

## Tips and tricks for surviving and thriving at UCD: COVID edition

A resource list compiled from SBG students and updated in 2020

### Research

- Establishing expectations with your advisor is really important in the first year and beyond. If you begin graduate school with a project already in the works, determine what your goals and timeline will be, and who in the lab can help you meet those goals (or at least figure out where the centrifuge tubes are!). If you don't have a project and must come up with your own, establish a clear timeline for when you are expected to begin your research, and determine a plan for you to use your time effectively while you are figuring things out (reading literature, helping labmates with fieldwork, etc).
- Schedule regular, high-quality meetings with your advisor. Prepare a meeting agenda in advance, as well as multiple choice questions (e.g. I was thinking about this or this, what do you think is best). Take notes, and send them to your advisor afterwards so there is a written record of what you've discussed and agreed to
- UC Davis Grad Studies has good mentorship resources, which can help you get an idea of how to approach things: <https://grad.ucdavis.edu/resources/mentoring/mentee-resources>
- Come up with a way to track productivity (planner, bullet journal, etc). It helps to map out a plan for the day or week and then also to look back and see how much you've accomplished
- Grad school is more like a job than your undergraduate work was. Get into the habit of spending regular 9-5 hours on campus, rather than heading to/from class.
- If you're unfamiliar with a method and want advice/ need incubator space for a bit/ ran out of filter paper/ etc., emailing the grad student listserv ([ssgrads@ucdavis.edu](mailto:ssgrads@ucdavis.edu)) is a good place to start. ([soilcorpssocial@ucdavis.edu](mailto:soilcorpssocial@ucdavis.edu) is the less official one and goes only to grad students; [lawrall@ucdavis.edu](mailto:lawrall@ucdavis.edu) gets you the whole department)
- If you are in PES and trying to figure out shared spaces, or looking for equipment, go to the first floor and talk to Tad Doane (office is right next to the teaching lab). He's super helpful.

### Coursework

- SSC205 and 298 could be taken in your first *or* your second year, so keep that in mind while making your course plan
- Try and take important classes with friends in your cohort. Studying is so much easier with people you trust and feel comfortable with!
- Prereqs...a necessary evil! One strategy is to take them as early as possible, so you can knock them out quickly and join your cohort on the other side
- Sometimes prereqs aren't very firm. If there's a class you want to take, never hurts to email the professor first to check.
- If you're interested in a class but don't need the credits/ don't have time to fully commit, auditing is a great option. Email the professor first to make sure it's ok and get added to the Canvas site.

## Mental Health

- UCD offers up to ten free mental health counseling sessions that are very easy to schedule. Don't waste this resource!  
(<https://shcs.ucdavis.edu/services/individual-counseling>)
- In addition to the ten free counseling sessions, you can also easily get a referral for outside therapy after seeing a counselor at the SHCS. Our student insurance plan covers mental health, so the co-pay for outside therapy is pretty reasonable.
- Try to maintain a work-life balance. Don't let your hobbies die!
- There is group counseling for graduate students specifically, very helpful!  
(<https://shcs.ucdavis.edu/services/groups/htc-gtg>)

## Academic Resources

- Attend select workshops provided by grad studies for productivity, networking, career development, etc (<https://grad.ucdavis.edu/professional-development/gradpathways>)
- The TA orientation is required if you're going to TA, but a good learning experience either way
- The Graduate Teaching Community  
(<https://cee.ucdavis.edu/graduate-teaching-community>)
- The Davis R Users Group for help with R programming while working through your data analysis (<https://d-rug.github.io/>)
- You can request free statistical consultations through the Statistics department for your thesis  
([http://www-stat.ucdavis.edu/stat-lab/Statistical\\_Laboratory\\_Consulting\\_Form.doc](http://www-stat.ucdavis.edu/stat-lab/Statistical_Laboratory_Consulting_Form.doc))
- The UC Reserve System allows students to rent space for writing retreats. It's cheap (\$8/night) and amazing. Quail Ridge is about an hour's drive from Davis, above Berryessa; <https://naturalreserves.ucdavis.edu/quail-ridge-reserve> (Still open during COVID, but email the director first to check)
- A word here about the QE: You hear a lot about it in your first year, but you don't need to worry about it yet. Your first year, you should just focus on passing your classes and absorbing as much information as you can and putting together your research project. In your second year, you can start your QE prep by having a conversation with your advisor. Ask them for recommendations on who should be on your committee, as that can help you decide if you should take a class with them or not. When you start to prep, reach out to your fellow students that have already undergone their QE - they will have good advice. And a note: usually nothing that happens in the QE is as bad as what you do to yourself prepping for it.

