

Get involved or get left behind!

Edited by Alexandrine Mailhé

This week the Graduate Student Caucus focused on issues relating to departmental involvement. Many graduate students dedicate a significant amount of time to developing networks of peers and colleagues across academic institutions, neglecting the importance of nurturing relationships within their own departments. Often the value of local relationships is overlooked by the significance placed on external events and opportunities such as attending conferences, landing internship positions, conducting interviews, etc., and the glittering promise of networking and advantage that they entail. Our Twitter contributors are here to remind graduate students that these opportunities should not come at the cost of developing a strong presence in your current academic abode.

We asked our Twitter followers to give us their opinion on why it is important to get involved in your own department and beyond. Here are some key reasons in no particular order.

Duty

@Eero_Laine @pannapacker @J_C_Hayes @VersatilePhD @clboyles
@pankisseskafka

First of all, departmental involvement seems to belong in the realm of duty for most of our PhD followers. Indeed, even though some of us are given a teaching job by our department, this department is investing in us. Investing time and money. It is thus only fair that we would spare a little bit of our time, albeit very valuable and sparse, to help out our department in its endeavors. Should it be in the form of organizing activities for undergrad language classes such as a language video/ book club, a conversation club, or helping out in the organization of a departmental symposium at a more academic level, it is important to show the professors in the department that you are present and returning

the favor.

Giving back

The life of a Graduate Student can often be compared to the life of a Union worker. Always trying to improve our conditions of work and social benefits. We are always moving heaven and earth in order to get what we want, thus it seems only fair that in return we support the people who support us, the professors and staff of our department. Indeed, it seems odd to complain but wanting to remain as detached as possible from faculty governance. For @pankisseskafka and @pannapacker it is a categorical imperative, if you're not helping, you have no right to complain about anything!

Good practice

@J_C_Hayes

At this point in our academic careers, we also have to start thinking pragmatically. Indeed, being involved in the governance of your department and of your university in general can and will help you develop skills that will diversify and widen your competence range. Being involved in committees or other things will not only demonstrate your interest in faculty business but will also provide you with an understanding of the "mechanics" of faculty work.

Life after the PhD will not only be dedicated to your research and your teaching, as a member of a department, you will be asked to participate in its governance and everyday life and organization. This involvement is thus good practice for life after the PhD.

Evaluation

@JeffreyKeefer

It is also important to remember that being involved in your department will provide your professors with concrete experience of your purely academic and managing skills, skills that are often very difficult to assess and practice. Your department will thus be able to help you acquire and develop these purely professional skills that will prove to be

essential to your future life inside or outside academia.

University level

@pannacker @clboyles @JeffreyKeefer

The question of whether graduate students should get involved outside the department created a small controversy on Twitter. It seems that the objective way to see this is insisting on the fact that involvement is not compulsory especially if for adjuncts. Indeed, for adjuncts the benefits will not counterbalance the time and effort they invest in it. Adjuncts are not paid for anything beyond teaching.

However, if you are a graduate student, it is a good idea to take this involvement to the next level, at the level of the university. Your department is not a free and independent electron. It depends from a college and ultimately from the university at large. Going the extra mile makes your involvement have a greater impact and allows you to make powerful connections outside of your department or field of study. @clboyles even points out that it increases academic communication.

Some great and easy ways to do that is for example to become the GSA (Graduate Student Association) representative of your department. By attending the monthly meetings, you will take part in the vote of budgets, actions and help better the lives of the Graduate Student Community of your university. Moreover, if you want to be even more involved, you can try to climb the ladder and why not become the president, the vice-president, the chair, the secretary, and the treasurer of the GSA. A good thing to know is that these positions are usually remunerated so it's a great way to ally community work and extra money.

You can also serve as member of various decision-making committees campus wide. Your university has a lot of these and they make decisions on very diverse things such as hiring, budget, and organization of events.

Professional Organizations

Perhaps you would rather look outside of your department or institution. Professional organizations and institutes on other campuses offer the chance to expand your network and your CV simultaneously. Some graduate students look to professional organizations if there are few others in their departments with similar interests. Organizing a conference or a journal through a professional organizations is a great way to meet people and serve your field. Conversely, other organizations and institutes might bring together grad students from diverse fields and foster interdepartmental and cross-institutional relationships.