

As a group, graduate students experience the normal stresses and strains of everyday life—losses, disappointments, and conflicts. They may experience additional stress because of their status as graduate students. This brochure was developed to help prepare graduate students for some of the predictable crises and common stresses they may face. It also provides information about services that are available to help graduate students successfully meet the academic and personal challenges of graduate school.

PREDICTABLE CRISES

Transition to Graduate School

The first year of graduate school can be especially challenging as students encounter the many demands of their coursework and research. For some students, graduate school will be the first time they have been with other students who are as capable as they are in their prospective disciplines, and they often find that their previous academic success does not distinguish them from their new peers. Self-doubt is not unusual, and it is common to question one's competence and fitness for the career one has chosen.

Arrival at graduate school may bring a number of other anxieties as well. Students must often adjust to a new geographical location, to new people with different styles of interaction, and to the loss of contact with family and friends to whom they were very close prior to enrolling at Rutgers.

For international students, the transition to graduate school can be especially demanding. In addition to all the other concerns, there are adjustments to what may be major differences in the academic system and to a whole new culture.

Work-related Problems

One common expression of anxiety for students in fields requiring extensive writing is "writer's block" – the inability to complete writing assignments in a timely fashion. Writer's block may occur in the first semester, when a student is worried about doing graduate-level work. For other students, problems with writing may not emerge until the dissertation stage, when the enormity of the task and one's concern about the quality of work expected by the faculty may cause a temporary inability to write. Seeking perfection is often a major factor in writer's

block – unless the work is perfect (which is rare), the student may not want to commit the words to paper.

The comprehensive exam before admission to candidacy can be another point of high anxiety. Students commonly feel that faculty expect them to know an impossible amount of material, with a very high penalty for failure. The isolation required to prepare oneself for the exams can also contribute to increasing stress.

It is not uncommon for relationships with professors, especially one's major adviser, to be a source of distress for students. There is often ambivalence, at times in both student and adviser, about the level of dependency and independence expected in this relationship. Some students complain that their advisers are unresponsive or uninterested, tied up in their own research or private worries. Other students are concerned that their advisers are too involved, overcontrolling to the point that students feel they have no autonomy to learn on their own.

A different kind of difficulty may occur if a faculty member wants to initiate a social/sexual relationship with a student, or engages in sexual harassment in other ways. Sexual harassment is against University policy, and the University provides resources to help. See the guide to services at the end of this brochure regarding whom to contact should you encounter a problem involving any form of harassment.

For those who have been away from the classroom for several years, returning to the life of a student can be particularly stressful. The status difference between graduate students and faculty may come as a shock to someone thinking of him- or herself as an independent capable adult. There is also the transition from being fully employed to entering graduate school, with its loss of income.

Becoming a teaching assistant may bring out other anxieties and confusion. One is expected to be "the teacher," which may raise self-doubts about competence and difficulty making the leap to the other side of the podium.

Finally, there is the uncertainty about life after graduation. The lack of information about how useful their skills will be in the next stage of life may increase anxiety for those about to graduate.

Personal Relationships

Graduate school often causes stress in personal relationships. For those students who are not involved in an intimate relationship, the lack of time and seeming lack of opportunities to meet others can leave one feeling lonely and isolated. The social whirl of undergraduate life continues, but one is not part of it, and many of one's new peers may be married or involved with someone already, so social opportunities can be limited.

Graduate student relationships are often put under stress as students feel great pressure to spend most of their time completing academic work and responding to the demands of professors, and may have little time or energy left over for a spouse or lover. This can be especially frustrating for a partner who does not understand the enormous time pressures placed on students seeking advanced degrees. He or she may not experience the same intellectual stimulation and interesting peer interaction that academic life can provide, and thus may have fewer releases from the stresses of maintaining a household, raising children, or doing relatively uninteresting work to support a family. This imbalance in quality of life can be complicated by the student's close daily contact with others who share the same pressures and academic interests, who may seem more appealing. Financial pressures may also contribute to stress, and can be a focus of disagreement between partners.

The comings and goings of the academic year, and finally the possibility of pursuing career opportunities in different locations after graduation, make relationships harder to maintain. In marriage and long-term relationship dual careers may cause difficulty.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Much of the stress experienced by graduate students is normal, and reactions to it are often transient, albeit uncomfortable. Like others, students tend to seek psychological help mainly when their usual ways of coping are not working well.

Symptoms of stress that are more extreme or that last longer than usual may raise special concern. For example, almost everyone feels depressed at times, but if one feels so lethargic (perhaps overwhelmed) that it is difficult to move, or stays depressed for days or weeks, it should be checked

out. Many problems are both common and readily resolvable, and seeking help is normal and prudent. Staff members at the centers listed in this brochure encourage students to seek help sooner rather than later, and an introductory interview with a professional may ease concerns.

AVAILABLE SERVICES

There are a number of different kinds of psychological services available on or near the New Brunswick/ Piscataway campuses. They include:

Counseling and Psychological Services

Counseling and Psychological Services, part of Rutgers Health Service, includes psychological counseling offices, psychiatry, and alcohol and drug counseling.

