



The 10-Point List

First Year Survival Guide:

All you need to know to survive your first year in chemistry graduate school.

Introduction

Herein lies the students' explanation of the requirements in the chemistry program for the first year, along with some helpful tips to help you get around and establish yourself in the Evanston/Chicago area.

The 10 Points

1. What goes on during orientation?
2. What are my options for housing?
3. (a) How does public transportation work in the Evanston/Chicago area?
(b) And what if I have a car?
4. How does the money situation really work for graduate students at NU?
5. What are proficiency exams?
6. What classes should I take?
7. How do I choose an advisor?
8. Where will I work/put my stuff during the day before I choose an official advisor?
9. What will my teaching/tutoring responsibilities be?
10. Does anyone have advice to help me survive this first year?

Other Helpful Items

Utilities
Housing
Stores/Post Office

Visit the 10-points web page for links to Evanston & Chicago information as well as Northwestern University information: <http://nulink.northwestern.edu> or <http://www.gradconnections.northwestern.edu/?quicklinks>

1. What goes on during orientation?

- ◆ This will be the only three weeks of your graduate school tenure that you will be paid to do virtually nothing! Enjoy it! Have fun! See Chicago! Get to know your classmates! Move in! Settle down! Enjoy the lake! Start reading papers of professors that you are potentially interested in!
- ◆ During this time you will fill out tax forms, take proficiency exams, sit through TA and graduate school orientation, do fire safety and so forth. Have fun with it, but pay attention to the information you are told. Go down to Chicago on a free afternoon via the El! There are few September afternoons that you will be able to do this again, seriously.

2. What are my options for housing?

- ◆ On-campus graduate housing is relatively expensive for the space and does not come highly recommended.
- ◆ Find an apartment in Evanston. Nice places are available though a bit pricey – find a roommate!
- ◆ Live a little bit south of Evanston in Rogers Park. Nice places are available. Cheaper. But be wary of safety and make sure to live near an El stop, for easy access to campus.
- ◆ If you are willing and mobile, Skokie is a 10-15 min drive West of Evanston. It's cheaper and close to a lot of necessary stores and there is even a mall (Old Orchard).
- ◆ If you have a car and don't mind 20-35 minute drive each way or a 30-40 min. El commute, you can choose to live in Wrigleyville or Lincoln Park which are further south. Nice places available. Fun areas. In Chicago. You may want to consider the commute before deciding to move far from campus – it's probably better to see what your lab schedule is like first
- ◆ Contact the Graduate Assistant in the chemistry department. He can put you in contact with students in the department who need roommates.
- ◆ Once you get the email list, contact people in your class to share an apartment. It's cheaper than living alone.
- ◆ Use the internet! Craigslist, Rent.com, The Evanston Review, the Chicago Tribune, The Chicago Reader and newspapers like these are easily accessible on the web with the classifieds at your fingertips. This is an easy way to figure out housing long distance.

Here are some good websites/email addresses:

- ◆ **NU Housing Office:**
email: grad-housing@northwestern.edu
www.northwestern.edu/gradhousing/
- ◆ **Apartment People:**
www.apartmentpeople.com
- ◆ **Pioneer Press:**
<http://www.pioneerlocal.com>
- ◆ **Chicago Tribune:**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com>
- ◆ **Craig's List Chicago**
www.chicago.craigslist.org
- **Off Campus Housing info:**
<http://www.northwestern.edu/offcampus/>
<http://ww.rent.com> lets you enter your own preferences such as price and location and does the work for you.



3(a). How does public transportation work in the Evanston/Chicago area?

There are three main methods of public transportation. They are the Metra train, the "El" (short for elevated train), and the buses. Go to <http://www.northwestern.edu/visiting/index.html> for more information on campus transportation and parking.

Northwestern Shuttles

- Northwestern runs a number of busses. Some are meant for transportation around campus, but others are convenient ways to commute. They are free to anybody with a WildCard (Northwestern ID card)
- The intercampus shuttle picks up in front of tech and ends at the Chicago Campus, and runs approximately every 45 minutes, but is often on schedule. Although the shuttle does not have frequent stops along the way, many of the stops are conveniently located near where students live.
- The Ryan Field shuttle is intended to take people to remote parking at Ryan Field, but goes all the way to Central and Green Bay, and some students use this route for commuting. Note this bus only runs during Fall, Winter and Spring quarters.
- During the school year, there are shopping shuttles on the weekends that go to the supermarket and various other shopping areas in the suburbs.
- Visit the following link for schedules and maps
<http://www.univsvcs.northwestern.edu/shuttles/information.html>

CTA Buses and Trains

Go to <http://www.transitchicago.com/> for schedules. Also, a new feature on google maps lets you look for directions as you normally would for driving, and then click "take public transit" to get directions via CTA!!

