

Departmental Citizenship and Strategic Planning for the Graduate Student

Graduate school presents several opportunities and challenges for students in their role as departmental citizens. The crucial factor for graduate students in that role is timing. Knowing when to take on which tasks in one's graduate career is an essential skill to cultivate, and can be used toward the goals of both finishing degree requirements and professionalization. To start, many activities that merit participation, such as attending lectures (even outside of one's area of interest), organizing panels or graduate student conferences, or serving on committees, should be treated as serious investments of one's time. They afford a breadth of experience both intellectual and practical. They make the student visible to faculty both within and outside of the department. Volunteering shows that one is engaged, interested, and helpful—ideal qualities in a colleague. Such qualities improve the overall atmosphere of a program among the students, serve to set a good example, and establish expectations and a culture of responsibility overall within the peer group.

Center to this habit of participation, however, is knowing what to prioritize and when to set that habit aside. Namely, it is prudent to be cautious of the degree to which participation may be detracting from those central objectives of finishing the degree and becoming professionalized. It is far more important to develop good research and writing habits in order to produce papers for presentation and publication. Yet, having cultivated a participatory ethos early in one's graduate career should enable one to lay aside such obligations for others, so that in later years, more or less starting with exams, one can focus on publishing, applying for grants, and finishing the dissertation. Participating and volunteering early in one's graduate career means that one will have the ability to call on such service, experience, and connections that those earlier efforts have rendered. Departmental citizenship for graduate students thus can and should be

used strategically in one's career to acquire useful skills and experience, but it must be done in a timely manner and with the right priorities in mind.