



**2021—2022**

# **GRADUATE STUDENT GUIDE**

**A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS BY STUDENTS**

**CRIMINOLOGY, LAW AND SOCIETY STUDENT ASSOCIATION**

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**



## Introduction

The Criminology, Law and Society Student Association is excited to share the *Graduate Student Guide* as a resource *for* students *by* students. This guide shares our advice to assist you in:

1. Identifying Key Resources for your Graduate Journey.
2. Preparing for Success in Graduate School.
3. Extending Your Learning.
4. Preparing for Orientation.
5. Getting to Know Your 2021—2022 CLSSA Officers.

This information is not intended to replace any formal guidance issued by George Mason University (Mason), the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS), or the Department of Criminology, Law and Society (CLS). Instead, it offers ideas from the student perspective to supplement existing Mason, CHSS, and CLS resources.

## Section 1: Identifying Key Resources for your Graduate Journey

One of the key benefits of completing your graduate degree with CLS is the access we have to a variety of institutional and peer support. We aren't just CLS students. We're also CHSS and Mason students more broadly and that gives us access to a lot of resources.

### University Support

Mason enhances the value of our criminology graduate degrees with its reputation and network. Mason's R-1 status is especially important to us. As an R-1 university, we are part of an elite group of institutions performing at the highest research level based on productivity and impact. That status has a lot to do with federal research agencies' confidence in Mason faculty and expertise, which facilitates a cycle of additional research investments that can support funded research positions for graduate students. Mason also has an expansive alumni network that enhances the support available to us from CHSS and CLS faculty and staff. There are over 80,000 alumni in the D.C. area alone.

As you think through the logistics of becoming a CLS graduate student, Mason's resources are especially helpful. You can explore the website or use the links below to learn more about:

- [Student Life](#)
  - [Graduate](#) and [Off-Campus](#) Housing
  - [Activities and Events](#)
- [Graduate Student Life](#)
  - [New Graduate Students](#)
  - [Gradstravaganza](#)
  - [Graduate and Professional Student Association](#)
- [Parking and Transportation](#)
- [Library Resources for Graduate Students](#)
- [The Writing Center](#)
- [Mason Student Services Center](#)

There is a lot of helpful information online, but it can also be overwhelming. If you have questions, please feel free to reach out to [clsgrad@gmu.edu](mailto:clsgrad@gmu.edu) or any of us at CLSSA.



### **College Support**

CLS is in the [College of Humanities and Social Sciences](#) and is responsible for two of CHSS' master's degrees and one of its doctoral degrees. CHSS Graduate Academic Affairs outlines a variety of resources for its graduate students on its [website](#), including information on university deadlines, a graduation checklist, and links to funding and support services beyond a specific department. Students can access CHSS support directly by reaching out to [chssgradstudent@gmu.edu](mailto:chssgradstudent@gmu.edu) with any questions or concerns about academic policy or [chsshhelp@gmu.edu](mailto:chsshhelp@gmu.edu) with any non-academic issues you need CHSS to address.

CHSS also provides detailed analyses of [Job Prospects](#) and works closely with [Career Services](#) to support students' long-term career planning. Mason also offers a variety of professional counseling in multiple categories, including:

- Preparing for graduate school.
- Choosing a major or career field.
- Finding an applying to internships and jobs.
- Going to graduate school.
- Preparing for an interview.
- Any other career-related questions you have.

Mason offers a variety of learning opportunities and career connections through [Handshake](#). Students can also view a variety of recorded events [here](#).



### **Department Support**

CLS offers three graduate degrees:

- [PhD in Criminology, Law and Society](#)
- [MA in Criminology, Law and Society](#)
- [MS in Criminal Justice](#)

The MS degree has both a traditional pathway and accelerated track through the CLS undergraduate program. While program requirements differ across the three graduate degrees CLS offers, graduate students work and learn together with each student contributing a unique mix of experience that elevates the collective learning environment. CLS has a very informative website. There is a lot of information you can find there related to our:

- [Four graduate program tracks \(PhD, MA, MS, and BA/BS-MS\).](#)
- [Faculty, staff, and students.](#)
- [Research centers.](#)
- [Events.](#)



### Peer Support

One of the best pieces of advice we can give you is to think broadly about your peers. With four graduate tracks, you have a diverse network of peers around you to support your graduate school journey. Try to attend as many CLS and CLSSA events as you can. Classes and extracurricular activities are a great way to connect with other CLS students.

