Below are some answers to questions from new grad students. Feel free to email graduatestudies@csuchico.edu if you have more questions, and we’ll be happy to answer you individually, too.

**Basic Stuff - What to Expect as a First Year Student, When to Develop Course Plan, Details on Forming a Graduate Advisory Committee, Other Timeline Stuff to Stay on Track to Completing the Program on Time.**

Each grad program is a bit different, and much of this information will be specific to your grad program. A brief discussion of some of the information you mention appears in “A Guide for New Graduate Students”, so be sure to check there. You’ll see in the section on “Academic Advising and the Role of the Department” that the best place to start is with your program’s graduate coordinator. The graduate coordinator typically assists you in choosing courses, developing a grad advisory committee, developing your culminating activity, and other tasks related to fulfilling graduation requirements. Contact information for each program’s graduate coordinator may be found on our Programs and Coordinators web page.

More in-depth coverage of the types of information you seek, however, appears in “A Guide to Graduate Studies Policies, Procedures, & Format”, and it is recommended that each student read the guide and continue to refer back to it during your graduate career. In addition, the Chico State catalog contains an entire section on Graduate Education with four separate web pages (in particular Graduate Education, Graduate Education Policies, and Master’s Degree Requirements) packed with critical policies and procedures with which you will also want to become familiar and continue to revisit as you proceed.

You can also always contact your Academic Evaluator in the Office of Graduate Studies if you have questions along the way. The new student guide linked above has links on page 13 to contact information for your evaluator.

**How Would You Compare Undergrad to Grad Classes, in Terms on Workload, Grading, Etc.?**

It depends on the program, but graduate classes are usually smaller, and are usually discussion based seminars with heavy student participation encouraged. Workload and grades depend on the program, but usually workload it is heavier in grad school. Most graduate students report that the reading and writing load is noticeably heavier. Because the classes are smaller and participation is considered a hallmark aspect of graduate education, graduate students usually have to prepare more carefully and fully for each class than they might have as undergraduates.

**Will Books Be Required for the Online Courses And, If So, Where Can We Get a List of What to Buy?**

It depends on your professors. You can view the required books at: https://www.bkstr.com/chicostatewildcatstore.

Select the Term under “Get your textbook” then click continue. Then select your “Department”, “Course”, and “Section” to find the required books. You have the options of renting or buying print or digital books. If you don’t see any books listed, then either your professors have not selected any books yet or there are no books required for that specific course.

Your professor may also have some materials on reserve or loaner copies for students, don’t hesitate to email and ask if they have any available alternatives.

**How Accessible Did You Find Professors, in Terms of Receiving Help or Guidance?**

Similar to the undergrad, it really depends on the professor. Says MSW grad student Nilu Samiei, “I had professors who stayed two hours after class to support students with their work, while others would take forever to email me back. It is important to make connection with at least one professor, so that you could consult with them on how to proceed since they were once a grad student too with professors similar to yours.”

**I’m a New Master’s Student in Political Science. I Graduated With My BA In Both Political Science and Communications Way Back in 1992. I’m a Little Worried About My Old Fashioned Research Methods. Can Someone Speak to Their Experience With Returning For Their Masters After Long Absence, Particularly In Regard to Research, Writing and Technology?**

All returning students have anxiety about whether they still “know how to do school” even if they have only been out a few years. It is understandable, but rest assured, our “long-gap” reentry students prove year after year that they have the right stuff to succeed in graduate school. Even though our reentry students do often underestimate themselves at first, faculty love having these students in their classes for good reason.

First, the skills reentry students learned as undergraduates have been honed over the years through work and life experience. Perhaps not many have written formal research papers over the years, but they have done writing and analysis of all sorts over the years that translate well in the academic setting; they developed a breadth and depth of knowledge that strengthens their logic and critical thinking skills; and they are usually comfortable with expressing their views in group settings (or quickly become so) and are usually willing to hear and reflect upon diverse ideas and opinions that differ from their own.

Second, reentry students quickly develop an appreciation for what a unique and special privilege it is to be a student again. To
engage in the pursuit of knowledge and personal intellectual growth through intensive reading, research, and seminar discussion is a significantly different enterprise than the work done for most jobs; it offers rewards and satisfactions that are perhaps more easily recognized by those individuals who have been out of the academic setting for a time.

In addition, reentry students usually have significantly more burdens and responsibilities than they may have had as 19 year-old sophomores. It takes a truly dedicated and committee individual to tackle the challenge of graduate school while balancing all their other life demands. For this reason, faculty know that reentry students are usually very goal oriented, focused, and determined to succeed given the sacrifices they and their families are making. And so they do succeed.

Finally, faculty know that reentry students’ anxieties about their skill sets and preparation for graduate school are not much different than the fears of all new graduate students. For that reason, graduate programs are designed to offer new students opportunities to refresh and develop their skills in research, writing, study, and technology. In addition to the support build into first year graduate courses, students have access to extracurricular support to help their skills development. For example, our library faculty are assigned to particular departments and programs. They hold special research and information literacy courses just for graduate students, but they also accept individual appointments to work one-on-one with graduate students in session tailored to your particular research and information literacy needs.