- SBG students put together an unofficial QE guide and study material repository: <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/folders/0B7YOnoXaSjXdcuUyYzZIMjdpYTO>

## Student Perks

- The UCD gym (“the ARC”) is free, and for a small fee you can attend group exercise classes. They are an excellent way to prioritize and schedule fitness! (<https://cru.ucdavis.edu/content/107-group-exercise.htm>)--May not be open during COVID. But lap swimming is! Check the website to see what’s available: <https://rec.ucdavis.edu/>
- The Craft Center! Each quarter, you can take reasonably priced art/craft classes. You can also purchase studio passes to use the ceramics studio whenever you’d like. (This is also currently not available due to COVID).
- The recreation pool has a lap swimming pool, and pools just for hanging out at
- UCDavis “Love Lab” (<https://shcs.ucdavis.edu/wellness/sexual-health>)
- The health coverage through SHIP is surprisingly decent! Consider enrolling, even if you are young enough to be covered by your parent’s insurance
- The cost of many glasses frames is fully covered by SHIP
- Free access to the New York Times online (<https://www.library.ucdavis.edu/news/get-free-access-to-the-new-york-times/>)
- Spotify for students is only \$5/mo, and comes with a free Hulu account
- Do you like art films and documentaries? UCDavis gives students a FREE subscription to tons of them, including the entire Criterion Collection: <https://ucdavis.kanopy.com/>
- Sadly, Unitrans busses are NOT free to grad students.

## Nearby Recreation

- Hiking and swimming at Lake Berryessa and Stebbins Cold Canyon (<http://yolohiker.org/> is a great site with very detailed descriptions of local hikes)
- Pena Adobe in Vacaville is not too far and has some nice trails
- The Yolo Bypass Wildlife area is great for birdwatching, bat watching, and flat walks

## Financial Planning

- You don’t get your first paycheck until November, so make sure to prepare!
- To stretch your grocery dollars, vary your shopping between Pedrick’s Produce, Grocery Outlet, the farmers’ market, and other more traditional stores in the area
- Forage for fruit

- UCD has a couple ridesharing facebook groups, can buy or sell spots (esp. for trips to the Bay Area, LA)
- One of the main stressors for grad students is the uncertainty of their funding and the expectations that are held for them. Sometime in your first year, sit down with your advisor and specifically ask what are their expectations of you when it comes to funding. Do they have fellowships they want you to apply for? Will you need to TA at some point during the year? It may be difficult to plan your funding more than a year in advance (often advisors don't know what the funding situation will be like a year in advance), but make it a habit to have these discussions openly at least once a year. It may feel awkward at first, but it will save you a lot of grief in the future.

### Tips and Tricks

- Shila Ruiz is the gatekeeper of all things helpful and wonderful. Don't be shy about making an appointment for your questions or concerns!
  - If you are trying to look for TA positions in the department, ask Shila for a list of the professors that will need TAs in the upcoming term, and then shoot them an email letting them know you are available.
- Download the Tapingo app to order food ahead of time (<https://home.tapingo.com/>)
- Sign for for the Eco-Social Listserv for announcements about housing, free stuff, and other resources and oddities (<https://lists.ucdavis.edu/sympa/lists>, search "ecology-social")
- Join the Buy Nothing Davis Facebook group
- Goodwill Furniture Store in Arden
- Download VPN to access articles from off campus (<https://www.library.ucdavis.edu/service/connect-from-off-campus/>)
- If you bike in the rain you'll get a big mud stripe on your butt ([https://localwiki.org/davis/Freshman\\_Stripe](https://localwiki.org/davis/Freshman_Stripe)) Buy a fender!
- If you have questions - reach out to the current grad students at the soilcorpssocial listserv. We have all been there and can help!

### COVID SPECIFIC TIPS

- Zoom happy hours aren't as bad as they sound! You can get a lot of people on one call if you organize games like trivia, paint and sips, or charades. Take turns hosting/planning, so no one carries too much of the burden.
- If your lab group isn't already regularly meeting, suggest weekly or bi-weekly meetings to stay in touch and accountable. Journal clubs are a very easy way to stay in touch as a lab group, and to learn more about your field.
- A selection of Davis activities available during COVID times:
  - Enjoying the arboretum or Putah Creek Reserve
  - Walking, running, or biking the Davis greenbelts, including the Davis Bike Loop ([https://localwiki.org/davis/Davis\\_Bike\\_Loop](https://localwiki.org/davis/Davis_Bike_Loop))