

navigating

GRAD  
SCHOOL  
as a

Woman of color

(in the humanities)

(and maybe social sciences, too)

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# ABOUT ME!

**Hi there.** My name is Ida Yalzadeh. I just graduated with a PhD in American Studies from Brown University. This fall, I'll be starting as a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Asian American Studies Program at Northwestern University.



Photo credit: Jessica Jiang

I'm the first person in my family to get a PhD, so the road to get to where I am now was a little bumpy because I didn't really know what I was doing. (Also, NO ONE in my family does \*humanities\* work, so I also felt doubtful of my decision to go down this path.) Slowly, I learned how to ask for help, and found people who were willing to invest time in making me a better scholar (and person).

Thanks to their help and my perserverance, I ended up writing a dissertation that I actually feel really proud of. It's on the Iranian diaspora and the relationship between foreign policy & racialization in the U.S. Although this process was difficult at times, I feel as though this is what I was meant to write (and what I was meant to do for the past 6 years).

This zine is one of the ways that I hope to take all the help I received during my time in grad school and \*pay it forward\*.

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# INTRODUCTION!

If you are reading this, I'm sure you are a very busy person. Thank you for taking the time out of your day and week to read this zine, and I hope that it holds something useful for you.

I've been consistently working on this zine from late April to July 2020 in an attempt to (1) make sense of the time that I spent in graduate school and (2) share some of my experiences in order to make the journey of others a little easier. Graduating from my program during a global pandemic was a little wierd, not going to lie, but channeling my energy into this project has slowly helped me realize that I am moving on to the next chapter of my career. More importantly, though, the mass uprisings that have and continue to occur after the murder of George Floyd and in support of Black Lives Matter have made this project all the more pressing for me. Women of color have always been at the forefront of recognizing and fighting against racist and colonialist systems. I hope that this zine can contribute even a little to that fight if it makes WOC better able to understand the nuts and bolts of going through an institution of higher education that at times seem so nebulous to us because they were never really explained.

To that end, I wrote this zine with the hope that it gives very practical information on things that were not really explained to me, but I had to find out anyway. I hope it saves you some hours of googling, and I hope it brings some peace to your process.

You can do this, you deserve to be here.

*Ida Yalzadeh*  
*July 24, 2020*

# MY JOURNEY!

Year	Program Milestones	Professional Milestones	Major Arcana Tarot Match
1	+Coursework (Survived.)	Honestly, nothing really of note. I was just trying to get the lay of the land at this point.	The Fool High Priestess Judgement (reversed)
2	+Coursework +TA for 1st time +Read for quals	+Center for Teaching Certification I +Presented at my first conference +Won first internal grant	The Hierophant
3	+Passed Qualls +Diss Proposal +Instructor of Record	+Center for Teaching Certification II +Organized first event +Won first external grant +Started working at Writing Center	The Chariot
4	+Researched Diss (through dept. fellowship year - no teaching)	+Presented at my first major national conf. +Published book review +Got an outside reader for my dissertation <3	The Moon
5	+Wrote Diss (through internal fellowship - no teaching)	+Won graduate writing prize at conference +Wrote + submitted an article for publication	The Hermit
6	+Wrote Diss (through external fellowship - no teaching) +Finished Diss!	+Went on job market +Got a job!	Temperance Justice



# MENTORSHIP!

When I first thought to make this zine, “mentorship” was one of the first topics I knew I had to write about because it has been so integral to any success I have had in this field. It makes grad school so much more manageable.

I am very lucky to have some amazing mentorship, both within and outside of my department. Some of it has been through formalized processes (committee members, classes, etc.) and other mentors I have gotten through more informal routes (conferences, straight-up cold emailing, campus invites). Whichever way you get them, having mentors is a game changer. Why be in this alone when you can have people help you along the way?

I think the one important thing that I learned about gaining mentors is that it is an organic process based on a genuine interest in their work and their own journey through academia. Most (though not all) of the people I consider mentors are women of color in my field. They have the same intellectual and political projects that I do, and they have faced the same sorts of barriers that I have or will have. They are honest and kind, and tell me frankly the things that I don't yet know but need to.

In this section, I'm going to talk about one of the ways that I was able to gain a mentor (and outside reader for my dissertation). Hopefully, you'll be able to get some ideas on the many ways that you can make these kinds of connections.







## - AN EXPOSÉ -

# How I GOT AN OUTSIDE READER\* FOR MY DISSERTATION

\*name redacted for privacy.



- ① Early on in graduate school, I read an academic book that I really loved a lot. The book's argument blew me away and it considered questions that I thought were critical to conceptualizing my own project. I then searched for her other work on my library's website and read some of her other articles. Turns out, she wrote about something that I was also going to write about for my dissertation. I got so excited—I had to meet her!
- ② I wanted to have the chance to speak with her in an environment that was more relaxed than, say, at a conference where I might already be overwhelmed by all the other stuff going on. With two of my friends, I planned an event where we invited her and one other scholar to come give a talk at our university. It was a two-day event: one day consisted of a lecture and a dinner, and the next day consisted of a graduate student workshop. We developed a budget and reached out to various departments and centers to ask for money and ended up getting a grant to fund most of the event through an on-campus Center. When I invited her, I also mentioned that I'd be at a conference she was also going to in the coming months. She replied, agreeing to the event. Woohoo! I emailed in Spring 2017 for a Fall 2017 event. I was in my 3rd year.
- ③ A few months later, I attended the conference we both were going to. After her panel, I went up to her to introduce myself. She was so kind, and told me that she was looking forward to coming to Brown to give her talk. I low-key died.
- ④ I kept in touch with her over the summer regarding the logistics of and updates about the event, and answered any questions that may have come up.







# mentorship bonus: being a mentor to others!

As much as it is important to have mentors help you throughout grad school, I think it is just as important to find opportunities in which you can act as a mentor to those coming up after you, whether they are undergrad students or grad students that may be in the years below.

For me, this has come in many forms and with varying sorts of contact. I worked at my university's Writing Center, and there were times when I felt like I was practicing different mentoring skills with these students. For the one (and in most cases, only) hour that I worked with them, I would do anything from sending along writing resources to making a writing plan to mitigating writing anxiety to helping them revise, and so much more. It turned out to be one of the ways that I gained confidence working with students in other, more formal instructional capacities.

At other times, mentorship looked like working over a semester with undergrad students who I taught in class. I'll talk about that more in the teaching section.

Also, mentorship consisted of looking out for my fellow grad student colleagues. There's a metaphor for quals I like to use that involves a target (we'll get to that). I've used this to explain quals to more than one of my friends when they started their reading.

Only now when I reflect on it, I see these moments as ones of mentorship. At the time, it felt more like sharing and excitement to share. **One of the best things I've done in grad school is to seek out folks who work collaboratively and are not afraid to share how they got their success.** I've learned to use that energy to create connections that are joyful and genuine.



# COURSEWORK!

## - GENERAL TIPS -

1. Use coursework as a chance to **develop a relationship with a professor** that you might want to work with. Take courses with a priority toward the professor rather than the "content."
2. It's ok not to have talked during a class! **Participation has many forms**, and if you are still engaged in the discussion, that's sometimes the best you can do.
3. Use **final papers as a way to play with ideas** you might have for a potential dissertation chapter. But don't feel like it's the end all be all and you *\*must\** incorporate it into your dissertation.
4. **Approach discussions with open-mindedness and curiosity.** There will always be *\*that kid\** who seems to say all the right things and can quote theory until the cows come home. Don't let them intimidate you. **Work collaboratively** and make the discussion work for you to gain a deeper understanding of the subject. It's ok to ask questions!



# TEACHING!

Or, teaching as a woman of color is hard sometimes!

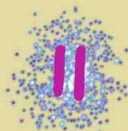
When I started grad school, I had absolutely no teaching experience. None. I was also 2 years older than the oldest student in my class. So this is all to say, that I was very unprepared for the first class I TAed in grad school. As you could imagine, that first experience was very difficult and exhausting. At times, when I felt a connection with my students and what they were learning, it felt exciting. But, at others, when I felt like I didn't do a good job, it would be demoralizing. Although I was a part of a teaching certificate program through my university and I was doing reading on pedagogy, it was all just very overwhelming.

On top of that (my age, my lack of experience), I was also facing difficulty with the way that I looked and how that presented to students. Luckily, I am in a field where the courses I teach are self-selecting, and the students know that we are all invested in the political and intellectual projects of the course. However, I have also TAed for large lecture courses where I have had students repeatedly question my capability and in some cases perform hostility to what they were learning. I want to acknowledge that many of us go through this without the proper support structures in place, and no matter how much you read about having difficulty in the classroom, it is another thing entirely to experience it.