Psychological Counseling Offices

All offices are staffed primarily by clinical or counseling psychologists and social workers, with graduate students under supervision seeing some clients after screening. Services are free to students, and strict confidentiality is maintained in accordance with ethical standards and the law. New Brunswick counseling offices are:

- **College Avenue**
17 Senior Street (732/932-7884)
8 Lafayette Street (732/932-3966)
<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~rccc>
- **Cook/Douglass**
Federation Hall (732/932-9070)
61 Nichol Avenue (732/932-9150)
- **Livingston**
Tillett Hall, Room 247 (732/445-4140)

All graduate and undergraduate students can be seen at any of the counseling offices in New Brunswick. The offices coordinate with each other so that students can be referred to the office that can best help them.

The counseling offices offer short-term psychotherapy, individual and group. In addition, crisis intervention is available, and a few students are seen for longer-term therapy under special circumstances. Students may seek help for a range of problems in their lives, from situational crises to longstanding psychological issues that cause major

disruptions. In most cases, students needing longer-term care will be referred to other agencies.

Counseling staff members are available to consult with faculty, staff, or student groups on organizational issues and to provide training in helping skills, conflict management, or other areas of human relations. Following a traumatic event such as the death of a student or faculty member, counseling staff can provide post-crisis intervention for students individually and in groups, including classrooms.

Psychiatric Services

Mental health services are available at Hurtado Health Center, and some other locations on campus, with appointments scheduled through a central number. Services include psychiatric evaluation, medication supervision, and brief psychotherapy.

Hurtado Health Center
11 Bishop Place, 3rd floor
College Avenue Campus
732/932-7402 ext. 233
<http://health.rutgers.edu/psychiatry>

Substance Abuse Counseling

The Alcohol and Other Drug Assistance Program for Students (ADAPS) is a counseling and information program for students who are concerned about their drinking or use of other drugs, about a friend's use/abuse, or about drug or alcohol use in their family.

Hurtado Health Center
11 Bishop Place, 3rd floor
College Avenue Campus
732/932-7402 ext. 233
<http://health.rutgers.edu/adaps>

Additional Resources on Campus

At the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology:

- **The Psychological Clinic**

732/445-6111
<http://gsappweb.rutgers.edu/clinic>

For long- and short-term psychotherapy by graduate students under supervision. This clinic also offers family/relationship therapy and testing for learning disabilities.

- **Eating Disorders Clinic**

732/445-2292

- **Anxiety Disorders Clinic**

732/445-5384

Rutgers University Sexual Assault Services and Crime Victim Assistance

Provides crisis intervention, counseling, and advocacy for students, staff, and faculty who are victims of sexual and dating violence, stalking, harassment, theft and other crimes.

3 Bartlett Street, College Avenue Campus
732/932-1181
<http://sexualassault.rutgers.edu>

In the Community

University Behavioral Health Care

1-800-969-5300

Services for a fee, usually based on a sliding scale, are available here. Offers some "Charity Care," reduced fee services.

Referrals to therapists in private practice are available through campus counseling and mental health services as appropriate.

SPECIAL SERVICES

Faculty and Staff Counseling

Rutgers Faculty and Staff Assistance Program

732/932-3020 ext. 4010 (24-hour hotline)

<http://uhr.rutgers.edu/fas/EECounsServ.htm>

Counseling is provided by a licensed, credentialed counselor. Common areas of concern for staff include family relationships, bereavement, financial problems, caring for adult family members, child and adolescent development, and substance abuse.

Conversations with counselors are completely confidential. Where necessary, outside referrals are made. Coverage for private mental health services is provided through the standard University employee health insurance programs.

Graduate Students in Helping Fields

Because a number of graduate students in professional psychology, social work, and counseling psychology receive practical training at the campus counseling centers, other students in

these fields may meet a friend or colleague when seeking help there. However, special efforts are made to ensure confidentiality for these students, and senior staff psychologists provide therapy for them. Faculty members in helping fields may be able to help find a low-cost private therapist as an alternative. At times Counseling and Psychological Services offers group sessions for students in helping fields.

Career Services

Graduate Student Career Services can help with career guidance, employment services, job search strategies, career seminars and programs, and other areas related to career management. There are four offices on different campuses – see the web page: <http://career.services.rutgers.edu/gradservices.html>

Services for International Students

Center for International Faculty and Student Services

A number of services to help students adjust to American culture are available through the center.

180 College Avenue, College Avenue Campus
732/932-7015
<http://cifss.rutgers.edu/current/index.html>

Additional Resources

Sexual Harassment and Discrimination

Complaints about sexual harassment may be brought either to the office of the dean of the graduate or professional school involved, or to:

University Harassment Compliance and Equity

ASB, Annex I, Busch Campus

732/445-3020 ext. 626

<http://uhr.rutgers.edu/ee/OEEservices.htm>

General Questions

Office of the Dean, Graduate School – New Brunswick

25 Bishop Place, College Avenue Campus

732/932-7747

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A GUIDE TO PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS