You never appreciate what you have until it is almost gone, CHC, and this week - my last week at UMass - I have been appreciating this place like crazy. It's so lovely here in the spring - it's almost like it's actually paradise. If you're a freshman, soak it in. By the time you're where I am, almost graduating, you'll wish you had three more springs at UMass to enjoy.

I haven't had as much time to enjoy the outside as I might have wished this spring, because, you guessed it: thesis. But don't worry, I know exactly what the outside looks like, even though I'm chained to a computer, because I always pick the spot with this view in the Learning Commons.
Why? Oh, I don’t know. To torture myself probably.

Anyway I’m coming around to the finish of my own capstone experience, so I have some advice to offer for those of you embarking on independent theses:

1. **Make a schedule and stick to it.** When you mark out your class schedule at the beginning of the semester, designate the nine hours a week of thesis and don’t let yourself stray from that. This is really important and you won’t regret it.

2. **Push for the things you need from your committee.** If you need weekly meetings and firm deadlines and suggestions from your faculty committee, insist on them. Everyone works differently, but if you are the kind of person that needs structure then you should make sure you have that kind of structure. You know yourself: if something is important to your success, fight for it.

3. **Take advantage of opportunities to talk to other people about your project.** Your friends are going to get sick of hearing about your project. They really are. I am basically a broken record of thesis lamentations and I know it’s not fun. Friends, I’m sorry. If your major has any kind of support group or coffee hour, go to that. If there are other professors not on your committee that have some insight into your topic, make an appointment and talk to them. And then, at the end, present at the Undergraduate Research Conference. It is so gratifying to give a coherent explanation of what you have worked so hard on and to have people show interest in it.

4. **If it’s possible, start early.** It’s too late for you I’m afraid rising seniors, but to all the rising sophomores and juniors and future freshmen I have a strong strong recommendation that I wish someone had made to me: if you can, start your project in your junior year. Most people stretch it out over the fall and spring of their senior year, but I think my life would have been much, much better if I had started it in the spring of my junior year and been done by the end of the fall senior year. Like I said, this is my last, beautiful spring semester here at UMass, the most beautiful time of the UMass year. There is nothing I would less like to be doing at this moment than cramming to finish up my projects. If you can, start early - you’ll get to savor your last semester the way it deserves to be savored.

I have full confidence in you, CHC. If I have (almost) completed this process, you certainly can. Goodbye for now, I’ve really appreciated the chance to share with you here for the past two years. Thanks for reading!
Until my first alumni post, best of luck to everyone.