Teaching students got better, though. And it came with time. There's so much stuff on the internet about teaching and pedagogy, so I'm hoping that this space can talk through some of the things that aren't necessarily said on the university teaching center website.



- ▶ The main thing I want to open with is that TAing and teaching in general is a time for experimentation and testing out different teaching styles. Experiment with the activities that you have students do in class. Experiment with your affect or level of vulnerability. Experiment with the types of assesment you give. Some things will work, and some won't. It's ok. Just keep going and keep trying something new.
- ▶ After you teach, esp. if you're an introvert like me, do something that gives you back your energy. I would always just go straight home and read a couple chapters of my \*for fun\* book. It made me feel happy and re-energized.
- ▶ Keep a journal of your teaching and your feelings around teaching. I think that this both helped me process my feelings about teaching and document why things did or didn't work.
- ▶ On the same note, I'd highly recommend annotating your syllabus as you go through your course. For example, I use "track changes" in Word. I'll write notes like "Students really liked this reading," or "delete that reading" or "good pairing" or "add this reading." When I go back to the syllabus if I teach the course again, I'll have more of a sense of what did and didn't work.
- ▶ Have your mentors and/or committee members observe your teaching for a class if you're able. This does two things. First, they will advise on best pedagogical practices. Second, they will be able to speak to your teaching abilities when they write letters of recommendation. This is particularly helpful when you are applying to jobs.
- ▶ Take advantage of your university's center for teaching (if it has one). Attend workshops and certificate programs that you are interested in and you think will be helpful to developing your pedagogy. For instance, I took a syllabus design workshop that helped me streamline the way that I build courses.
- ▶ Build a network of peers that you can discuss pedagogy and teaching with. Sometimes, you may run into a situation that you do not know how to handle. Apart from googling, it is always good to ask advice from someone whose advice you trust and who is currently or has recently been in your same position.





# CONFERENCES!

While conferences are a necessary part of the graduate school experience, they are a bit overwhelming at times. Applying to the conference, writing the conference paper, figuring out the logistics, going to the conference, presenting, meeting new people. The whole process was a bit intimidating to me the first time that I went through it (and some parts still are!). As I've gone to more conferences, however, I've learned that they can be a wonderful place to create community with peers from different institutions and to participate in discussions with scholars whose work you admire.

Like the process of finding mentorship, I suggest going to conferences with a sense of open-mindedness and self-awareness. Go to panels that have nothing to do with your work, but you think sound really exciting. Go to panels that have everything to do with your work and introduce yourself to anyone who's paper you really loved. Go to roundtables and take notes on what other folks are thinking about. Take some time to yourself and relax in your room so that you can feel recharged for the things that you care about. Spend an hour or two in the book exhibition hall lusting after all the books you can't fit in your suitcase (**pro tip:** on the last day of the conference, some presses will sell the rest of their stock for 10-25% off). Listen to what your body and your mind need to enjoy yourself, and lean into that. Bring something with you from home (a face mask? a room spray? a drawing?) that will make the space you're staying in feel more familiar. If you can, go with friends—this always makes it a much more enjoyable experience.

In this section, I walk through some items on conference-going with Don Miguel Ruiz's Four Agreements. I think that the points he makes can apply to having a positive time at conferences because it speaks to and encourages positive thought patterns. These allow me to feel like I am making the most of enjoying my time with and participating in a community of scholars.



# Conferences with the four agreements\*

## ① Be impeccable with your word.

Hold yourself accountable to the commitments you make to other people that you're conference-ing with. If you apply as a panel with others, adhere to deadlines presented by the group (especially if someone else is commenting on your work). Don't be afraid to be honest with yourself and your panel about what would work well for you.

## ② Don't take anything personally.

Everyone is usually overwhelmed at a conference, whether it's by delivering their paper, meeting a potential mentor for coffee, or getting everything they want to fit into their schedule. If an interaction with someone doesn't go as planned or in the way you envisioned, it's most likely not because of you.

## ③ Don't make assumptions.

Don't assume that because you're a grad student you have nothing to say or nothing productive to ask. By the same hand, don't assume that scholars you admire wouldn't want to talk to you. At most of the conferences I have been to, folks have been quite welcoming and lovely.

## ④ Always do your best.

This will look different at different conferences and on different days. If you're able to attend four sessions and have coffee with someone, that's great. If you need to spend part of the day in your hotel room revising a paper and then have dinner with some of your friends, that's great too.



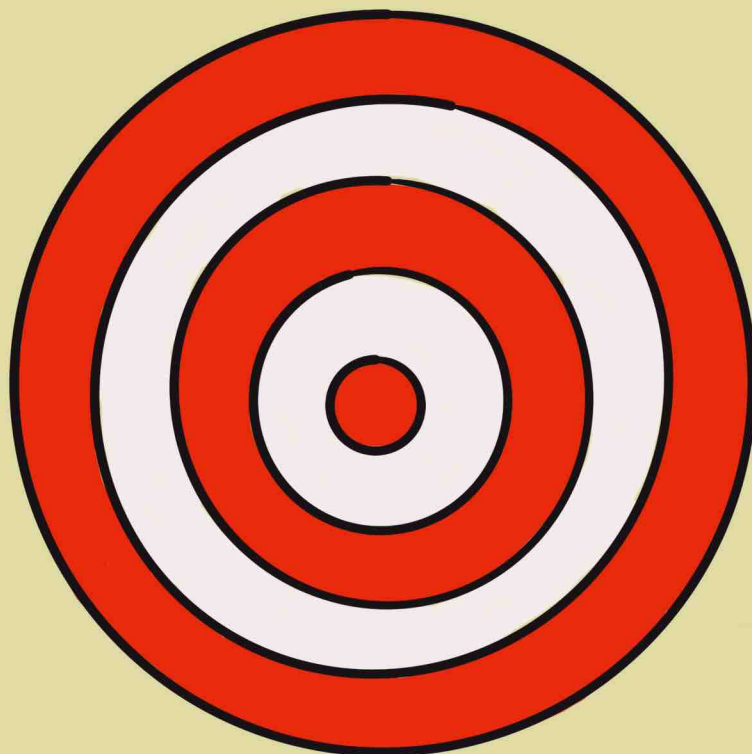
# QUALS!

Different schools do qualifying exams (or field exams or comprehensive exams or whatever your schools call them) in different ways. In my program, we read 100-150 books in three fields that were directed by three professors. After many, many months of reading (and crying?) in my apartment, I had an oral examination that lasted about three hours. Some of my friends in other departments had a written component as well, so that might be the same for you.

Whatever form your exam takes, however, I hope that the following will help you prepre for your exam in a way that makes it more manageable and digestible.

Think of each field as a

# TARGET.



Each book is a dot on the target.



In the center of the target is your dissertation topic. The ring closest to the center holds the books on your field list that are the most important to read for your dissertation project. As you move further and further away from the center, the books relate less and less to the content, theoretical framework, or methodology of your dissertation project. The location of these books on the target is directly proportional to the amount of time that you spend reading (or gutting) the book. So, for those books that are integral to the way you are conceptualizing your project, make sure to read as much as you can. For those books that are foundational to the field, but do not have much to contribute to your dissertation project, read the introduction, conclusion, and some book reviews. You will not have time to read everything cover to cover (or at all...), and that is ok!

For me, there were two main points to goals. First, to get a grasp on the field so that I could gain teaching competence in it. Second, to make it work for me so that when I started researching and writing the dissertation, I could hit the ground running.

# ~THE FIELD~

books that have a theoretical or methodological framework you may use in diss (read intro, concl ⊕ a chapter)

books on or directly related to your dissertation (read most/all)

books you might not be able to get to (and that's ok!)

books for teaching & knowing the broader field (read intro, concl. ⊕ book reviews)



One of the most useful things I did while studying for quals was creating a ~\***précis**\*~ for each book I read. A ~\***précis**\*~ (or what I like to call a ~\***précis**\*~) is a template that allows you to summarize a book in **one page or less**.

For my field exams, I had set categories listed in a blank document. For each book, I would duplicate the original document, rename it as "quals-[author last name]-[first word of title]," and edit right in the new document. Here are the categories that I used in my précis. Of course, use what works for you!

Title + Bibliographic Info

Because let's be real, you will not for the life of you remember that info when you eventually need to cite it.

Question/Problem

What are the main questions the book examines?

