

PGSA

PGSA'S

DECLASSIFIED

First-Year Survival

Guide

PGSA's Declassified First-Year Survival Guide

2023

Remember to waive optional fees!!

This somehow gets students every year. Our department covers the cost of the student medical plan, but some students choose to waive it if they are bringing their own insurance. Most students waive the One to One Fitness plan (we have access to other fitness centers for free, see the **Exercise** section below). [Check out this guide](#) on how to waive optional fees on SIS, and make sure to do this before the end of the second week of classes.

Therapy

Even if you don't have a mental health condition, therapy can be a great tool for managing day-to-day stress, improving productivity, navigating conflict, and staying aware of your emotional needs. You don't have to go once a week either. You can try going bi-weekly or even monthly. We have access to free counseling at CWRU and our Aetna insurance covers outside therapy. Check out our healthcare guide for advice on accessing counselors.

Study Habits

Keeping a schedule for your study time is a great way to ensure you can keep up with the curriculum without burning out. Some students opt to spread their hours throughout the week, while others may choose to dedicate their weekends to studying. Try to land on whatever schedule is sustainable for you, because losing sleep only hurts you in the long run.

Many students find studying is easier done in a **study group**, where communication with others can help you get a better understanding of the material. Whether you meet the day before an assignment is due or regularly throughout the week, try and integrate group study into your routine.

Lots of students will rotate where they study, as a change of scenery can do wonders for your focus. Here are some of our favorite study spots!

- **Kelvin Smith Library:** graduate students have access to the *Graduate Student Research Commons* on the 2nd floor with their student ID. The quiet area on the third floor is also a great space for a late-night study session.
- **Blue Sky Brews** in Little Italy.
- **Phoenix Coffee** in Cleveland Heights.
- **The Physics Graduate Student Lounge** on the second floor of Rockefeller has whiteboards and makes for a great collaborative space.
- **Go to Office Hours**

Exercise

Along with the long-term health benefits that come with regular exercise, it also improves brain health, boosts your energy and mood, promotes better sleep, and reduces your risk of chronic disease. It's recommended you get 30 minutes of physical activity five times a week. This can include walking, biking, swimming, dancing, playing a sport, running, etc.

Whatever you choose, try and go for something you enjoy so that it's sustainable. If you have trouble staying consistent, try getting a workout buddy so you can keep each other motivated. Like with many other things in life, it's easiest to keep up with exercise if you stick to a schedule.

Here are some places and ideas for getting exercise:

- **Veale Recreation Center:** free to access for all students. There is a weight room, a cardio room, an indoor track, and some multi-purpose courts. With your student ID, you can borrow equipment for sports such as: tennis, badminton, racquetball, basketball, etc. There is also a locker room where you can rent a locker for the semester, or bring your own lock for the free daily use lockers. There is a pool located in Veale if you like to swim laps for exercise. This gym is about a 5-minute walk from Rockefeller.
- **One to One Fitness:** graduate students have the opportunity to sign up for the One to One membership at a discounted rate (this is auto-charged to your account, you have to manually disable the charge). If you're a fan of workout classes, or want access to nicer equipment, it's a great rate compared to other gyms that offer similar benefits. Plus, it's less than a 5-minute walk from Rockefeller. Amenities include:
 - Sauna
 - Lockers and towels
 - Validated parking up to 4 hours at the Veale Parking Garage
 - Group exercise classes
 - Personal trainer for beginners as personal workout planning
- **Wyatt Athletic and Wellness Center:**
- **Planet Fitness:** located on Euclid Ave by Plum Market. It's open 24/7 and is a good affordable option if you'd like somewhere that can work flexibly with your schedule. This gym is a 15-minute walk from Rockefeller.
- **Climbing gyms:** Shaker Rocks
- **Intramural sports:** join our soccer team or form another team.
- **WhatsApp groups:** for hiking and sports.
- **Bikeways/Trials and Lakefront Parks:** There are a number of parks around Cleveland that are connected via paved trails (these trails are not continuous and sometimes share roadways). Located close to campus is the "Lake to Lake trail" which connects the lakefront trail to Shaker Heights. It cuts through Rockefeller park and the cultural gardens before connecting with the Lakefront bikeway on the other side of I-90 at Gordon Park. Heading west will take you past the Rock and Roll hall of fame, all the way to Edgewater Park, while heading east will take you towards Euclid. More trials and Metroparks can be found here: <https://planning.clevelandohio.gov/bike/index.php>

Dental and Medicine

Keep up with your preventative care to avoid costly emergency situations. Check out our **Healthcare Guide** for more information on how to use the Aetna insurance and find providers.

Excursions

Here are some fun things to do in your free time. Because we don't live to work!!