In addition, the Office of Graduate Studies and our Council of Graduate Students offer writing and research workshops and collaboratives of all kinds. For example, the Graduate Studies Thesis Editor works with individual students and holds writing workshops to assist students to complete writing projects of all sorts including the thesis. And the Thesis Editor and the Council of Graduate Students set up and facilitate writing collaboratives to allow graduate students to gather together and support each other in completing the writing projects that are common to all.

Given how quickly technology changes and how many different programs and processes exist, almost everyone entering graduate school will need some support to advance their technological skills. Campus also offers many trainings and guides to assist students in developing their technological skills. And individual programs have courses, tutors, and trainings to assist students in developing skills particular to their programs. In addition, your own graduate peers are excellent resources. Those who are up-to-date or experienced are often the first and best sources for students to quickly get up to speed.

In short, we have seen over and over evidence of the success of our reentry students. We know that even if they start out with shaky confidence in their own “rusty” abilities, they quickly find their footing and move successfully toward the completion of their degrees.

**WHAT ARE SUMMER WORKLOADS LIKE?**

As with many other questions, this depends on the program. Check in with your Graduate Coordinator to see what is typical for your program. Remember, Grad Coordinators are used to hearing from program grad students; it’s their job to assist you with information and support, so do not hesitate to contact them with any question you have.

**I AM ALSO INTERESTED IN THE A MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION, TEACHING CERTIFICATIONS, AND THE ESL CERTIFICATION. DO STUDENTS EVER PURSUE TWO MASTERS DEGREES AT ONCE? AND HOW DO THE CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS WORK?**

It is possible to pursue two masters degrees at once; however, Academic Evaluator Rosanne Kennoyer says “I don’t think it’s advisable” and cites examples of students not finishing a program due to the program time limit. She also noted that GPA can be an issue as any courses taken are part of the Chico cumulative GPA. It’s best, she says, to finish one before enrolling in the second one.

Academic Evaluator Sarah Lehner agrees, but adds, however, that it could work to take a class or two at the end of the first program that would count towards the second program. For instance, if you only had your comps to complete for TILS, perhaps you could also enroll in a couple of EDMA courses during your last TILS semester. That way you could get a bit of a head start but not use up too much of the time limit for the second degree. She points out that up to 9-units of pre-admission coursework may be counted towards a program.

Certificate programs, by contrast, are designed to be completed at the same time as the master’s degree.

**HOW CONFIDENT DO YOU FEEL, UPON GRADUATING FROM CSU, CHICO, THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO FIND A JOB IN YOUR FIELD? DID STAFF HELP WITH YOUR JOB SEARCH?**

Master of Social Work grad student Nilu Samiei says “I feel very confident, because I have a wide network from Professors, Deans to Program Directors from different agencies. The wider the network the more confident you will feel when applying to jobs. You will also be at an advantage since most of the jobs are presented internally within an agency before being posted online.”

The fact is, the vast majority of our graduates do get jobs in their fields upon graduation, but the time it takes may differ by degree program. For example, some of our programs have 100% placement in related careers upon graduation, others have a lower placement rate at graduation, but find that the majority of their students have a career-related job within a couple of months of
graduation. In general, those that are professional degrees such as social work, communication science and disorders, and nursing will have higher placement rate at graduation than those that are more generalist degrees. This is information that your graduate coordinator and department chair will have and you should not hesitate to ask them these questions.

**I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT NETWORKING.**

Network through professor: Graduate school is not just about passing classes and receiving a degree, it is also about finding job opportunities. Almost all your professors have had years of experience in the field they are teaching, hence having a large network. Take the time to talk to your professors after class or during their office hours and they can introduce you to opportunities. Most professors would love to talk to you about their experiences and challenges.

Network through department or club or organization: current grad students also recommend joining a club or volunteering in one of the on-campus events. This is a perfect opportunity to meet new professionals. Take the time to talk to them and ask if you can keep in touch through email or LinkedIn. Participate in events hosted by your Council of Graduate Students or consider serving as an officer. This is a great way to connect to students outside of your discipline and many of the activities and events organized by the Council bring you into contact with faculty, administrators, and alumni. (All graduate students are members of the Council of Graduate Students.)

Your department can also help you connect to alumni in your field. And the university is setting up a virtual mentoring program to link our current students with alumni professionals for career development opportunities. The Office of Graduate Studies will be sending you information on this in the next month or so.

Network through LinkedIn: You can also use LinkedIn to network. Find someone in your field and send them a quick message about yourself and your interests. Most people would love to tell you about their career and their job-hunting process. They can give you excellent tips on how to find a job in that field.

* 1st gen students usually start with a much smaller network and connections, so it is very important to utilize your resources such as professors to expand them.

* Cultural barriers tend to hold students back from taking the first step in networking. For example, in some cultures walking up to an older individual in a high position such as a professor to ask a question is not acceptable. Do not let these cultural barriers hold you back from networking. It is okay to email and or call to ask about opportunities as long as you are respectful. Also, remember that they do have the right to decline to answer but our faculty, staff, and administrators are very student centered and will usually help you find someone to support you if they cannot for some reason.