Main Argument

No more than 3-4 sentences. 😊

Supporting Arguments

Arguments from specific chapters you might have read. 1-2 sent.

Methodology / Sources

What are the theoretical frameworks or methodological innovations this person might be making? What archives or cultural objects does this person use? Is there anything that might be of use to you here?

Historiography

What literature is it in conversation with? What theories does it build off of? Who's listed in the acknowledgments? (These are usually the people that have helped shape the book.)

Main Takeaway

The one sentence that you might say during your exams.

Keywords

A way to cluster and categorize your work within a field and across fields through hashtags. Can search for groupings using the spotlight tool in Mac or ctrl+F in whatever platform you're using to take and organize notes.

*I can't tell you how helpful these précis were after I finished my exams. There were times when I would copy+paste sentences from them into my lit review for my diss proposal or a chapter. I also went back to them while developing syllabi for courses. Your future self will be very happy you did it.*



# FELLOWSHIPS!

Fellowships. Yet another thing to add to the things you already have to do for your program as a grad student. When I first started grad school, I was really down on myself about this particular aspect of academia because I came in having no experience with this. I had never applied to (let alone won) a fellowship or grant in college for my research and I felt very behind compared to the other folks I came in with. But, with time, I was able to build up a CV that showed that both my institution and others outside of it saw potential in my project and wanted to materially invest in it. By my last year, I had received an externally funded dissertation completion fellowship that allowed me to focus on getting my project done, rather than splitting time between that task and TAing. It felt very validating.

Receiving fellowships and grants not only shows that people are invested in your project, though. More importantly, it gives you the funding to be able to do the things you want to do. This is absolutely crucial, especially if you have to travel to do your work (or even if you don't). Your work is valuable, and it should be funded as such. One of my friends once told me that I shouldn't pay out of pocket for anything I do that is related to work. And I've used that mentality going forward when applying for funding. Of course, because of the state of academia and the state of the humanities, this is not always possible. (I'm sure it is also much more difficult to do this at a public school where institutional resources might not be as robust as one with a private endowment.) But it was definitely my aim to carry out that sentiment.

I've tried to organize this section into tips that have helped me throughout the years with grants and fellowships. While it is by no means comprehensive, these were the few things that were most helpful to me when applying. Although many of the headings are quite straight-forward, I hope that the information beneath them will provide practical information and resources that are not trite.



# ① Look early, look often.

This is probably one of the things that is the least talked about, but is the most important. How, after all, is one supposed to apply to fellowships if you don't know where to find them? Of course, people talk about the "big ones" (Ford, Mellon/ACLS, Fulbright, SSRC), but there are also ones that are more niche or less applied to. These are great for building up to those "big ones."

My first year of grad school, I created a word doc in my dropbox called "Fellowships List." I wrote little sections in bold like: **pre-ABD, internal funding, dissertation research funding, dissertation writing funding, dissertation completion fellowships, conference funding, writing prizes.** Every time I found a fellowship—even if I would be applying to it years from then—I would write it in the doc. I included the **name of the grant, around when every year it's due, and the link to the website.** This was the best way for me to organize my findings, but I'm sure an excel sheet or something else would be just as good.

Here are the different ways I found those fellowships:

1. **Google the CVs of people you admire, and see what they did in grad school.** This ranged from senior scholars to assistant professors that had left grad school closer to when I started to grad students that were in their last years. Not only did I learn what fellowships are out there that I didn't know about, but I also learned a lot about the field and career trajectories, how to write a CV, and what professional associations I should join.

2. **On your university website.** Some universities have grant databases (e.g. google "UCLA GRAPES") for fellowships and grants, which is great. But also, a lot of universities have internal (meaning, within the institution) grants that you can apply to as a graduate student (like conference funding grants, matching grants, summer grants). I'd suggest looking at **your university's graduate school page, office of the provost page, and pages at any university centers or institutes that pertain to your work (usually under the resources tab).**

3. **Professional Association websites.** Sometimes, they have grant databases or grants of their own!



4. **Social media.** If you already are on social media, it might be helpful to follow some academics in your field that post fellowship info. These folks have shared information that has helped me: @driftinghouse, @RobinMBernstein, @matthewguterl.

5. **Specific archives or organizations.** If you have to go to a particular archive for your work, there may be a chance that the institution gives out small grants to come visit. Prior to applying, I'd also suggest talking to the staff so they know who you are and what you're interested in. They might also be able to tell you if there are other items that you may not have considered yet.

I continued this process of searching and recording fellowships in the doc throughout grad school. Ultimately, it helped me create a little database for myself, and helped me see what was coming up that I could apply to.

## ② Start small.

Once I found some fellowships I wanted to apply to, I started applying for small sums of money from internal sources. These were things like conference funding and summer grants. This allowed me to build up my CV slowly. That way, when I applied to smaller external grants, I was able to show that my institution was invested in furthering my scholarship. By the same hand, when later applying to larger research and writing grants, I was able to show that institutions outside of my university were invested in my scholarship as well with those smaller external grants.

In short, small fellowships build a bridge to larger fellowships. Internal grants build a bridge to external grants.

## ③ Ask friends for help.

Probably one of the most helpful things I did was ask friends for their application materials, especially from those who had won the fellowships to which I was applying. I was lucky enough to have collaborative colleagues who were willing to share and who I was always friends with. I would not ask someone if I did not already have a strong relationship with them. Additionally, ask friends to read your materials if you feel comfortable!

And remember to *\*pay it forward\**. If you get a grant, give your friends and colleagues advice if they ask for it! :)



## ④ Start early.

This may sound trite, but really, the best thing to do with these fellowships is to start working on your application materials well before the deadline. Usually, if it's a big fellowship, I start 3 months in advance. If it's a smaller grant, I start 1 month in advance. This is for two reasons:

1. Conceptualizing and communicating your project to funders takes a lot of effort and revision.
2. You need to give your recommenders enough time to write your letter, which involves also giving them drafts of your application materials. \*This is critical!\*

So, you're probably wondering what materials you should have in your arsenal. Although different grants might want different things from you, I'd recommend starting with the following items to use as a template:

## ⑤ Have certain documents on hand.

By having the following as templates, you can revise more effectively to speak to certain fellowships if need be:

1. **Project description:** I'd recommend having two different project descriptions - one that's 100 words and one that's 500 words. Sometimes, grants want an \*abstract\* that's shorter, and other times, they want a more robust description. Things to potentially include: question, argument, methodology, sources, significance.
2. **Project proposal:** What you still need to do and how you're going to do it. Could include a timeline.
3. **Lit review/annotated bibliography:** The disciplinary fields you are speaking to and the works that influence your work.
4. **CV:** Something to consistently revise and add to.

Depending on your discipline, this list could look different for you.

I do think that writing (and revising) these docs - esp. the project description - has helped me articulate my project more clearly over the years.



## ⑥ Get your recs in order.

Most grants and fellowships require you to obtain letters of recommendation. These will most likely be from your dissertation committee, but some (like the Ford) may ask for more. Consider professors who you've developed a strong relationship with through your coursework, or who know your project well. I tried to start making these connections early in my graduate career, so that my recommenders didn't exclusively come from my committee.

I also want to note here that one of the reasons why it is so important to start on your materials early is because you want to get drafts into your recommenders as soon as you can. Not only will they have a sense of why you're applying to the grant, but they may also be able to provide comments that will make your materials stronger if they have time. I aim to have drafts into them two months in advance of the deadline, having asked them three months ahead of the deadline (for larger grants).

When emailing them the drafts, I'd also include the following:

- CV
- link to the grant page + deadline

ALSO:

- do some googling re: how to write a good app — ACLS has a great PDF on their website about this
- It always sucks getting rejected. But it happens. And it's ok.

# DISSERTATION!

May 2020

Dear [insert your name here],

Congratulations! You made it through your program to the point that you're ready to start working on your diss! Please celebrate this! What a milestone!

When starting your diss, it might seem like a daunting task, but know that you can get it done. I hope the following pages will help make the process a little bit easier. I decided to focus on the more logistical elements of writing (rather than the emotional part of it) because I feel like advice on writing anxiety is more abundant on the internet than the actual, like, how do I organize hundreds (thousands?) of docs on my computer and have it make sense to me when I look at it two months to two years from now. Hopefully, me sharing my workflow will give you some ideas on how to optimize yours.

Remember, one step in front of the other.  
*Someone is waiting for your words.*

Take care,

Ida



# MVPs OF APPS

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**TurboScan:** An amazing scanning app for your phone that converts photos into PDFs, JPEGs, PNGs, you name it. Sends files to your other devices through airdrop, dropbox, email, etc. etc.

**iAnnotate:** App that lets you annotate PDFs on your iPad. Really nice when I wanted to note something on an archival document. Especially nice when there was a long report from the archives that I wanted to underline and star.



**Scrivener:** Very powerful word processing app for your computer or any device. Although many people use it to organize notes and draft chapters, I mainly used it to write and keep track of my research and notes. When I did draft stuff, it was usually preliminary ideas that I would then transfer to Word.

**Microsoft Word:** What I used to draft all my chapters. Yes, it is v. basic, but what can I say, it gets the job done.



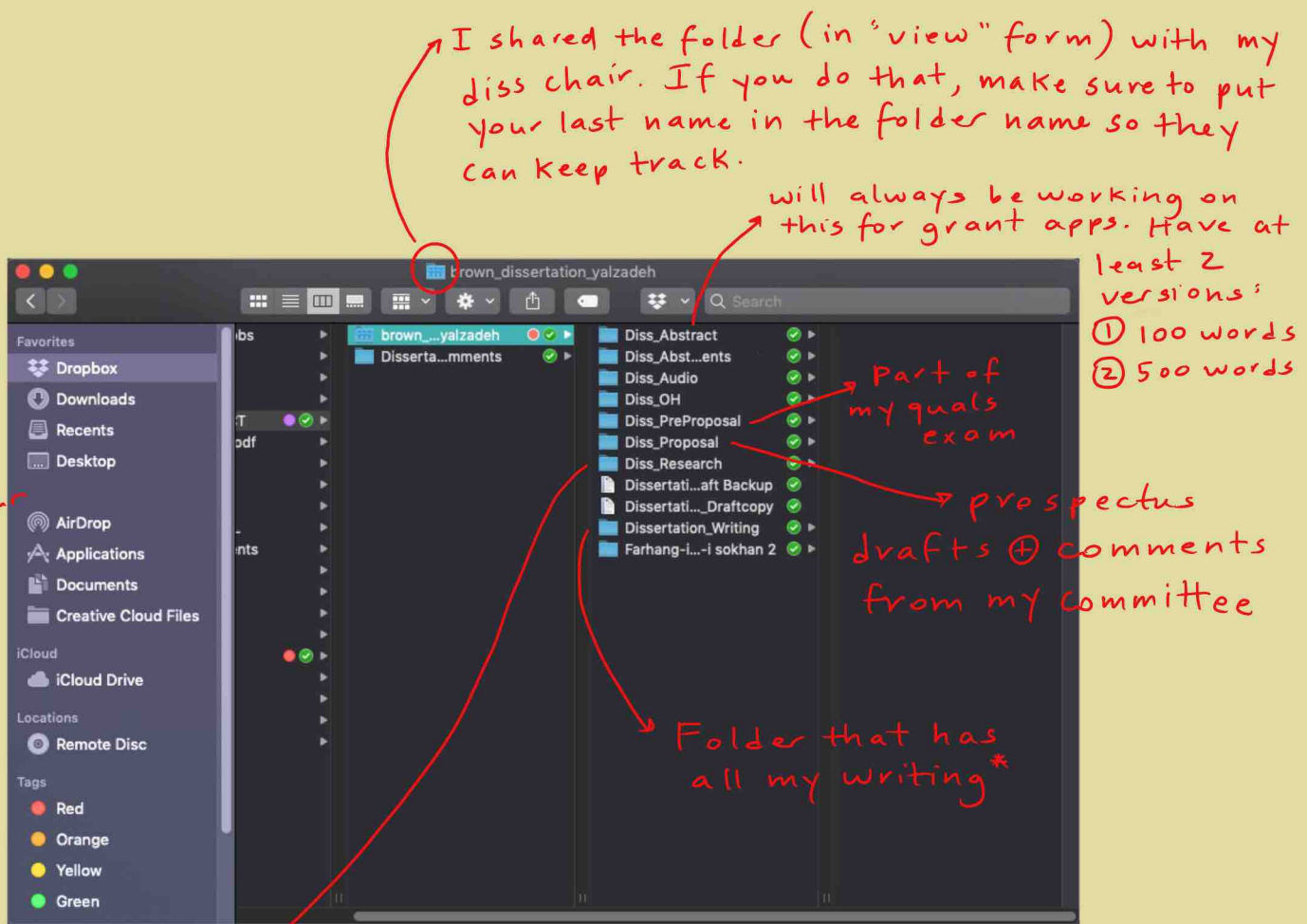
**Mendeley:** My preferred references organizer. I think it has a really intuitive interface, and I like that you can annotate journal articles and PDFs that are saved in the reference file. I'm sure Zotero & EndNote have similar features, but this was just the one that worked for me. 😊



# MY DISS WORKFLOW

This is what my dissertation folder looked like. Each folder represented one stage in the process of writing a dissertation. (Or, at least, I tried to make it that way.)

**Disclaimer:** I am an interdisciplinary scholar that works with historical and cultural studies methodologies, so my file organization will probably reflect that.



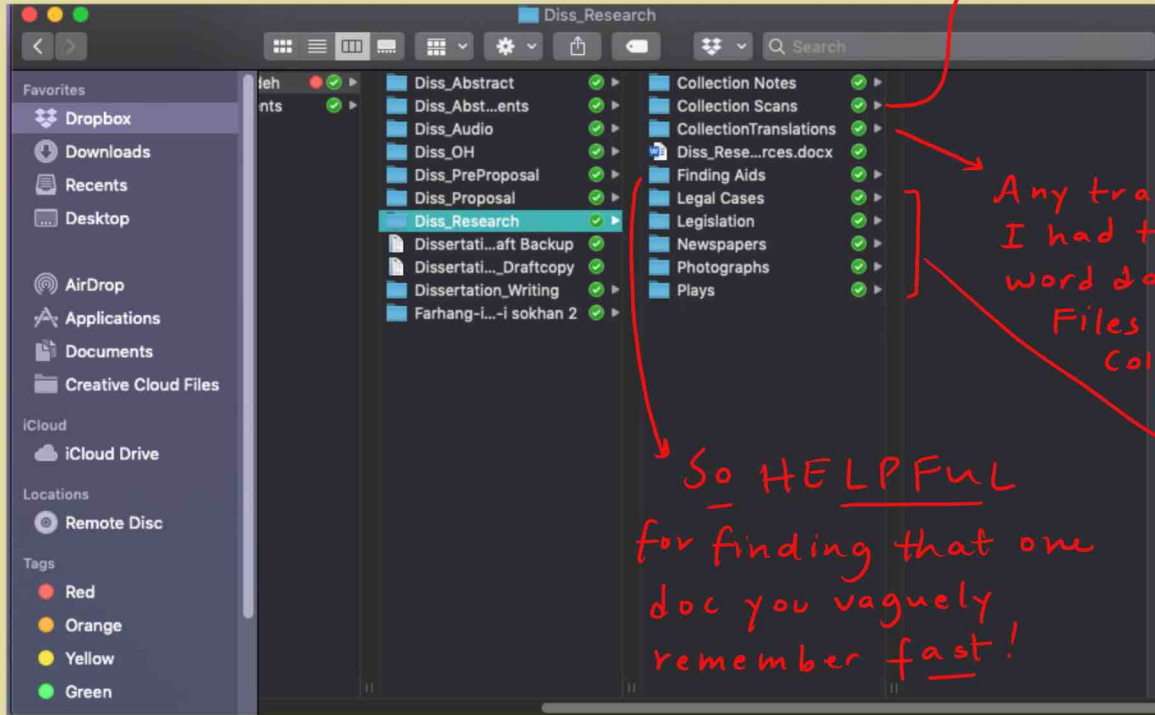
Folder that holds all my research\*

\* Will be looking more in depth at the folder

Make sure to label things consistently so you know where to find them.



This is what my **RESEARCH FOLDER** looks like when you open it.



