A Guidebook in Reverse

I wanted to write this column as a guidebook in reverse - all the things I wish I had known going into a thesis. I expect I’ll be doing something like this again, and I wanted a way to remind myself of the trials and tribulations of a project of this magnitude.

I’m proud of myself for being able to do this honors thesis/project, and I’m grateful for the people who helped me along the way. I feel like it took a village to bring this thesis together - librarians, archivists, professors, friends, and family all guided me in some shape or form. Here’s what I’ve learned in looking back:

- **Start your thesis topic as early as possible.** Talk to as many people as you can about your ideas. Even if you’re not sure, talking it out with an advisor or a professor can help sort through your ideas. And use the first proposal (for the fall semester) to really think through your research. Start thinking about your literature review and your introduction. The more prepared you are going into your first semester, the better.
- **Apply for funding!** Need to travel somewhere? Need software? Need materials to put together your poster presentation? CHC and UMass want to help you succeed. There are limited opportunities for funding, but go out and find them! (Also, apply for the Honors Dean’s Award next spring!)
- **Let your thesis evolve.** The questions you have about your topic are going to change as you learn more, and you shouldn’t get stuck on trying to fulfill. Asking questions makes you a better researcher, and your thesis should be the documentation of that crucial part of the research process.
- **Pick a great committee.** Make sure you have people who can support you, who are willing to help you, and who can put forth the time and effort to help you succeed.
- **TAKE. GOOD. NOTES.** I don’t have a blog post on this one, but it’s definitely important. You never know when you’ll see a source again, so taking down as much information as possible (and pictures, if you can) is the best strategy.
- **Schedule everything.** Set aside specific blocks of time to work on your thesis
or project and set meetings with your committee. If you don't commit the
time, it won't get done. Also, make deadlines and stick to them. I like the
sound of the whooshing noise they make as they go by, but I felt a lot better
knowing when I was on top of things.
• But also, take your time. If you’re doing your thesis during senior year like I
am, there are so many other things on your plate. Don’t let the semester
get away from you - enjoy the activities of UMass just as much as the
academic opportunities.

Blog Column:
A Moral Voyage

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