Vietnam Education Foundation Fellows & Scholars

Pre-Departure Orientation

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Studying and Training in the U.S.

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Presentation Outline

- Ph.D. program milestones
- Personal experiences
  - coping with the demanding workload required of graduate students
  - ultimately completing the challenging graduate program successfully
- Strategies
  - surviving the first semesters
  - maintaining grades of “A”s throughout the years of study
- Ups and downs of completing a dissertation
- Useful tips for studying and training in the US

Ph.D. Program Milestones

- Preliminary exam
  - required for admission to the Ph.D. program
  - written and oral tests
- Qualifying exam
  - after completing the required coursework
  - in-class written tests of topics and/or courses (one hour/each)
  - research projects in courses
  - oral exam
- Candidacy
  - proposal presentation (chapters 1, 2, & 3) -> revisions

    DISSERTATION RESEARCH
  - dissertation/oral defense (complete dissertation: 5 chapters) -> revisions
- Graduation

Personal Experiences

1. How **to cope** with the highly demanding workload required of graduate students and
2. **Ultimately how to complete** the challenging graduate program successfully

- Defined a dissertation research topic of interest early
  - Was general at the beginning, more defined (focused) at a later time
  - Selected courses around the topic
  - Wrote papers/assignments around the research topic
- Had good time management (e.g., using timelines)
  - Developed Ph.D. degree plan
    - Transferred some credit hours from Master's degree
    - Took core courses & required courses first
  - Developed dissertation plan

Personal Experiences

- Met critical deadlines for all courses taken each semester.
- Maintained a good relationship with advisor and other faculty members:
  - Was considerate about their busy schedules (teaching, research, and community service)
  - Met during office hours; was prepared before meetings (requested appointments, had questions to be discussed in advance, and sent a reminder of the meeting)

Strategies

1. **How to survive the first semesters**
2. How to maintain **"A"s** throughout the years of study

– Tape record the lessons with permission.

– Before the beginning of each semester, contact each faculty member to request the syllabus. Purchase textbooks and read chapters in advance. (Three courses are considered full load for graduate students.)

– Pay close attention to grading policies, keep track of all the deadlines, and allocate time adequately. (If a grade was not satisfactory, ask how the assignment could have been improved.)

Ups and Downs of Completing a Dissertation

- Define the dissertation topic early.
- Attend dissertation workshops (annually).
- Complete required five chapters:
  1. Introduction
  2. Literature review
  3. Methodology
  4. Data analysis and findings
  5. Conclusions & recommendations
- Follow a timeline for the dissertation.

Useful Tips

- Online databases for journal articles, e.g. FirstSearch, Web of Science
  - Avoid Wikipedia (not verified information) and Google.
  - Google Scholar is OK (for general background information).
- Electronic dissertation archives from most universities available full text PDF
- Citation and style conventions (APA, Chicago, etc.)

Useful Tips (cont.)

- Take advantage of Endnote, SPSS software and free short courses.
- Use appropriate citations to avoid plagiarism.
- Use writing center.
- Seek native speaker mentors to help with editing.

Useful Tips (cont.)

- Be involved in
  - professional activities (conferences and workshops)
  - service activities (Kappa Delta Pi: honorary society)
  - social activities (international student associations, sightseeing, travel)
- Other hints
  - Learn about the library and take a tour (part of the orientation). (Students can go straight to the book shelves, borrow many books for the entire semester, and can further extend after that.)
  - Apply for a study carrel.
  - Take advantage of interlibrary loans.

Non–Degree Programs

- Time management
  - Make/keep critical deadlines
- Isolation
  - Be patient
  - Make opportunities to discuss/share with U.S. faculty, building a future relationship
  - Share experiences/research from Vietnam
- Narrowing the scope of the research project
  - Be practical and realistic

Useful Survival Tips

- Bring unique Vietnamese cultural artifacts (ao dai, monetary denominations, masks, gloves, post cards). Be an ambassador of Vietnam by making cultural presentations to groups.
- Bring typical Vietnamese gifts (e.g., silk, scarves, ties, coffee, chopsticks, embroideries).
- Keep in contact with your home institution. Be a bridge between your U.S. institution and Vietnamese institution. Possibly return and teach at Vietnamese universities in summer.
- Take advantage of Skype software to communicate with your families and friends (www.skype.com/download).
- Learn to drive in Vietnam. Take the tests in the U.S. and get a U.S. driver's license.

Conclusions

Studying and training in the U.S. is difficult, demanding, and challenging, but effective and rewarding.

WARMEST CONGRATULATIONS!

May all your dreams come true!

Good luck and

all the very best for your journey ahead!

Thank you!

Questions