**MVP** - Housed all my archival documents

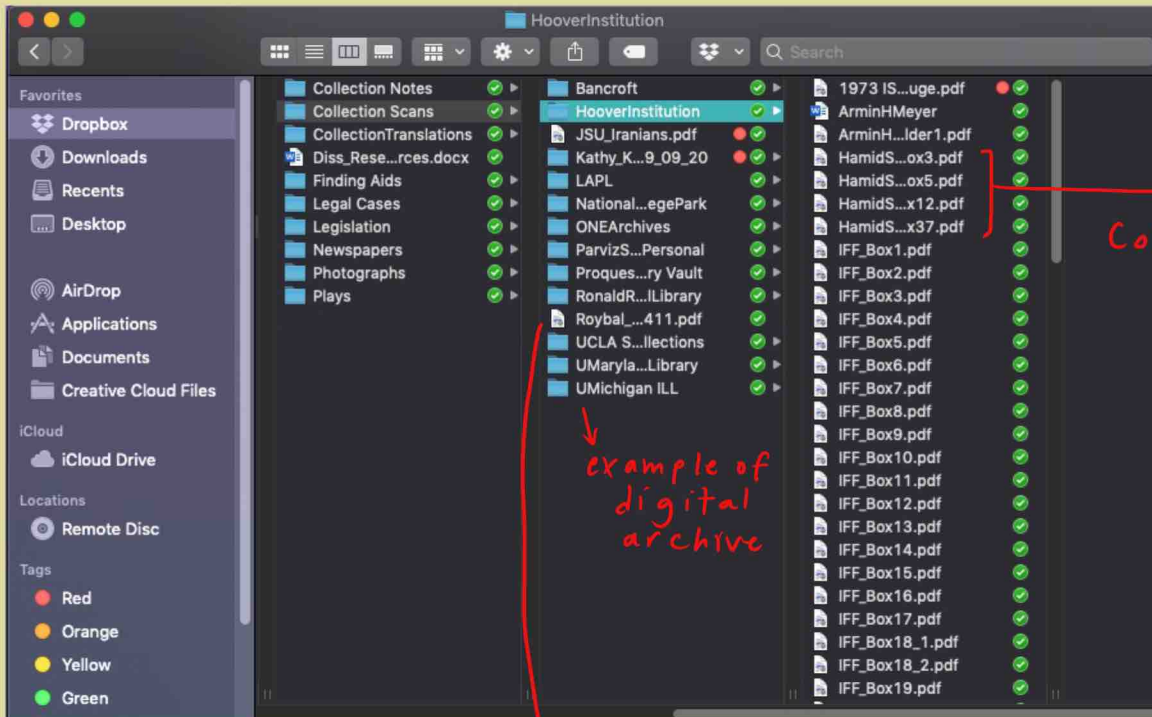
Any translation work I had to do, I did in word docs here.

Files labelled with Collection name ⊕ box # ⊕ folder #

So HELPFUL for finding that one doc you vaguely remember fast!

Primary sources or cultural objects that I didn't find in a physical or digital archive

The "Collection Scans" folder was the one that was the most "robust." Within the folder, I had separate folders that named all the physical archives I had gone to, or all the digital archives I had accessed. All of my scans were in PDF form (both from physical and digital archives).

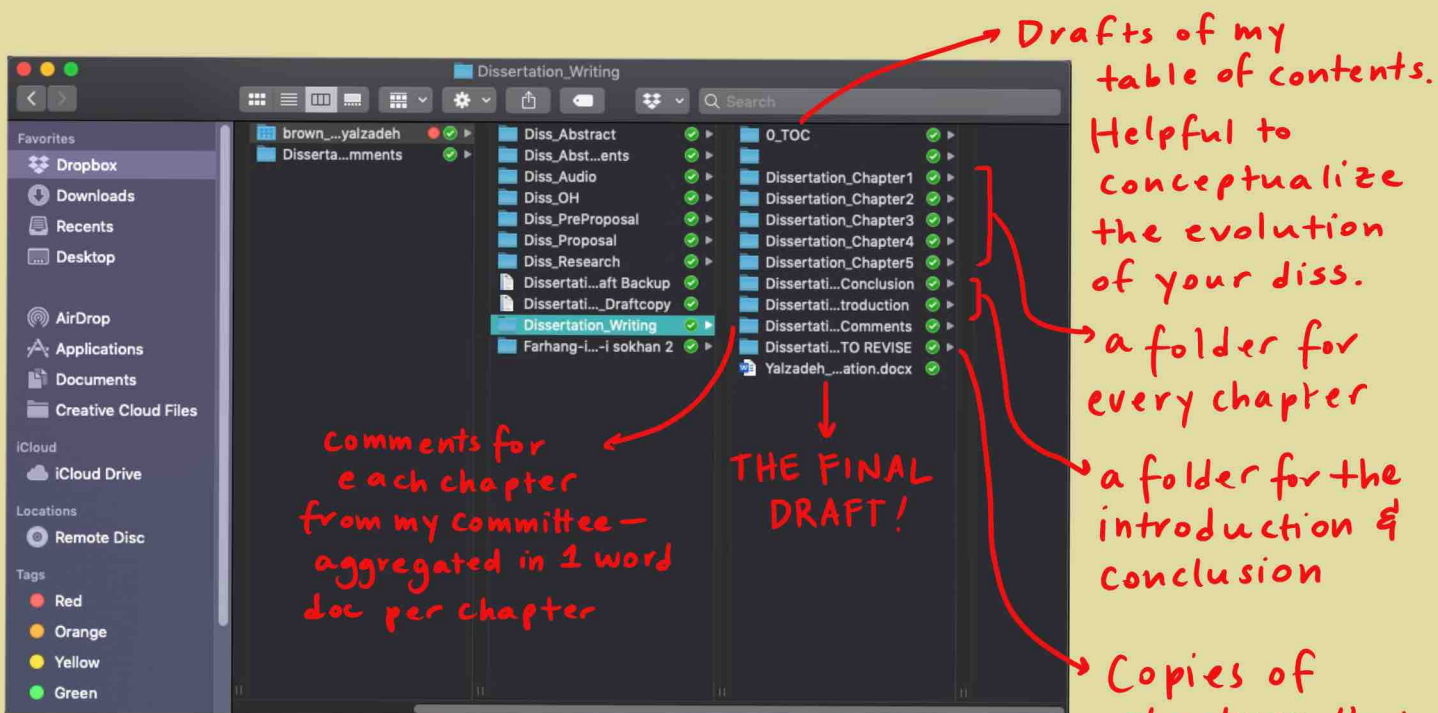


File names - Collection ⊕ Box #

example of digital archive

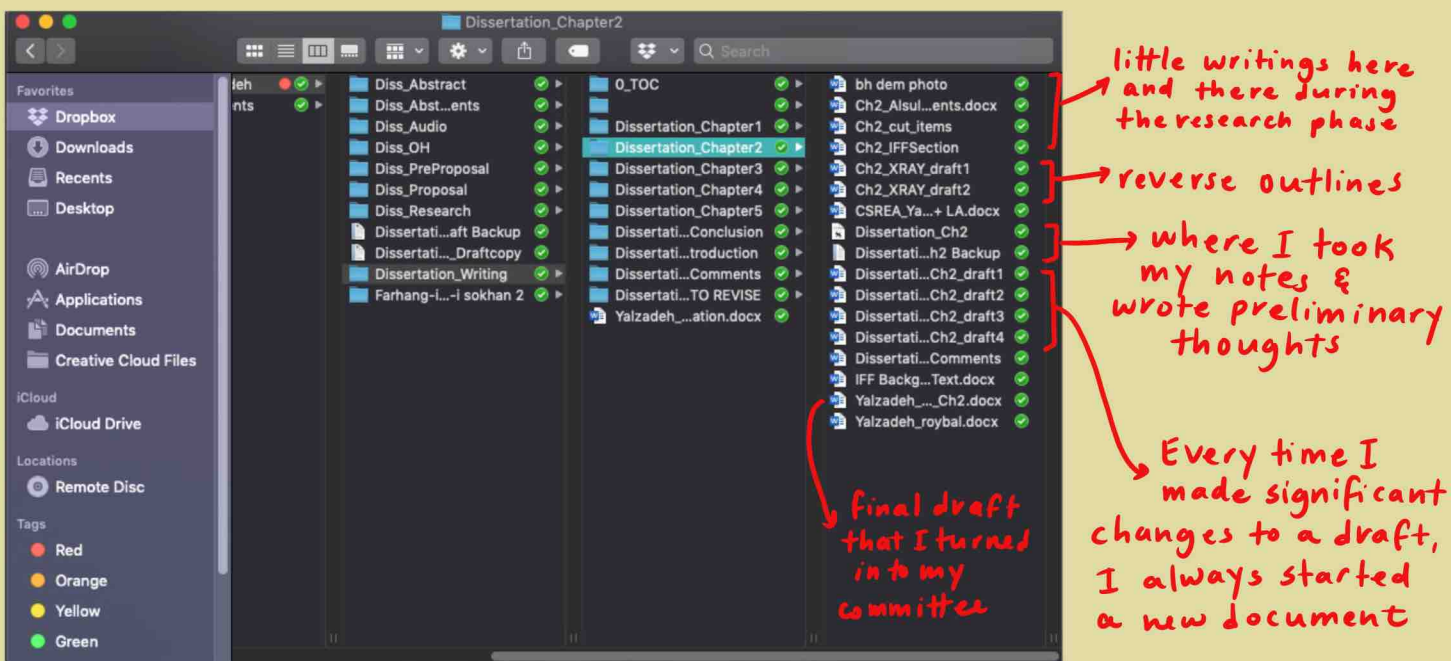
If I only looked at one box in a certain archive, I wouldn't create a folder - I would just have the PDF.