In addition to learning more about faculty and staff through CLS's [People](#) resource, you can also find bios for graduate assistants and doctoral students. These bios can be a great resource for learning about some of your peers' research and policy interests so that you can network more strategically during your time in the program. Many of CLS's [Research Centers'](#) individual websites also provide information on the professors and students supporting them.

Several student organizations work together to formalize peer support during our graduate school journeys. At the department-level, we have [CLSSA](#). CLSSA is the student association of masters and doctoral students who strive to connect CLS's graduate students with one another to share research, professional, and social interests. CLSSA also supports graduate students' professional development by organizing events such as guest speakers, informal group lunches with faculty, and Trivia Nights (see Figure 1). CLSSA often supplements CLS and CHSS travel funding for students presenting at conferences. Many student engagement events are shared via email, so it is very important to keep up with your Mason email to stay informed about student events and connection opportunities. [GAPSA](#) provides similar support at the university-level and represents all graduate students on the Graduate Council as the university's recognized student governance organization.



Figure 1: Example CLSSA Mid-Semester Newsletter

### TIPS AND TRICKS

*You should closely monitor your Mason email for official university, college, and department correspondence, but it's also important because that's where you'll hear about most of CLS's events for students. If you forward your Mason email to a personal email, it is critical to only respond from your Mason account. Faculty and staff are not permitted to communicate with students via non-Mason email accounts.*



## Section 2: Preparing for Success in Graduate School

As you think about preparing for success in graduate school, we've found that the most important thing is to recognize everything you've already done to be here today. Hard work got you here and hard work—and strategically engaging your support networks—will get you through. It's important to trust yourself to take things in stride, but we also pulled together a list of recommendations to raise your confidence as you enter your program.

- Sign up for classes early.
- Build relationships with the department, faculty and staff, and peers.
- Manage time wisely within and between semesters.
- Set yourself up for future success.
- Recognize that needs and priorities shift and make time to re-evaluate.

We've also found that asking for advice is a great way to drive conversations with current and former graduate students. Most are willing to share their experiences if you reach out.

### ***Sign Up for Classes Early***

The department provides several course planning resources, including an online Degree Requirements webpage for each graduate degree in CLS ([MS](#), [MA](#), and [PhD](#)) and [Degree Progress Worksheets](#). [Patriotweb](#) also has degree planning resources, such as [DegreeWorks](#), and is where you'll register for classes each semester. You should reach out to the many formal resources in place to help you, including:

- Your Faculty Advisor, assigned upon entering the program.
- [Brielle Manovich](#), the Graduate Program Coordinator.
- [Allison Redlich](#), the Director of Graduate Programs.
- [Charlotte Gill](#), the Director of the MS Program.

### TIPS AND TRICKS

*You should always use the Degree Requirements information and Degree Progress Worksheet associated with your degree program when signing up for classes. CLS offers a diverse range of graduate courses across its degree programs so you want to be careful that you're not taking coursework that does not apply to your degree. When in doubt, reach out!*

### ***Build and Nurture Relationships with the Department, Faculty and Staff, and Peers***

Finding ways to get and stay involved empowers you to get as much as you can out of your graduate studies. There are a lot of ways to get involved so this looks different for every student. For example:

- If you enjoy meeting new people in group settings, you should watch your Mason email closely for CLSSA and department events.
- If you enjoy meeting people with shared interests 1:1, you might be a big fan of the [People](#) webpages on the CLS website. You can find faculty, staff, graduate assistants, and doctoral student bios to see who shares your research, policy, and practice interests and use that as a jumping off point to email folks to set up a 1:1 meeting.

