

Tips for Incoming Students

Finding Housing:

- Craigslist was honestly how I found both of the apartments I've lived in while in Ithaca, but there are also other websites such as:
 - lthacarents.com
 - apartments.com
- A lot of apartments don't have central AC so ask the landlord about that if it's important to you
 - sometimes if electric is included in rent they will charge extra if you want to put in a window ac unit in the summer
- Make sure you ask the landlord about whether maintenance requests are responded to quickly. Most houses in Ithaca are pretty old and might need a lot of fixing up so it's nice to have a maintenance person on hand if something goes wrong
- It might be awkward, but if you're looking at an apartment with the landlord and their current tenant is there, ask the current tenant how their experience is going. I've legitimately had a current tenant tell me how horrible their experience was during the housing tour so hopefully other fed up tenants might do the same!
- If you live far from Ithaca and won't be able to see an apartment in person, feel free to reach out to one of the current students (like your GGD Buddy). They will be happy to go see the apartment for you.

Getting to campus/around Ithaca:

- Consider how you will get to campus each day when looking for housing (walk, bike, bus, car). Cornell is on a hill and some neighborhoods in Ithaca where graduate students live are down the hill.
 - <https://gradschool.cornell.edu/admissions/admitted-students/living-in-ithaca/ithaca-neighborhoods-map/>
 - <https://gradschool.cornell.edu/admissions/admitted-students/living-in-ithaca/housing/>
 - As 1st years, all Cornell grad students receive a **free bus pass** that lasts a full academic year. We highly recommend you to use this opportunity to understand whether the bus commute/ bus lines work for you
 - <https://www.tcatbus.com/>
 - Ithaca carshare is a GREAT resource **if you don't have a car**. It's similar to Zipcar, but is subsidized by Cornell so it's pretty cheap. If you have questions about this, feel free to contact me (chk63@cornell.edu)
 - <https://www.ithacacarshare.org/rates/cornell/>

Choosing a Rotation:

- While you may have come into grad school with an idea of all three faculty you want to work with, **give the rotation talks a chance!** You may find a faculty member that you're more interested in.

- Is diversity and inclusion important to you? Check the lab's website for a diversity statement and if they don't have one, ask the PI about it!
- Ask the PI and current students in the lab what their mentoring style is.
 - There's definitely many faculty that are hands off and others that are more hands on. Determine what kind of mentoring style you like early on and make sure the faculty you're interested in matches that mentoring style.

Timeline for choosing rotations (These suggested dates may change due to COVID):

- At least a few weeks before the rotation should start, email the PI you think you would like to rotate with and suggest having a meeting to discuss. A meeting can help you decide early on if you really want to rotate or not. [Include things to discuss in this meeting - number of students will take this year, number of other people rotating, etc.]
 - Deciding on a PI for the first rotation usually happens during the summer or early in the Fall semester. The first rotation for you all will begin mid-September, so just try to contact them ahead of time.
 - For the second rotation, usually sometime during the middle-end of Fall semester
 - For the third rotation, usually sometime during the height of winter.
- Once you decide which PI to rotate with, it's good to meet with them at least a few weeks before you start your rotation to discuss potential rotation projects and expectations during the rotation.
- During your rotation:
 - Try to meet with the PI often, this helps build a connection with the PI and also allows you to evaluate how you work together.
 - Talk to the other graduate students in the lab! They are a great resource not only to ask research questions, but also to ask about the lab environment and PI.
- At the end of the rotation, go over the evaluation sheet with the PI. Some other things you can discuss during this meeting:
 - Whether they would be willing to take you in their lab / funding
- Keep in touch with the PI after your rotation, especially if you are interested in potentially joining their lab. But, try not to commit to a lab until you have given all of your rotations a chance.

Good Signs During a Rotation/Choosing the right lab to join:

- Your PI not only cares about your performance in lab, but about how YOU are feeling about the lab environment as well
 - Remember, you'll want a good lab environment if you're going to be in a lab for 5 years
- Choose a lab where you not only enjoy the research, but enjoy the mentorship of your PI and the environment that the other students create
 - While you should be intellectually motivated by the projects in the lab, your relationship and compatibility with your advisor is more critical to a successful and enjoyable graduate school experience than the specific research program in the lab.

- DON'T join a lab solely for the science. The environment of the lab is just as important for a successful and happy graduate school experience.

Red Flags During a Rotation:

- The PI does NOT lay out clear expectations for you at the beginning of your rotation when you ask
 - We will have an expectation form that you and your PI can fill out and if they refuse to do so, that is definitely a red flag. Communication with your PI is key!
- The PI does a poor job at communicating with you during your rotation
- Students in the lab are constantly complaining about the PI
- The faculty is a helicopter PI AKA, they are keeping an eye on what you're doing 24/7. Trust needs to be built from the beginning and the faculty you're rotating with should give you at least a little space to grow on your own.
- **NOTE:** If you are noticing any of these red flags, talk to other grad students (like anyone on the Climate Committee for example) about them to get their opinion. We're all here to help you guys!
 - You can also talk to your DGS. They're here to help you too!

Taxes:

- It's super nice getting large lump sums every semester, however, make sure you save about \$3000-\$4000 for taxes when the time comes
- If you would like to save ~\$30-\$50 in total, file your taxes quarterly, if not, don't worry about it until tax season!
- Once you're ready to file taxes, feel free to ask other graduate students for help. It's definitely intimidating and we all remember the feeling
 - Many students have used Turbo Tax (free) or H&R Block (~\$300) to file their taxes

Other Tips:

- Find your work life balance
 - **Make sure to take time to make friends.** I know it's compelling to want to work your butt off during your rotations to make a good impression, but it's also important to keep a good work life balance at all times during graduate school. You'll be here for 5 years, you'll want all the support you can get!
- Try not to come into grad school with a concrete idea of who your official PI is going to be! Things change and you may decide during your rotation that the PI that you thought would be best just isn't a good fit for you.
- Don't worry about picking classes for your first Fall semester until orientation - you probably won't hear about the options until then and that is normal.

Fun stuff to do in Ithaca:

- Hiking! There are sooo many good places to hike in Ithaca and they're absolutely gorgeous (get it? :D)

- If you're worried about seeing too many people on the trails because of COVID, check on some of the more hidden trails using this link! <https://ithacatrails.org/>
- Swimming
 - Taughannock
 - Treman
- Indian Creek Farm
 - Go pick some fruit and then enjoy some of their delicious apple cider donuts
- Cornell Botanical Gardens
- Get some ice cream at Sweet Melissa's!
 - They have really good soft serve ice cream and it's a hit in Ithaca
- Restaurants/Breweries (Consider take out because of COVID, but there are some that have a lot of outdoor space to social distance)
 - Ithaca Beer Co (they have a toooon of space outside and there's plenty of space to social distance)
 - Their burgers and beer are amaaazing
 - Red's Place has the best Mac and Cheese ever -Catherine
 - Jade Garden has good Chinese food in my opinion
 - Tamarind and Thai Basil have great Thai food
 - Breweries in NY state <https://www.brewtrail.com/new-york-breweries/>