This is what my **WRITING FOLDER** looks like when you open it up.



In each chapter folder, I have notes on my research, drafts, and little brainstorms, as well as comments that my committee made along the way.

I did my final big revisions on



Some items of note:

- I had one Scrivener project doc per chapter. Otherwise, it would have gotten too unweildy.
- I wish that my folders were a little more organized, but hey, c'est la vie.



# CREATING COMMUNITY!

I went to grad school straight through from college, and this meant that a lot of my fellow grad students were much older than me. The activities, institutional support structures, and social events that were in place when I was an undergraduate were no longer present, and many people already had support circles in place. I had come to a completely new city that I didn't know at all on the other side of the country. My department was also very small. Needless to say, I felt very alone.

With time, I was able to create some support networks in grad school and through my larger community. Honestly, this took a few years to figure out. But I think it's because I was thinking my institution had structures in place that I didn't know about. Maybe they do, but for me, they didn't. Which is fair, but meant that I had to figure it out for myself.

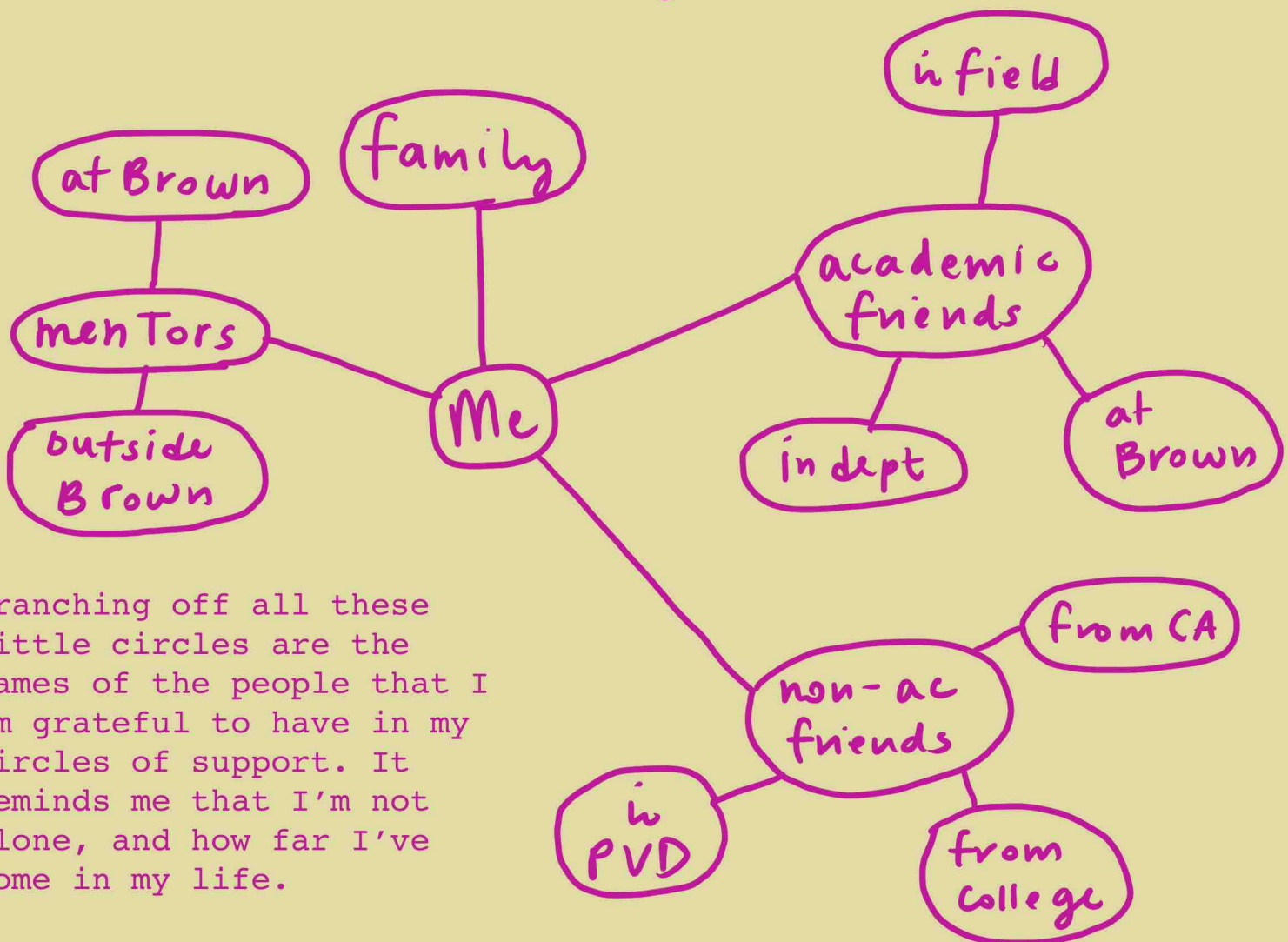
Here, the internet is your best friend. For me, I really love reading for fun, and there are many independent bookstores in Providence. I was able to find a few bookstores that had events and book clubs, and by going, I made friends outside of graduate school. I also slowly made friends who were in my kickboxing class. Of course, these all took time, but it eventually came together, and I am now sad to be leaving the community I've created here in this city.

In this section, I talk about one way that I've charted my own journey through grad school that makes me feel extremely grateful. In addition, this section contains the contributions of some of my grad school community to you.

# CIRCLES OF SUPPORT

This is an exercise that I love doing every six months when I start a new agenda book because it reminds me of all the people that make up my networks of support. It's basically a spider diagram that organizes your \*people\* into various arsenals of people who you can lean on for emotional, professional, social, etc. etc. support. It's also wild to go through my notebooks and see all the people who get added to the diagram over time.

This is how mine is structured right now:



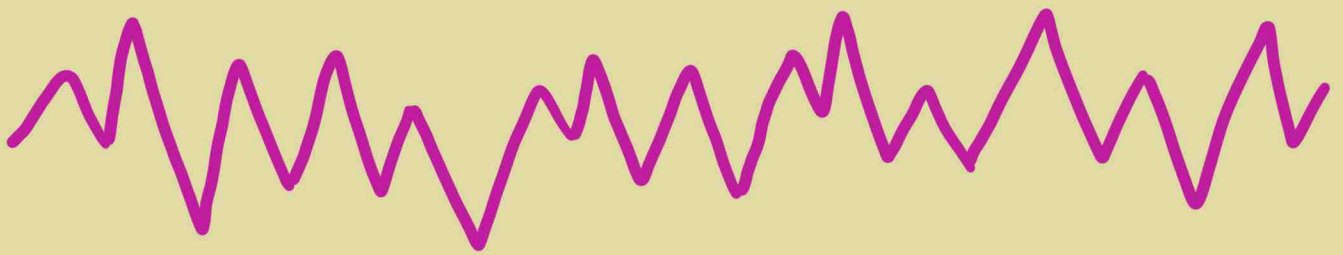
Branching off all these little circles are the names of the people that I am grateful to have in my circles of support. It reminds me that I'm not alone, and how far I've come in my life.

This is probably my favorite page in my agenda, and I turn to it when I have an issue and feel like I am alone. When I see the page, it makes me realize how many people are on my side and who I can reach out to for support.



# From my community to you:

I couldn't imagine putting out a zine without asking my own friends who are women of color to offer some words of wisdom or reflect on their own experiences as a grad student. Below, you'll find their responses to this open-ended prompt. I hope it also proves helpful.



**SLOW DOWN!**

From Minju Bae  
PhD Candidate  
Temple University

“Caring for myself  
is not self-indulgence.  
It is self-preservation,  
and that is an act of  
political warfare.”