- **Museums:** we are lucky enough to have some great museums right by our campus! Not only are they nearby, but with your student ID you have free access to:
 - **Cleveland Museum of Art + Special Exhibition Gallery**
 - **Cleveland Botanical Garden**
 - **Cleveland Museum of Natural History**
 - **Western Reserve Historical Society**
 - **Dittrick Museum of Medical History**
 - **Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland**
 - **Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage**
- **Metroparks:** one of the great things about this area are the beautifully lush metroparks surrounding Cleveland. Hike, walk, run, or bike the paths, or check out one of the hiking events for a group hike led by a Naturalist.
- **Beach parks:** On the west side, there's **Edgewater Park** with a swim beach, dog beach, picnic areas and grills, and a fishing pier. On the east side, check out **Euclid Beach Park** for more picnic areas, grills and a scenic observation pier.
- **Bars:** some of our favorite bars include:
 - **Jolly Scholar**
- **Nighttown:** a Jazz bar that's reopening soon!

Public Transportation

- CWRU Safe Ride - Free university "taxi" service available between 6pm - 3am:
 - <https://case.edu/publicsafety/services/safe-ride>
 - Wait times vary; longer waits on weekends
- CWRU shuttles page - Good for most areas near campus:
<https://case.edu/parking/transportation/shuttles>
- RTA systems map - Easy access to most of the Cleveland area:
https://www.riderta.com/sites/default/files/pdf/maps/System_Map_Main.pdf
- Use the transit app for live tracking, checking routes, and trip planning:
<https://transitapp.com/>
- Bus passes:
 - You can purchase transit tickets using the EZ-fare app:<https://www.ezfare.us/>
 - **BUT:** The university provides a bus pass to all students every semester
 - Get it from access services!
 - Email oxk108@case.edu to schedule a time to get your sticker

- You'll get a sticker for your CWRU ID badge, which you simply show to bus drivers (etc) when boarding.
- <https://case.edu/parking/transportation/public-transportation/passes>

Accessible Groceries

- Food pantries (free):
 - <https://case.edu/studentlife/dean/resources/food-insecurity-resources>
- Affordable grocery stores you can reach by bus!!
 - Aldi; 7500 Euclid Ave
 - Healthline Bus
 - Dave's Supermarket in Shaker Square (typically less expensive than other Dave's due to location)
 - 48 Bus
- Circle convenience on Euclid
- Park to shop in Asian town (take 9 Bus for around 20 minutes)

Giving yourself a break

Aim to have at least one full day off of school/work per week! There are going to be weeks where you can't take a day off (i.e. around exams), but aim to have your "normal" weeks include a day off so you can properly recharge. You can use these days to run necessary errands and explore Cleveland! See our **Excursions** section for ideas of where you can spend your day off.

Suggested questions to ask potential research advisors

- List of suggested questions to ask potential research advisors.
- **What would you say is your advising style?** There are many different advising styles that can range from hands off/independent to hands on/dependent.
- Some professors have a more hands-off approach than others, so it is best to set expectations early on
 - Work in the office, or can work from home?
 - Expected number of work hours per week - do they monitor this?
 - Frequency of meetings with advisor - weekly meetings can be beneficial for keeping things on track, but others might be more hands-off
- Number of students in group - will you be working together with others in a project, or work alone in your own research?
- Average number of years students take to graduate in the research group

Managing Finances

We get paid once per month on the last business day of each month. Here are some ideas on how you can go about ensuring your money lasts the month.

- Keep a budget spreadsheet

- Set aside money for necessary expenses (rent, savings contribution, other bills, food, etc.) ASAP after getting paid to avoid overspending.
- Research and related expenses (like conference travel) can potentially be reimbursed by the department.
- You can get free software and/or discounted electronics, such as laptop computers from U-tech.

Taxes

- Collect important documents: W-2, 1098-T
- Tax day is mid-April. If you cannot do your taxes by then for whatever reason, file an extension ASAP to move your deadline to mid-October.
- You have access to **FREE guided tax preparation** if you make under \$73k/year - [check out this website](#) for more information on IRS Free File.
 - If you make over \$73k/year, you can still do them for free by filling and mailing your own forms. This information is also on the webpage linked above.
- Most of the Cleveland area falls under the RITA tax umbrella, which are local taxes (besides the state and federal taxes). These have the same deadlines as IRS taxation.
 - <https://www.ritaohio.com/>

General/Other advice

- Sleep Sleep Sleep - it's recommended you get 7-9 hours of sleep per night. Losing sleep can increase cortisol levels (i.e. stress), which has all sorts of negative effects on your body.
- Keep up hobbies. Try and do something fun and creative outside of work, it'll help you decompress.
- Don't skip meals and maintain a healthy/balanced diet. Food is fuel!