Professional Development Timeline for the PhD Student

Your highest priority is doing well in courses and exams, and then making rapid progress toward completing an excellent dissertation while still funded. This suggested timeline speaks to your reach outside of the classroom and the university.

This timeline is designed to alleviate anxiety, not to create it. The goal is for you to be in the best position you can be by your 6th year and by the time you go on the job market. But all the suggested dates are very approximate. There are no hard and fast rules for this.

It is also designed for people coming in with a BA. Those with an MA already should start at the middle of year 2.

The English Graduate Student Association provides tremendous support. The department also runs periodic workshops on professional development issues. Your best resource is also the faculty, who will mentor you abundantly, if asked.

Conference travel: There is some money for this. Check with the Graduate School, the College, and the department for all funding options. Also many conferences have small grants available for graduate students, so be sure to inquire. Your goal should be to present papers at five professional conferences by the time you graduate.

Publishing: Your goal should be to have published (or have forthcoming) three articles by the time you graduate.

Teaching: You are very lucky that here we have ample opportunities for you to teach. Your composition teaching experience will be very helpful on the market. But it is important to gain experience teaching literature classes, too. We try to see that students get at least two before graduation. This often is most possible in the summer or intercession. Keep turning in your preference sheets with the request until you have a reasonable amount of varied teaching experience.

Dissertation: No matter what this timeline says about conferences, publications, or teaching, the most important thing is to write an excellent dissertation and to complete it before you run out of funding.

Year One:
1st semester: Welcome to Grad School—entering the profession
- Write your seminar papers, explore interests, learn research techniques

2nd semester:
- Look at Calls for Papers; try sending out an abstract; plan to adapt a seminar paper for conference presentation
- Look at scholarly journals in your fields of interest—what kinds of articles do different journals publish?
• Attend or present a paper at the EGSA Mardi Gras Conference (as you will probably want to do every year)

Summer: You’re still on the job
• Edit a seminar paper for submission to a conference; Look for non-graduate conferences to submit an abstract; think about how you might edit a paper for submission to a scholarly journal

Year Two:
1st and 2nd semester: Continue to present at conferences, edit papers for submission
• Organize panels at EGSA conference
• Present a paper at EGSA Mardi Gras Conference
• Present a paper at brownbag colloquia
• Join or start a writing group
• Join MLA at the cheap grad student rate (this will give you a sense of the profession)
• Request a literature class for summer school

Summer: You’re still on the job
• Choose one paper to revise for submission and submit it to the best journal you can
• Perhaps teach a literature class

Year Three:
1st and 2nd semester: Present at a regional or national conference, of a recognized national organization
• Request a literature class for summer school
• This is the year you will probably pass your General Exam. It’s an ideal time to submit abstracts based on your exam essays to conferences
• Complete your dissertation prospectus

Summer: Begin thinking about dissertation topic; Try to get published
• Perhaps teach a literature class for summer school

Year Four:
1st semester: Congratulations! You are probably ABD!
• Start writing your dissertation
• Make sure you know how frequently all members of your dissertation committee want to see chapter drafts
• Work on publishing within your field
• Attend and present at conferences in your field

2nd semester:
• Continue writing your dissertation
• Set up regular milestones with your major professor

Summer: Perhaps teach a literature class for summer school
Year Five: Dissertation

1st semester:
- Continue writing your dissertation
- Submit abstracts for important conferences in your field—don’t go overboard conferencing
- Submit article drawn from a dissertation chapter to a journal in your field
- Apply for national dissertation grant

2nd semester:
- Present a paper at one conference in your field
- Submit conference abstracts to MLA (it would look great on the job market to be presenting at the conference when interviewing)
- Keep writing and revising

Summer: start preparing job market materials, including:
- Templates for letters of application for teaching and research jobs
- Abstract of dissertation
- Writing sample
- Teaching portfolio (including teaching philosophy)
- Ask professors for recommendations

Year Six:

1st Semester: Job Market and finish up Dissertation
- Submit full draft of dissertation to your committee
- Revise
- Attend job market workshops
- Revise job application materials
- Apply for jobs
- Plan to attend MLA
- Schedule dissertation defense
- Apply for additional University funding (if you aren’t graduating), such as the Dissertation-Year Fellowship

2nd Semester:
- Apply for additional University funding (if you aren’t graduating), such as the department’s limited Extra-Year Funding
- Attend MLA
- On-Campus Interviews
- Dissertation defense
- Graduation

Year Seven: FUNDING HAS RUN OUT! (RED ALERT)—This is the last year the Graduate School allows you to be a student without a special appeal (never granted for more than one year)
1st Semester: Job Market
- Complete full draft of dissertation.
- Revise
- Attend job market workshops
- Revise job application materials
- Apply for jobs
- Plan to attend MLA
- Schedule dissertation defense

2nd Semester:
- Apply for extension with the Graduate School if aren’t graduating
- Attend MLA
- On-Campus Interviews
- Dissertation defense
- Graduation