

How to be Successful in Graduate School: A Practical Guide

Foyzul Hassan
Department of Computer Science
University of Texas at San Antonio
Email:foyzul.hassan@gmail.com

Abstract—Doing Phd is always a critical decision as there is always a chance of drop out or be frustrated. This paper attempt to give some insight about how we can over come critical issues while doing Phd. The intention behind this paper is not provide 7 ways to be successful or such formula rather it gives an insight that helps graduate student to be successful.

I. INTRODUCTION

Doing Phd is long process and within these time period students should enjoy research activity. But in recent years we are observing that students get demotivated while doing Phd and even after completing Phd they feel that they took wrong decision. And attrition rate for Phd is almost 50 percent. So, why this is happening is a big concern.

After studying different publications and discussing with my graduate school friends and faculty members I have identified some issues that can be helpful for graduate student to be successful. This issues might not be always to be happen, but it might be helpful to successful graduate student.

II. THOUGHT BEFORE APPLYING PHD

Doing Phd usually changes one's carrier path and it also takes long to be completed. Within the period of study one has work hard for study and doing research for publication and dissertation. Again carrier path become narrow after doing Phd. Usually after completing Phd people join as faculty member or work researcher in RandD labs. It's a very narrow carrier path and getting these sort of job is always not easy. So, before applying graduate school we need to ask our self is it required to do Phd, am I motivated enough to do research. If get positive answers then go ahead and enjoy.

III. APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

Before applying to graduate school think about your research interest and search for graduate school based on your research interest. Based on research interest one should also try to communicate with faculty members mentioning the research interest. Communicating with faculty member regarding research interest does not mean I am interested in networking or such broad topic. Pick a interesting topic within your research area and try to discuss with faculty member mentioning the topic. But it might not be always the case that faculty members will be interested on the topic you mentioned. It will allow you to discuss on the topic and later you may work on other areas within your research interest.

IV. WORKING WITH ADVISOR IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

Advisor is a person who is usually a faculty members and supervise graduate students to do research works. A good relationship with your advisor is critical to your success. Make sure you pick the right advisor for you. In case of doing Phd try to listen advisor's suggestion as he/she usually has better knowledge of doing Phd. You might discuss about your concerns but try to follow him. Regarding communication in between graduate student and advisor, try to meet regularly that is every week or every alternative week with proper agenda. Also keep meeting minutes for the discussion with the advisor [?].

V. REGULAR WORKS IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

Although working on different project is the main activity in Phd, but you have also join course works, attending seminars and discuss with other graduate students about what they are doing. So, lot of work and you have prioritize those works. Attending seminars and discussion with graduate students will give some insight of doing research and also help you to identify a suitable research topic. But one think we should remember is apart from doing all his things we should maintain our social and family life. Other that social and family life graduate students may become demotivated soon.

VI. RESEARCH WORKS IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

Most Phd students spend their time reading papers, discussing ideas with colleagues, writing and revising papers, think of innovative ideas etc. While reading papers there are two approaches Breadth Vs Depth. Some papers we just need to go through very quickly to get some idea about the work while other need to read very deeply. Also you have to know whats been previously done in your research area in order to make your contributions are actually novel and useful. Again knowing the research community on your research area might give you idea prior work, how to talk and picking up a viable research topic. Picking up a viable research topic is also important it should not be much big and again there should be novelty and industrial expectation behind choosing research topic. Once your research topic is selected try to start writing about the problem, solution you think and steps to resolve the problem is also good idea. While writing ask yourself about the problem and implement the steps to make to get the solution of each steps. When you will start getting data, spend

time on analyzing you data, rethink about research steps based on your data and try to represent the data in presentable way. Once you have enough data start thinking about publishing paper. If you take so much time to publish paper your work may get published by some one else. So, start writing as soon as possible, revise your writing and submit the paper to a quality conference or journal. After submitting you also need to organize your work and tools so that you can start working viably for upcoming research problems.

VII. TALKS AND NETWORKING WHILE DOING PHD

According to [1] attending conferences and workshops is valuable whether you have paper there or not. While attending conferences you will get chance to meet with people and have chance to discussion about their problem. Also you will get idea about current state and trend in your research domain. If you give talk in conferences practice ahead of time so that your key points and ideas can be presented. For creating a network you can participate conferences, review papers and even do internship. Writing tutorials, technical notes is also a effective way to make you known in the research community.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Graduate school is not an easy process as process of doing Phd is too unstructured. In my writing I tried to identify the hurdles and give some advice to overcome those.

REFERENCES

- [1] M. desJardins, "How to succeed in graduate school: A guide for students and advisors," *Crossroads*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 5–9, Jun. 2008. [Online]. Available: <http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/1375972.1375975>