Everyone networks and builds relationships differently, and there are many tools to support a variety of approaches.



As you think through your individualized plan for engaging with the department, we recommend developing a strategy for holistic mentorship during your studies. Support networks are critical to successfully navigating graduate studies and usually require a delicate balance of depth and breadth. We've found that a little research into mentoring best practices goes a long way and want to share a few of our favorites to get you started. First, Figure 2 presents a mentoring map that can be helpful in making sure you're covering all your bases when you think about the support you may need during your graduate studies. The CLS community—faculty, staff, and other students—can be a resource in many of these areas, but they aren't the only resources you have. When you think about where you'll get support, consider family, friends, and colleague. The links below will take you to some of the broader resources we found helpful:

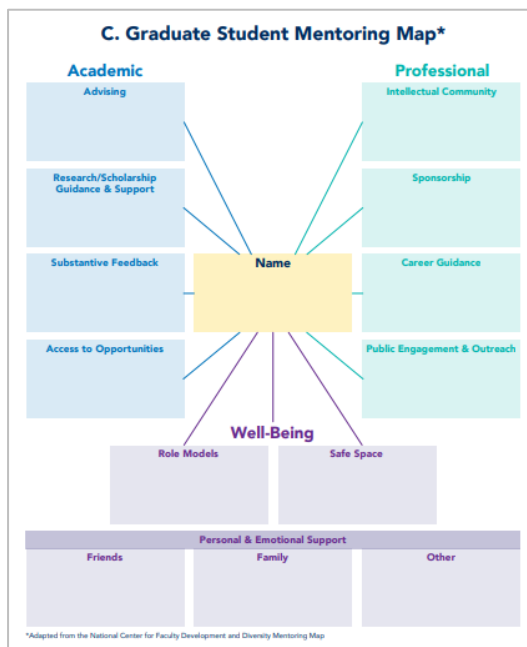


Figure 2: University of Michigan Graduate Student Mentoring Guide for Students

- The University of Michigan's [Graduate Student Mentoring Guide](#) covers the need for multiple mentors and resources to assist students in arranging mentorship support.
- The Public Health Institute's [Mentoring Guide for Proteges](#) is another great resource.
- Harvard Business Review articles on [What's the Right Way to Find a Mentor](#), [How to Build a Great Relationship with a Mentor](#), and [How to Get More from Your Mentor](#) can help you navigate some of the specifics of developing mentoring relationships.

There's no one way to mentor or be mentored, but it is important to make sure you're coordinating and nurturing mentoring relationships. We also encourage you to think about how you might be a mentor to other students, graduate or undergraduate, to contribute to the CLS community's support of one another.

### **Manage Time Wisely Within and Between Semesters**

Learning to manage your time effectively is a skill you'll refine in graduate school that will continue serving you for the rest of your career. Mason's [Academic Readiness Toolkit on Time Management](#) covers the core time management skills of prioritization, focus, and scheduling. Mental health resources, especially those related to stress management, go hand-in-hand with effective time management skill building. Mason has a variety of [health and wellness](#) resources to help you, including [Counseling and Psychological Services](#), [the Student Support and Advocacy Center](#), [the Center for the Advancement of Well-Being](#), and [Learning Services](#).

### TIPS AND TRICKS

*While most time management advice may seem tailored to activities within a semester, it is equally important to think about how you spend your time between semesters. This could mean leaning in to "get ahead" or leaning out to recharge so you are ready to bring your best effort again next semester.*





**Prioritization** requires you to assess tasks' relative importance and allocating your time where it is needed most. There are a lot of ways you can approach prioritization so we found [this article](#) especially helpful in getting to know five common approaches. One of our favorite tools is the 2x2 matrix in Figure 3, which focuses on importance and urgency. You can use this adaptable tool to prioritize an existing list of near-term tasks or adapt it to navigate long-term learning priorities by thinking about what you need to learn by the end of your degree and the potential benefits of doing that more quickly.