—  
AUDRE LORDE

From *Thamyris Almedia*  
PhD Candidate  
Brown University

Source: <https://www.oprahmag.com/life/relationships-love/g25776736/audre-lorde-quotes/>



BIPOC experiences in the academy are undoubtedly differential, and so are those amongst women of color. Each of us will have different racial, gender, and class battles within institutions not historically designed for any of us. To future scholars who are BIPOC and women, I say (not casually but purposefully): academia needs you more than you need it. Create your own terms, whenever possible.

I veered off of the traditional path for a phd program in the humanities. What I didn't know was, that's okay.

I am a first-generation graduate student and refugee migrant from a working-class family. I have been privileged to train in an ivy research institution, but one that inevitably charted its doctoral timeline for a very particular kind of (historically, white upper-middle class male) experience. I did not— could not— follow (rather, afford) that timeline. I worked full-time (in addition to my full-time phd training) through the entirety of graduate school in order to support extended family. I also took time off for a paid position when it became necessary. Yes, it took me a few extra years to finish my phd. No, it didn't end up scarring my record for academic jobs (which I truly feared it would, constantly).

Instead, my “alt-academic” labors became academic assets: I expanded my research skills and teaching experiences by finding jobs that trained me in curatorial work, public humanities, oral histories, grant writing, and community organizing, while also compensating my financial needs. I looked for paid opportunities that also aligned with my research within university and university-affiliated institutions like museums and public outreach offices. These skills not only helped me in the academic job market but they forged my identity (and ethic!) as a scholar. I don't want to glorify the conditions of doing more labor on top of your research + teaching + service labors for the university. But, until humanities departments compensate the ideal model of academic training for historically nontraditional students in the academy, we must create our own terms and paths whenever/however it is possible.

If any element of my experience happens to resonate with you, I would offer three thoughts that took me too-long to practice: 1) Your path may look different, and that's okay. And, it may even be awesome. 2) Express your terms to your advisors early and regularly— that is, how you can accomplish the requirements of your program alongside your material needs. (To be honest, I hid my financial circumstances for a while because I feared I was “falling behind” my department's requirements. Finding support in women faculty of color helped me more than I can say.) 3) If you want the phd, get the phd. However long it takes. That phd will be a unique measure of your experiences.

From *Najwa Mayer*, PhD 2020  
American Studies, Yale University





For students and writers of difficult histories, how do you not center yourself in the telling of others' stories, stories they never could finish themselves? My dissertation research is primarily concerned with this question, as it examines Black and Indigenous artists whose work challenges easy consumption and translation of social traumas in a market-driven contemporary art environment. Its centering issue is the problem of empathy. If empathy is the capacity to feel for another's situation by imagining or projecting oneself into another's experience, one might see the surface appeal in the call to feel for, and with others. It is difficult to deny or dismiss the compassionate roots of such an appeal, which binds us together towards something closer to justice.

However, it is also necessary to see the implicit dangers in an uncritical deployment of an empathetic impulse. As Saidiya Hartman and Édouard Glissant warn us, we must be vigilant of how empathetic projection can tokenize trauma, hardship, and difficulty by rendering our reception of others' experiences a voyeuristic, static encounter. This includes, among others, the expectation that one has the right to interpose oneself in another's situation, that one has the right to a capacity to completely understand another's subject position without having lived it, and that one's rights to another's experiences render those experiences as tools for the ultimate betterment of one's self. In other words, the danger of an uncritical empathetic impulse is a reification of our own positions, feelings, thoughts, and moral grounding, at the expense of ongoing experiences others endure that we cannot ever presume truly to know or understand.

John Berger puts it this way: "To try to understand the experience of another it is necessary to dismantle the world as seen from one's own place within it, and to reassemble it as seen from his...The world has to be dismantled and reassembled in order to be able to grasp, however clumsily, the experience of another. To talk of entering the other's subjectivity is misleading. The subjectivity of another does not simply constitute a different interior attitude to the same exterior facts. The constellation of facts, of which he is the center, is different" (The Seventh Man, 96–8). For Berger, the constellation of who we are, were, have been, and will be is ours to account for and be accountable to, even and especially in the meeting with others. Empathetic impulses are also manifest in the academy, in how we are taught—and not taught—to consider the agency of stories we witness, recover, and inscribe in our research and writing. To believe that a story, a question and its answers, or the subject of our research has an agency and authority of its own is to believe, and adhere to, an ethics of writing and witnessing that cannot be managed and mediated through academic licenses or consumed through the exploitative and extractive impulse of knowledge disciplines. It is to believe that we are not owed the story. It is to recognize that the way we tell others' stories is as much a telling of and about ourselves.

What do we do with the empathetic impulse in the witnessing of difficult histories and contemporaries? As I reflect on my dissertation, I have learned three points that I hope to share for others who are working through similar challenges in their work, or have taken the challenge of furthering research and writing and understanding on misrepresented subjects. The first is to be ever conscious of the roots of our desires to fill in the gaps in our understanding, both of our own subject positions and those with whom we meet. The second is to reject the arrogance of expertise, in particular our own, when it prevents us from seeing the positions from which we speak and think before we see the positions of others. Finally, know that you will not always know, and when the unknowing arrives and stalls, be willing to be dismantled in order to reassemble a better world for each other.

From Anni Pullagura  
Curatorial Assistant, Institute of Contemporary  
Art / Boston  
PhD Candidate, Brown University





# MENTAL HEALTH!

First thing's first: NOTHING should come at the price of your mental health.

The grad school grind sometimes makes it hard to see this. At times, there can be so many things to keep track of that sustaining mental health is...forgotten. We've all been there. I especially have a penchant for saying that after \*this\* deadline, I'll go back to a \*normal\* routine. But there is always another deadline after that. Or there's a period of rest where I do nothing, and then I have to go back to a "work hard, work hard" mentality.

Since writing my dissertation, I have made much more of an effort to prioritize my mental health and figure out what it is that I need to be happy. Here are a few examples:

(1) I realized that I love watching tv with friends in the evenings. I have standing appointments with specific friends on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays where we catch up at each other's apartments and watch a tv show episode together.\*

(2) I realized that I need some structure on the weekends, or else I get sad and feel lonely (I live alone). Sunday mornings are for laundry and grocery shopping, and Sunday nights are for face masks.

(3) I realized that I need to sweat at least 2 days a week (preferably rock climbing with friends\*). This is a number that's manageable for me every week, and allows me to feel accomplished consistently.

\*COVID-19 has rendered all of these \*virtual\*.

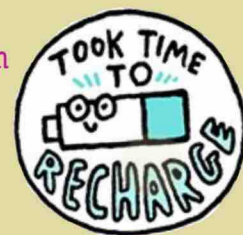
\*Again, COVID-19 has really \*fucked me over\* on that one, so I've been taking lunchtime, socially distant walks with friends, or walks where I talk with someone on the phone.



Whatever it is that helps you feel like yourself, give yourself time to do it in the week under MOST ALL circumstances. (I have learned that there will always be \*something\*, and there is no \*normal\* week in grad school that is always consistent.) If you don't know what that is yet, therapy is a great way to figure out what your priorities are and how you're going to carry them out in everyday life.

Give yourself the time to be more than a researcher or a teacher. Do things "for fun." One thing that I've done consistently for fun is read novels. I read 20-40 books per year. The year of my quals, however, I only read 10 books. That was probably the saddest year for me for many reasons. But one of the reasons why was that I wasn't making time to do the one thing that consistently gives me joy.

In the following pages, I share some things that have allowed me to make small changes in my life throughout grad school that have really worked for me and my happiness. 2 are ones that have been in my toolkit for a while, and the other is a practice newer to me but ever so helpful in the current situation we are all finding ourselves in (context: I am writing this in May 2020. 😞) They are as follows:



### 1. The Four Agreements (from Don Miguel Ruiz)

I first read the Four Agreements a couple years back, and was genuinely taken aback by how simple these 4 pieces of wisdom are. There have been many moments when I have been in a situation where reflecting on one of the agreements has given me greater peace of mind.

### 2. Daily Checklist



This is much more granular than your average to-do list. Although I don't do this practice all the time, I find that it is extremely helpful to bring out when I am having one of \*those days\* or \*those weeks\* or \*those months\*.

