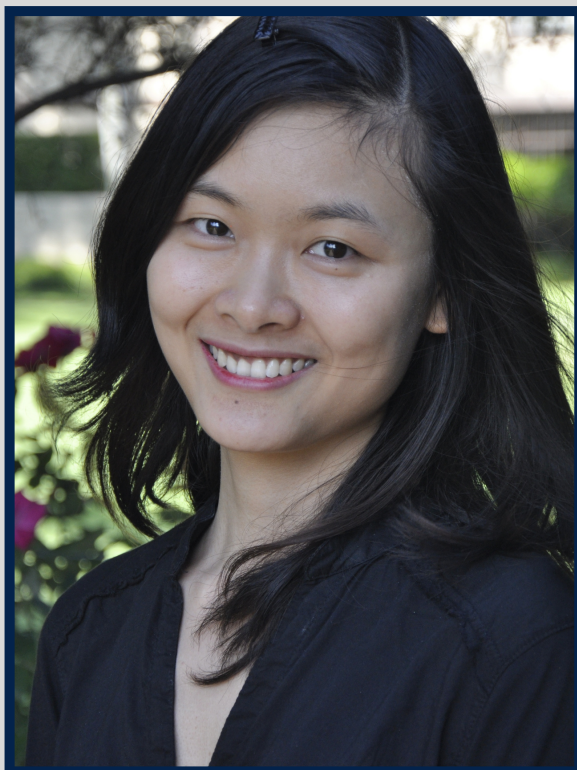
To the future PhD candidate.

During this process, you might see a transformation in yourself. For instance, you might become more confident in articulating your research. Although comps can be stressful, I hope you find this process fulfilling, and with the insights from contributors to this column, I hope this becomes a celebrated event for you.

Don't forget to plan something special for the Day After -- a special dinner, a spa day, or tackle your own recreational reading list!

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

MEIQING ZHANG



Meiqing is a third year PhD student from USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. She completed an MA degree in political science from the University of Chicago and worked for NORC during and after her studies. Before returning to academia, she conducted market research and media analysis for multinational agencies, and serviced Fortune 500 advertisers in automotive, chemical, and FMCG sectors.

In an interview with Joyce Jiang of GSIG's Membership Committee, Meiqing shares with us her background, her research interests, some advice for incoming students, and an interesting fact about herself.

What did you do before grad school and what made you decide to pursue a PhD degree?

I completed my MA in political science at the University of Chicago, focusing on comparative authoritarianism and computational social science. Prior to that, I worked in the market research and media analysis industry and served multinational corporate clients in automotive, FMCG, chemical and real estate sectors.

Why did you decide to come to USC for your doctorate?

Let's just say it's life's unexpected arrangement...

How did you develop your interest in political communication?

I developed an interest in politics in high school, but not what textbooks indoctrinated us ;). In college I enjoyed following online political discussions. Although I have taken a few detours in my professional and academic developments, learning about how people's political preferences are formed has always driven my curiosity. At the core of that interest is my commitments to the freedom of expression and reasoned deliberation.

Could you share some of the projects you have worked on and what you plan to do next?

I used to work on comparative media systems in authoritarian regimes. More recently, I have been advancing projects on political opinion dynamics and political conceptual evolution using NLP.

What are you most excited about as you pursue your PhD?

You can feel free to intellectually challenge yourself. But most of the time, excited is not the word...I'm just happy that I don't have to live the life that I don't want to live.

You studied political science for your master's degree. Would you like to share some experiences as a cross-disciplinary researcher?

Still need to find yourself a well-defined intellectual home, know the audience, conventions and the dominant intellectual tradition in that field...

What tips/advice do you have for incoming graduate students, either for their master's or PhD?

Always trust yourself and strive for better.

Our last question: would you like to share some fun facts or little known about yourselves?

I was the champion of women's backstroke in undergrad, but there were only two contestants.

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