

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 to find 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 relationships 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, Alcohol and Other Drug Assistance Program & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

CAPS is part of Rutgers Student Health. It is staffed by psychologists, drug and alcohol counselors, psychiatrists, social workers, and select graduate students in training.

CAPS staff collaborate with students to develop an individualized Action Plan, based on each student's unique needs and the range of resources available at CAPS, within the university, and in the surrounding community. Once the best course of action is determined from an initial conversation, students will be connected to the most appropriate services.

health.rutgers.edu/caps

Counseling Services

Counseling services help students understand and change behaviors or situations that are creating problems in their lives. Most students come to counseling when their usual ways of coping aren't working well.

Available counseling services include:

- Individual therapy
- Group therapy
- Crisis intervention
- Workshops and educational programs
- Referral to specialists in the community
- Consultation and collaboration with campus partners
- Community-based counseling
- An on-campus concentrated care program

Alcohol & Other Drug Assistance Program (ADAP)

As a part of CAPS, ADAP is a counseling and information program for students who are concerned about their drinking or other drug use, as well as drinking or other drug abuse among family and friends.

ADAP programs include:

- Consultation, evaluation, and assessment
- Individual alcohol and other drug counseling
- Recovery support groups
- Recovery house
- Early recovery program
- Nicotine assessment and referral
- Adult children and alcoholic/addicts groups

Psychiatric Services

Psychiatric services is a clinical program staffed by psychiatrists (physicians specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems).

Services include:

- Psychiatric evaluations
- Medication monitoring/supervision

CAPS Locations

Services are free to students and privacy is carefully protected in accordance with ethical standards and the law. For more information about CAPS, go to health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling.

- **College Avenue**
17 Senior Street, College Avenue Campus
- **Cook/Douglass**
61 Nichol Avenue, Douglass Campus

Making an Appointment

- Call 848-932-7884
- Visit 17 Senior Street, College Avenue Campus
- Online at nbstudenthealthportal.rutgers.edu

Additional Resources on Campus

At the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology:

- **Psychological Services Clinic**
848-445-6111
psychologicalservices.rutgers.edu

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

- **Anxiety Disorders Clinic**
732-445-5384
anxietyclinic.rutgers.edu

Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance (VPVA)

VPVA offers a range of free and confidential services including:

- Direct advocacy and support to survivors of interpersonal violence and other crimes
 - Educational and awareness programs
 - Trainings
 - Policy Development
 - Primary prevention programming
- 3 Bartlett Street, College Avenue Campus
848-932-1181
(available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day)
vpva.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

848-932-3956 (24-hour hotline)
uhr.rutgers.edu/faculty-and-staff-counseling
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.

Career Services

Career Services can help with career guidance, employment services, job search strategies, career seminars and programs, and other areas related to career management. careers.rutgers.edu.

Services for International Students

Rutgers Global–International Student and Scholar Services

A number of services to help students adjust to American culture are available through the center. global.rutgers.edu/international-scholars-students

- 180 College Avenue, College Avenue Campus
848-932-7015

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:

Office of Employment Equity

ASB II, Cook Campus
848-932-3973
uhr.rutgers.edu/uhr-units-offices/office-employment-equity

General Questions

Office of the Dean, School of Graduate Studies

25 Bishop Place, College Avenue Campus
848-932-7747
grad.rutgers.edu

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A Guide to Psychological Services for New Brunswick/ Piscataway Graduate Students