Figure 3: Eisenhower Urgency-Importance Matrix

**Focus** refers to your ability to manage your time on task, remaining aware of your motivation and energy. One of the focus tools we love is the Pomodoro Technique, which aims to increase focus by making a dedicated space for distraction. It can work for smaller tasks (like homework) and bigger tasks (like capstone papers, theses, major area papers (MAP), and dissertations). Our peers who swear by this method add that it is helpful to silence your phone during the 25-minute focus period so notifications don't pull you away. Figure 4 comes from the [Productive Club's beginners guide to the Pomodoro Technique](#).

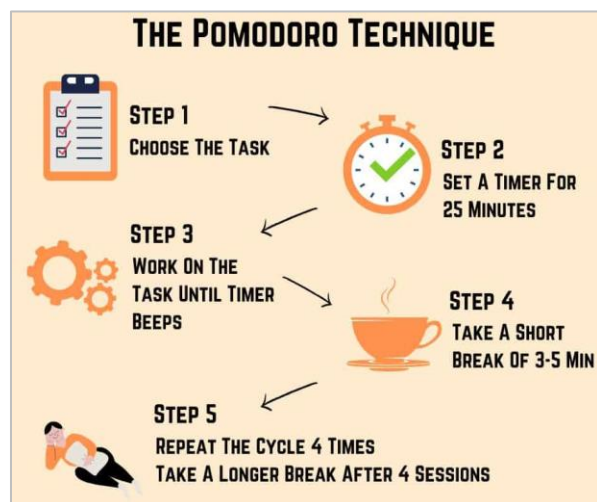


Figure 4: Overview of the Pomodoro Technique

**Scheduling** allows you to ensure you can accomplish essential tasks in the time you have available. Time and Task Plans are can be especially helpful for significant graduate school projects like capstone papers, theses, MAPs, and dissertations. Time and Task Plans encourage you to outline all the major tasks necessary for completing the project and then work backwards from your goal deadline to allocate time to each milestone based on its level of effort relative to the other milestones. The [example](#) in Figure 5 is a free template from [Smart Sheet](#), and there are many other variations and templates available online.

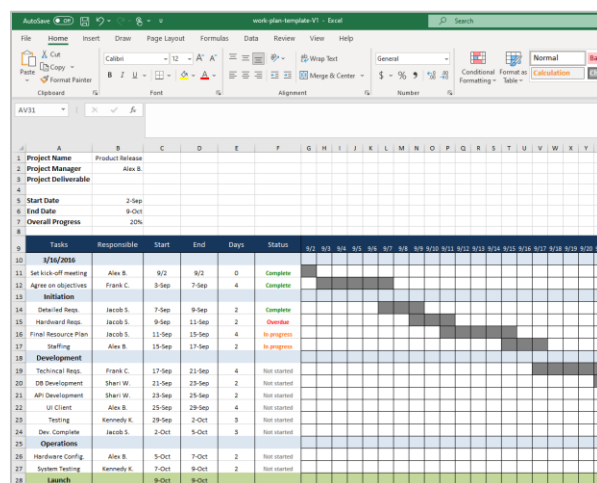


Figure 5: Example Time and Task Plan



### **Set Yourself Up for Future Success**

We highly encourage you to talk to [current graduate students](#) and alumni from the [PhD](#), [MA](#), and [MS](#) programs to get their advice. Among the variety of recommendations you'd receive, you'd probably get a lot of advice to "think ahead." These are our top three recommendations.

1. To ensure you don't have to read articles and books more than once across your multiyear studies, always write a short "brief" for any assigned readings as you go through classes. Your future self will thank you for those briefs later on because they will be easy to review when you work on your program's major writing assignments, whether that be a capstone, thesis, major area paper, or dissertation.
2. Balance exploration with focus when selecting your elective courses. Many students try to leave the program with an articulable "area of expertise," but finding the right area for you (which then informs which electives you prioritize) requires openness early in the process. Talk to as many people as you can to develop a broad understanding of your concentration options before you narrow your focus.
3. Develop timelines with intermediary milestones to help you stay on track during long-term projects. Think about your degree's culminating assignment early because you'll be surprised how much time you can save yourself if you start focusing on preparing early. You can also take advantage of faculty's expertise to get recommendations for additional, self-directed reading you can do to prepare you to meet your goals.