### 3. Ways to Cultivate Growth in Times of Uncertainty (from Nina Williams for [outwild.co](http://outwild.co))

So basically Nina Williams is this pro rock climber that I love and she hosted a webinar on how she's been coping with the \*current situation\* (again, May 2020...ugh). I'm glad she did, though, because it's given me a lot of clarity on how to feel about my days during this time, and may be helpful in the future.



from Don Miguel Ruiz:

# the four agreements

## - A SUMMARY -

(adapted from listicles I got from web searching "four agreements summary")

### 1. Be impeccable with your word.

- + Speak with integrity
- + Say only what you mean
- + Avoid speaking against yourself or gossiping about others
- + Use your words in the direction of truth & love

### 2. Don't take anything personally.

- + Nothing others do is because of you
- + What others say and do is a projection of their own reality or dreams

### 3. Don't make assumptions.

- + Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want
- + Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstanding

### 4. Always do your best.

- + Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different depending on how you feel
- + Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgement and regret





# DAILY CHECKLIST

I use this checklist for those days when I feel stuck and unmotivated. Those days when I wake up and dread the day to come. Those days when I'm feeling super overwhelmed. Simply put, the daily checklist is a micro to-do list that serves to book-end the larger tasks of the day.

And while it's not necessarily revolutionary to have a morning or evening routine, I found that writing out my various bio-processes in to-do list form has been extremely therapeutic to me. It's almost like a recipe; by doing these few things in the morning, a human *Ida* comes into existence who is better equipped to take on the day.

So, I started by observing my morning and evenings for some time, and seeing what tasks were essential to help me feel ready for the day. I then put these all in a checklist using word (lol), copy+pasted it in the doc multiple times, and printed it out. It sits on my nightstand with a pen. On mornings when things are hard, I reach for it and look at the first thing to do. (Because it has to do with food, I am much more likely to get up. 😊) With each thing I do, I look at the next task, and then the next. One by one.

By the time I get to the botton, I feel like I have done something that has helped my body and mental health. If I don't want to do a task on the list, I will honor that and not do it. If I get at least 50% of the tasks done, that is a success to me.

most of the time, I don't worry about weekends



Task	M	T	W	Th	F	S	S
Prepare bfast							
Make bed							
Eat bfast							
Take meds							
Brush teeth							
Shower/Skin							
Get dressed							
Pack lunch							
Tidy up							
To do list							
Tarot							
Get started							

Morning Checklist ←

Task	M	T	W	Th	F	S	S
Shower							
Skincare							
Journal							
Tidy up							
Mike/TV							
Brush teeth							
Read							

Evening Checklist ←



# ways to cultivate GROWTH in times of uncertainty

from Nina Williams for outwild.co

This strategy presumes that we have two states regarding getting tasks done: PRODUCTIVE and PROTECTIVE. PRODUCTIVE state is when you have lots of energy to bring out into the world. PROTECTIVE state is when you need to bring energy into yourself to recharge. Depending on what state you're in, you should honor that feeling and complete tasks keeping it in mind.

Think of some categories that encompass activities important to you (ex. physical, mental, environmental, spiritual, social, emotional). Every day, write each category down in the order of what matters most to you that day. Then, list a task in each category that corresponds to whether you are feeling productive or protective.

So, let's take "environmental," which for me means doing a task that acknowledges my surroundings. If I feel productive that day, I might write that I want to put away my laundry or tidy the living room. If I feel protective that day, I might write that I'll water the plants or walk around my block and notice the spring flowers coming in. It does not matter how small the task may seem. If you are feeling protective, it should be about doing something in the category that doesn't feel like a chore. And, for both states, the list should contain things that you want to do.

I acknowledge that this sort of tasklist might not be possible to do consistently. There are, after all, administrative and other tasks you need to complete that might not fit within these categories, and there will always be something you may not want to do. But, this way of organizing my life has been extremely helpful since the beginning of this pandemic, and has allowed me to regain some sense of control over the way I live my life day to day. In the future, I want to use this practice to build my to-do list over the weekends.



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@sheneenagins



# RESOURCES!

## Instagram accounts:



**femalecollective**

3,982 Posts   652K Followers   281 Following

**Female Collective**  
Community  
Where women are celebrated, uplifted, supported, and empowered everyday.  
Founder: @candacereels  
femalecollective@gmail.com   more  
linktr.ee/femalecollective



**the.holistic.psychologist**

1,020 Posts   2.4M Followers   785 Following

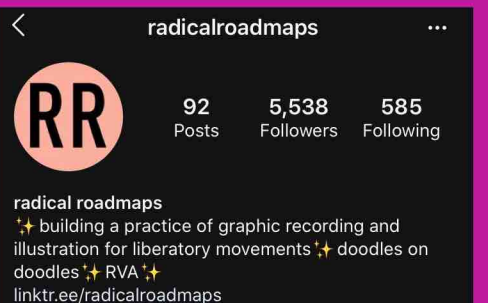
**Dr. Nicole LePera**  
Community Psychologist  
I teach you to heal + consciously create a new version of yourself #selfhealers  
Healing texts: 215-366-0012   more  
linktr.ee/the.holistic.psychologist



**notsoivorytower**

1,567 Posts   39.8K Followers   3,163 Following

**Not So Ivory Tower**  
Business  
We exist to support, empower, + connect women of color in academia. Co-founded & curated by @barbarasostaita & @ryann\_den



**radicalroadmaps**

92 Posts   5,538 Followers   585 Following

**radical roadmaps**  
building a practice of graphic recording and illustration for liberatory movements  
doodles RVA  
linktr.ee/radicalroadmaps



**decolonizingourhealing**

100 Posts   7,131 Followers   1,978 Following

**POC Healing & Mental health**  
Health & Wellness Website  
Mental health awareness for people of color by people of color. Decolonizing as an act of resistance & healing  
Rav, M.Ed (Therapist, poet, friend)  
linktr.ee/decolonizingourhealing



**aafc.nyc**

266 Posts   9,657 Followers   789 Following

**Asian Am Feminist Collective**  
Community Organization  
nyc-based asian american feminists in solidarity organizing, politicizing & talking back  
#aafeminism  
www.blackwomenradicals.com/blog-feed/black-an...

# Academic Resources:

## ▶ National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD)

Despite the name, this web network is really helpful for developing smart writing and time management practices as a graduate student. I have mostly used it to learn from webinars about planning my week, planning my semester, and dealing with rejection, but they also have writing accountability groups and chances to connect with an academic community that is primarily women and people of color. Check with your institution to see if they already have a subscription, because you shouldn't pay for this service.

## ▶ h-net.org

Website that lets you subscribe to listserves pertaining to your disciplines and subject interests. You can receive email digests that list notices about conference CFPs, journal calls, folks seeking panelists for conferences, etc. etc. They also have a job listing board for when \*that time\* comes.

## ▶ The Chronicle of Higher Education

Website that reports on academic news. It also has some interesting articles that talk about pedagogy and how-tos for certain things (I currently have a chronicle article bookmarked on how to write a book proposal). It's just a helpful website to have on hand.

## ▶ Your university's Subject Librarian

One of the most helpful things I did in my first year of grad school was meet with my subject librarian to ask them what resources were available to me at my university that I might not know about. Their knowledge of databases and library archives is so helpful. Also, I have emailed them to ask about acquiring a particular academic title and finding articles that are behind a paywall.



# ON MY BOOKSHELF!

Presented to you in Chicago style, naturally.



## Some Books on (Academic) Writing

Belcher, Wendy. *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019.

Birkenstein, Cathy and Gerald Graff. *"They Say/I Say": The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006.

Boyce, Robert. *Advice for New Faculty Members: Nihil Nimus*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000.

Hayot, Eric. *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. New York: Anchor Books, 1995.

## Some Books for the Soul

Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

brown, adrienne maree. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984.

## Some Academic Books That Made Me Cry During Grad School Because They Were So Amazing And Helped Me Realize That This Is What I Want To Do With My Life

Alsultany, Evelyn. *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation After 9/11*. New York: New York University Press, 2012.

Dabashi, Hamid. *Iran: A People Interrupted*. New York: The New Press, 2008.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007.

McAlister, Melani. *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Nguyen, Mimi Thi. *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt and Other Refugee Passages*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

v. helpful if you have a seminar paper or diss chapter you want to turn into an article

good for teaching!

has some cool stuff on the minutia of writing

"SHITTY FIRST DRAFTS" is what got me through writing the diss

my WOC inspo in prolific writing that is also beautiful



an intro I turn to often.

How I hope to write one day. Everything about this book is amazing.

low key the smartest, most relatable book I have ever read in academia.

despite the title, it actually has really good tips for grad school!

build worlds you want to live in

just a really powerful book on something I care about

first book to make me cry - I felt like I wasn't alone in what I care about & what moves me.

↳ where it all began...



Thank you to my colleagues, mentors, and friends for giving me such a wonderful support network throughout my time as a graduate student.

Here's to the next chapter.