

## PhD Student Professional Milestones

### *PhD: years 1-2*

During your first and second years, familiarize yourselves with journals, professional associations, and conferences in your field. Aim to present at one conference during this period. Consider The [Rocky Mountain MLA](#) or consider going to the annual conference of a national professional organization (RSA, ALA, ACLA, etc.), many of which have graduate travel funds and offer “best graduate paper” awards. Submit your receipts to University of Denver GSFF and OGE, which offer quarterly conference reimbursement grants.

You should also think about how you can use external funding sources to fund your emerging and ongoing doctoral research during the summer. Do you need to be in a town, city, or region as part of developing your project? Archives in large cities and small towns have collections that range widely and can include photos, maps, broadsheets and posters, objects, clothing, and local newspapers. Many of these archives have short-term (typically one-week) fellowships which can off-set the cost of travel. In addition, summer seminars and institutes are an important way that graduate students and faculty alike build and advance their proficiency in foreign languages, field-specific skills, literary topics, and critical theories. The NEH fully funds its participants, and the [Rare Book School](#), Cornell's [Summer School of Criticism & Theory](#), and the Newberry's [Mellon Summer Institutes in Vernacular Paleography](#) have need-based financial aid and/or graduate-specific fellowships.

Likewise, there are a handful of predoctoral fellowships that you should have on your radar and to which, if you are eligible, you should apply: the [Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship](#) and the newly-launched [Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Innovation Fellowship](#).

While coursework takes up much of your time as a doctoral student, you are also working in the Writing Center; you may have an administrative GTAship within our department; and for the creative writers, especially, you are probably involved in Denver readings, the Denver Quarterly, and/or [Lighthouse Writers Workshop](#). All of these experiences are opportunities that provide you with valuable professional / employment experience. While it is easy to see them only for their immediate value, all deepen and broaden your professional skill set and expose you to a much wider sense of careers in academia and in the arts.

As you meet colleagues, build a support network by talking with your fellow graduate students and finding out what kinds of projects they are involved in; get involved with EGSA; and look outside the English department to environments like the [Center for Community Engagement](#), [iRISE](#) and the [Latino Center](#), and the [Ritchie Center Innovation Lab](#), to name a few. By understanding professional development as an act of exploring other communities and spaces at DU in conversation with your work in the English department, you will begin to identify interests and opportunities that extend past your life as a student and your understanding of the Academy. You will also begin learning about DU alums who have found work, and become entrepreneurs, in surprising places.

Begin to work with [Career & Professional Development](#) to create your Curriculum Vitae (CV) and LinkedIn account and regularly update them every 6-12 months. This is also the time to develop and grow your professional network, so commit to joining a professional association within these first two years. The [DU Career Network](#) can connect you with alumni volunteers who can support your goals as well.

### *PhD: years 3-4*

During this period, you will pass your comps exams, file your prospectus, and advance to doctoral candidacy. (Prior to this, you are a doctoral student, *not* a doctoral candidate). For literary studies students who want to pursue academic employment, try to attend 1-2 conferences during these years and be in conversation with your dissertation director about [publishing your first essay](#). By the time you go on the market, you should aim for one A-journal publication. For creative writing students who want to pursue academic employment, ideally, a book or two is necessary for the creative writing job market; if you will apply to creative-critical positions, work on a critical essay for publication. Regardless the above advice, it is important to keep in mind that there is no single formula to prepare for the academic job market because no student has the same interests and goals. While I (Donna Beth) place stress on publication, this is only for the sake of helping students understand a process that takes a long time. The bottom line: work closely with your dissertation director during these years to formulate a plan is best for you.

Once you have begun work on your dissertation, you will be eligible for external dissertation funding. (See the Portfolio pdf on grants and fellowships.) Know the application windows for these fellowships, and apply to them. Some of you will need to travel to archives to complete dissertation research. In addition to short-term fellowships, which are discussed above, long-term fellowships support archival work. Likewise, some professional organizations and regional MLAs have small dissertation grants to supplement your labors. Have conversations with your dissertation director to discuss archives and funding sources.

While the dissertation is an all-consuming process, there are many things you are doing during these two years that continue to broaden your sense of academic professionalization. Embrace these experiences as opportunities to extend your understanding of research, writing, and learning environments. Take advantage of DU's membership to the [NCFDD](#) to get free webinar and workshop support for dissertation writing and career planning. Explore free resources like [ImaginePhD](#), [PhDs at Work](#), and [The Professor is In](#). Reach out to the department's Job Placement Officer and [Career & Professional Development](#) as you start to have a better sense of the parts of teaching and research you enjoy. Work with them to articulate your interests, skills, and values so that you can better discuss types of employment and employers. Continue to work on your professional network and use opportunities at conferences to meet individuals from all over the country.

### *PhD: year 4 and beyond*

This year will be incredibly busy. It will also be mentally taxing. To alleviate some stress around going on the academic market, begin work with the department's Job Placement Officer and your dissertation director in the summer to prepare academic materials. This will ensure that your materials are ready when the job season begins in the Fall. (Note: while academic positions can be posted at any time during the year, a majority of them still open in the Fall.)

Also, start work with [Career & Professional Development](#) during the summer to be ready for employment opportunities that come along during the upcoming academic year. Update your CV; make a list of individuals who are willing to serve as references or write letters of recommendation; purchase a limited subscription to a dossier service like [Interfolio](#); and identify resources for job openings.

Once your materials are ready, and as the year progresses, work with the Job Placement Officer, your dissertation director, and Career Services closely so that you put your best foot forward with interviews, job offers, and salary negotiation.