

# A Letter to My Younger Self, a First-Generation Graduate Student

By Emily Dacquisto

**Dear Emily:**

Wow, graduate school! Congratulations! I know how excited you are to buy new school supplies (especially a planner and multicolored pens!), pick out your class schedule and live in a new city.

Before you get too enthusiastic, however, there are a few words of wisdom and lessons learned that I want to share with you as you embark on this emotional roller coaster called graduate school.

**Pave your own way**

First, being a first-generation college student means that you are a pioneer on this journey. There was no road map for you as an undergrad, and there will be even less of a road map for graduate school.

There will be times when you feel like you don't belong, when you feel like you are not capable and when you question the life course you have chosen. You will cry about your student loans, but you will also tell yourself, over and over again, that it will all be worth it.

In addition to carving out a path as a first-generation college student, you will also have to navigate the spaces of higher education as a woman, which is not always an easy feat. Your field placement at the Women's Center will help you learn to embody your womanness and will support and uplift you on your feminist journey.

In moments of doubt and uncertainty, it will help to repeat the wise words of Leslie Knope from *Parks and Recreation*: "I am a goddess, a glorious female warrior, queen of all that I survey. Enemies of fairness and equality, hear my womanly roar."

**Get ready to learn**

Second, though there will be times of uncertainty, never fear! You will learn an incredible amount about yourself and the social work profession.

What you learn about social work may surprise you—in both the best and worst ways. You may question once or twice, or a few more times, if social work was the best choice, but don't worry; your passion for social justice will always lead you back.

You will be presented with opportunities now that you will never again have in your life—seize them!

What you learn about yourself may surprise you, too. Your identity as an introvert will take on new meaning because being an introvert in graduate school can be difficult. You will often feel judged and misunderstood by both professors and peers, so it is important to know and embrace who you are.



Emily Dacquisto

Even though graduate school seems like the appropriate time for an identity crisis, now is really not the best time (only because you already have so much on your plate).

**Embrace self-care**

Third, maintaining a balance of school and life is so important. It can also be incredibly challenging—and that's OK.

You may never have heard the words "self-care" before, but they will soon become your new best friend. At first, it won't make much sense why everyone around you holds self-care so dearly, but just you wait. And when the time comes, own and embrace your self-care practices!

Similar to your (aspiring daily) yoga practice, your self-care practice will be both incredible and exhilarating, yet tedious and demanding. A pint of ice cream at the end of a long day? Self-care. Just one more episode on Netflix? Self-care. A glass (wait, let's be honest, several glasses) of wine in your pajamas? Self-care.

Schoolwork will try to sneak into your kitchen, living room, bed and all other facets of your life, but you need to learn how to stand up to the system! Do what's best for you and always remember that your health and well-being are a priority.

**Enjoy the journey**

Fourth, graduate school is an emotional journey. You will love it beyond measure, but there will also be times when you loathe it. You will so desperately want to be done and at the same time you will never, ever want it to end. You will feel like you have sold your soul to the ivory towers of the academy, but you will also feel like it was the best thing you ever did.

Always remember that it is OK to let yourself feel. The pain, anxiety, worry, stress, discomfort, despair: these feelings will help you grow just as much as the joy, happiness, elation, pride, enthusiasm and passion will.

**Stay positive**

Lastly, there will be times when the world as you know it becomes dark and the linear path that you think you are on will disappear. When this happens, look for the sunshine.

There are three amazing places you will find it:

1. *In the people who support you:* They will help you pick up the pieces when you are broken.
2. *In gratitude:* Gratitude will save you. Constantly remind yourself of all that you have to be grateful for because there is so much.
3. *In smiles:* Never stop smiling.

As graduation approaches and you are without a job, are unsure of where you will live, still have not figured out licensure, and you owe the U.S. government an unfathomable amount of money, just remember that every little thing will be all right. Through graduate

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school, you will have learned how to pave your own way, embrace self-care, enjoy your journey and stay positive. These wisdoms will carry you forward into the world as a Master of Social Work!

And when all else fails, enjoy a glass of wine.

In Solidarity,  
Emily, MSW 

Emily Dacquisto graduated in May 2016 with her Master of Social Work from the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities. Her most recent field placement was with the campus Women’s Center, where she strived to advance gender equity across identities through education, empowerment and advocacy. You may contact her at [dacqu005@umn.edu](mailto:dacqu005@umn.edu).

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### Women on the Move, continued from page 5

director of early college programs at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

- **Lisa Intagliata** moves from director of development for the Sarasota Memorial Healthcare Foundation FL to assistant VP of constituent engagement at the Ringling College of Art and Design FL.
- **Dr. Heather James**, associate professor of English at the University of Southern California, becomes president of the Shakespeare Association of America.
- **Dr. Janet Kistner** moves from interim to VP for faculty development and advancement at Florida State University.
- **Lori A. Lewis** moves from VP for institutional advancement at McDaniel College MD to vice chancellor for development and alumni engagement at Western Carolina University NC.
- **Daveen Litwin** becomes inaugural dean and chaplain of the William Jewett Tucker Center for Spiritual Life at Dartmouth College NH. She has been serving as chaplain for the Claremont Colleges in California.
- **Dr. Kathryn Lofton** becomes deputy dean for diversity and faculty development for the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Yale University CT.
- **Mary H. Loomis** moves from assistant VP for business and finance and comptroller at Savannah State University GA to VP of business and finance at Fort Valley State University GA.
- **Patricia Lowe** moves from interim to executive director of the Office for Institutional Diversity at Boston College MA.
- **Nichol Luoma** moves from interim to associate VP for university business services and university sustainability operations officer at Arizona State University.
- **Dr. Cheryl Matherly** moves from vice provost for global education at the University of Tulsa OK to VP and vice provost for international affairs at Lehigh University PA.
- **Joelle A. Murchison** will become associate VP and chief diversity officer at the University of Connecticut on July 5, 2016. She is currently serving as VP of enterprise diversity and inclusion for The Travelers Companies.
- **Dr. Julie Nagel** moves from interim to associate vice chancellor for innovation and entrepreneurship at the University of Kansas.
- **Onye Ozuzu** moves from interim to dean of the School of Fine and Performing Arts at Columbia College IL.

- **Dr. Elizabeth Palacios** becomes special assistant to the president on diversity at Baylor University. She has been serving as dean for student development at the university.
- **Dr. Suzanna Rose** becomes the founding associate provost of the Office to Advance Women, Equity, and Diversity at Florida International University.
- **Dr. Susan S. Rugh** moves from associate dean of undergraduate education to dean of undergraduate education at Brigham Young University UT.
- **Deborah Shaffer** moves from senior associate VP for finance and administration to VP for finance and administration at Ohio University.
- **Gia Soublet** moves from interim to VP for institutional advancement at Xavier University LA.
- **Lynn Vanderhoek** moves from assistant dean of advancement for the Newhouse School of Public Communications to associate VP for principal gifts and strategic initiatives in the Division of Advancement and External Affairs, both at Syracuse University NY.
- **Dr. Lynn Videka** will become dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Michigan on August 1, 2016. She has been serving as dean at the Silver School of Social Work at New York University.
- **Adrienne C. Webber** becomes dean of library services at the Frederick Douglass Library at University of Maryland Eastern Shore. She has been serving as dean of library and information services at South Carolina State University.
- **Dr. Gennifer Weisenfeld** becomes dean of the humanities in the Trinity College of Arts and Sciences at Duke University NC.
- **Angela Winfield, JD**, becomes director of inclusion and workforce diversity in the Division of Human Resources at Cornell University NY.
- **Dr. Kathleen Wong** moves from director of the Southwest Center for Human Relations Studies at the University of Oklahoma to director of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and chief diversity officer at San Jose State University CA.
- **Pamela Nolan Young** becomes the inaugural director for academic diversity and inclusion at the University of Notre Dame IN.
- **Shawna Young** moves from director of the Office of Engineering Outreach Programs at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to director of the talent identification program at Duke University NC.
- **Katie Ziglar** will become director of the Ackland Art Museum at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on July 6, 2016. She has been serving as director of external affairs for the Freer/Sackler Galleries at the Smithsonian Institution DC. 



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