While these are our top three, there are many more ways to set yourself up for future success and this can be a great icebreaker question to get to know others in the department. What works for someone might be easily adaptable into a solution for you, so don't be afraid to ask what people wish they'd known earlier in their graduate studies.

### **Recognize That Needs and Priorities Shift and Make Time to Re-Evaluate**

Many of us enter graduate school with a plan: earn *this* degree, take advantage of *these* research or internship opportunities, and get *this* job. Through our own studies, we've learned that it is important to be flexible. Timelines and interests shift. Some master's students realize that they want to go on to pursue the doctoral degree. Some graduate students who originally planned to remain full-time students get amazing job offers and transition to part-time study. Others who come into the program intending to study part-time discover that they can better meet their goals if they leave their jobs and transition to become full-time students. Everyone takes a different path, and it is okay if that path changes during your studies. If you remain committed and engaged, you can be successful in graduate school in a variety of environments. We recommend asking yourself questions like those below after each semester or year.

- What did you accomplish during the last semester/year?
- What do you want to accomplish during the next semester/year?
- What are your overall goals for your graduate studies?
- What are your goals after you graduate?
  - How will your graduate studies help you achieve those goals?
  - What other things—beyond your graduate studies—should you focus on now to help you achieve those longer-term goals?

The answers to these and other big picture questions will help you ensure that you're targeting your graduate school efforts in ways that are aligned with your broader goals.





### Section 3: Extending Your Learning

Your graduate program's curriculum is an important foundation that can be enhanced with extracurricular experiences, including working, attending conferences, and networking.

#### *Professional Experience through Internships*

CLS students have secured internships and full-time work with a variety of employers. At the beginning of each semester, the Graduate Coordinator confirms which students would like to be on the email list for job announcements, which is another great source of information. The list below provides examples of some of the places that offer opportunities in the area.

- Research firms
  - American Institutes for Research ([internships](#) and [jobs](#))
  - RAND Corporation ([internships and fellowships](#) and [jobs](#))
  - Urban Institute ([internships](#) and [jobs](#))
- Non-profits
  - Justice Policy Institute ([internships](#) and [jobs](#))
  - The Sentencing Project ([internships and jobs](#))
  - The Vera Institute of Justice ([internships and jobs](#))
- Department of Justice
  - Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives ([internships](#) and [jobs](#))
  - Community Relations Service ([internships and jobs](#))
  - Federal Bureau of Investigation ([internships](#) and [jobs](#))
  - Office of Justice Programs ([internships and jobs](#))
  - United States Secret Service ([internships](#) and [jobs](#))
- State/local governments
  - Alexandria City Police Department ([internships](#) and [jobs](#))
  - Arlington County Police Department ([internships](#) and [jobs](#))
- Consulting firms
  - Booz Allen ([internships](#) and [jobs](#))
  - Deloitte ([internships](#) and [jobs](#))
  - ICF ([internships and jobs](#))

#### *Conference Attendance*

Students often attend the following academic and industry conferences, and travel funding may be available through the Provost's Office, CLS, and CLSSA.

- American Society of Criminology
- Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences
- American Psychology-Law Society
- International Association of Chiefs of Police

#### *Networking*

Some students also find it helpful to join professional associations that offer networking opportunities and additional resources, such as the International Association of Crime Analysts, Police Executive Research Forum, and International Association of Chiefs of Police.



## Section 4: Preparing for Your First Semester Orientation

We thought about the questions we wish we'd known to ask when we were starting out as CLS graduate students.

The first set of guiding questions are few that may be helpful to reflect on during your first semester and may also be valuable to return to periodically.

<b>Initial Self-Reflection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are you most excited about?</li> <li>• What do you think will be the major challenges in your graduate school journey?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What support will be important in addressing those challenges?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What skills might you need to develop to be successful?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What study practices will continue to serve you well in graduate school?</li> <li>○ What study practices will you need to develop or adapt?</li> <li>○ What self-management skills (e.g., time, motivation) will you pay the most attention to nurturing during your first year in your program?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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The second set of guiding question are a good jumping off point for starting discussions with faculty and staff.

<b>Getting to Know Faculty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your primary research, policy, and practice interests, generally?</li> <li>• What are the main research projects you are currently working on?</li> <li>• How do you typically work with students on your research? What roles are students typically assigned and how they change over their time in the program?</li> <li>• Do many students work in addition to taking classes and working on research?</li> <li>• What do you recommend to students interested in working either part- or full-time during their graduate studies?</li> <li>• What are a few things that tend to surprise new students, and do you have any advice to ensure students can successfully navigate those surprises?</li> </ul>
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The third set of guiding questions can help you start conversations with other students about the lessons they've learned through their own graduate studies.

<b>Getting to Know Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think of the graduate program?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What are the benefits new students should be sure to take advantage of?</li> <li>○ What tends to surprise new students about the program?</li> <li>○ What places do you like to go nearby to take breaks (e.g., parks, trails, coffee shops, other sport or entertainment facilities)?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What is the Mason, CHSS, and CLS graduate student community like?</li> <li>• What was your transition like from undergraduate to graduate studies?</li> <li>• What professors do you work closely with?</li> <li>• What type of work are you assigned and what does a typical work relationship with a professor look like in CLS?</li> <li>• Do you typically work on projects that professors have already developed? Have you been able to create a project individually that you were able to pursue with your professor's assistance?</li> </ul>
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## Section 5: Getting to Know Your 2021—2022 CLSSA Officers

<p><b>President</b></p> <p><b>Clay Drummond</b> <i>cdrummo@gmu.edu</i></p>	<p>Clayton B. Drummond is a doctoral student in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University and a Graduate Teaching Assistant. He earned his B.S. and M.A. in Criminology from the University of West Georgia. His research examines legal decision-making, criminal law, and wrongful convictions. Clayton also serves as an Editor for the Innocence Research Workshop.</p>
<p><b>Vice President</b></p> <p><b>Andrew Madrigal</b> <i>amadrig2@gmu.edu</i></p>	<p>Andrew is a doctoral student in Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University. He received his BS and MS in Criminology and Criminal Justice from California State University, Long Beach in 2017 and 2019. His research interests include wrongful convictions, social justice issues, and juvenile justice. Andrew currently serves as an editor for the Innocence Research Workshop with Dr. Robert Norris and Clayton Drummond.</p>
<p><b>Secretary</b></p> <p><b>Mary Catlin</b> <i>mcatlin@gmu.edu</i></p>	<p>Mary Catlin is a doctoral student in Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University working as a research assistant for Dr. Allison Redlich in the MODLIS Lab. Her research interests include exploring how social and cognitive factors influence victim (i.e., victims of crime and victims of the justice system itself) decision-making, with a special interest in victim recantation and exonerees.</p>
<p><b>Treasurer</b></p> <p><b>Ben Mackey</b> <i>bmackey2@gmu.edu</i></p>	<p>Benjamin Mackey is an M.A. student in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society and a Graduate Research Assistant at the Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence (ACE!). He graduated from George Mason University with a B.S. in Criminology, Law and Society in 2019. Benjamin has experience in the field of reentry, where he has worked with a nonprofit reentry organization to address the needs of currently or formerly incarcerated individuals.</p>
<p><b>Web Chair</b></p> <p><b>I-Ching Jen</b> <i>ijen@gmu.edu</i></p>	<p>I-Ching Jen is a doctoral student in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University. She received her MS in Criminology from National Chung Cheng University in Taiwan. She currently works under Dr. Sue-Ming Yang as a Graduate Research Assistant.</p>

### TIPS AND TRICKS

*Connect with CLS on social media!*

- *Facebook*
  - *Criminology, Law and Society and George Mason University*
  - *CLS Student Association*
- *Twitter*
  - *@gmucriminology*
  - *@CLSSA\_GMU*