The El:

- ◆ As part of your student fee, you get a U-Pass, which gives you unlimited transportation on CTA busses, CTA trains, and Pace (suburban) busses. Note that there are three weeks in the summer and three weeks at winter break when the pass is not valid. It is also not accepted by Metra (suburban commuter rail).
- ◆ Standard fare for the El is \$1.75. To transfer, it is an additional \$0.25, if you ride again within two hours. It is also recommended to get the "Chicago Plus" card, which gives you 10% of the reload value, and only costs \$5.

- ◆ The two train lines that most NU students use most are the Purple Line (runs through Evanston until 1 or 2am and to downtown during weekday rush hours – Purple Line Express) and the Red Line (runs North/South through downtown). When the express is not running, take the purple line to the end at Howard Street and transfer to the Red Line to go to downtown Chicago.
- ◆ The stop closest to Tech is at Noyes Street. It is about a five minute walk east to Tech from the El stop.
- ◆ The Purple Line only runs until 2 am, but the Red Line runs all night.
- ◆ In general, the El is pretty safe and is a very effective means of transportation. However, you should keep in mind that this is an urban means of transportation, which means that you should be careful about traveling alone – especially late at night -- and should always make sure that you are aware of your surroundings.
- ◆ The El does not really run according to the times posted on the website or the signs at the stations. However, the intervals between stops are about right.

Buses:

- ◆ Bus fares are the same as the El.
- ◆ The routes for different bus lines are extensive, and too complicated to explain here. The #201 is the only bus that passes Tech.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to use public transportation. As you use the El, the bus, etc. you will learn the routes, the schedules, and everything you need to know to efficiently use the system.

The buses are also a convenient way to access Old Orchard and Golf Mall (where Target is) shopping areas if you don't have a car.

The Metra train:

- ◆ The Metra is essentially a commuter train for professionals going from the suburbs into the city.
- ◆ The fare is \$2.00 - 4.00 per ride depending on your travel route.
- ◆ The stop closest to campus is at Davis Street in downtown Evanston. It is about a 15 minute walk from the station to [Tech or pick up the intercampus shuttle](#) which runs even when school is not in session.
- ◆ The Metra is very safe and usually runs on time. For more specific Metra information, visit the website at <http://www.metrarail.com/>. Metra is another convenient way to get downtown.

3(b). What if I have my own car?



- ◆ A commuter (student) parking permit can be purchased at the Parking office at 1819 Hinman Ave., x1-3319. For fees during the school year, contact the parking office. You must be outside of the walking zone, provide a copy of your lease and show a wild card in order to get a parking permit. A Ryan Field (remote parking at the football stadium) pass can also be purchased for about \$25.00 per school year. During rush hours (6:45a.m. – 9:00a.m., 3:45p.m. – 6:45p.m.) [a shuttle service is provided from the stadium parking lot to campus](#) . During all other hours, students can use the [intercampus shuttle to travel between Ryan Field and campus](#). Any questions regarding either shuttle service can be answered by calling Support Services at (312)-503-8129.
- ◆ A temporary parking pass can be purchased in advance from the Parking Office for the day. You can pay with check, or cash. These requests must be picked up in person from the Parking Office. Please allow a week for the office to process these requests.
- ◆ Prices for parking anywhere else vary greatly. Residential areas are free, side-streets near downtown Evanston and the Evanston campus are free but with time-limits, downtown Evanston has metered parking (8a.m. – 9p.m., Monday - Saturday) as well as parking decks, and parking decks in downtown Chicago can be as much as \$16.00 for one hour (take the El!).
- ◆ Most campus lots are open to anybody after 4pm and on weekends, but watch for signs specific to the lot and space you are in.
- ◆ Beware of where and when you park until you are comfortable with the area. Both Evanston and Northwestern LOVE to hand out parking tickets if you are in an improper parking spot, if your parking meter runs out, if you are in a time-limited free spot for too long, and numerous other reasons. Be careful! Also, too many violations and you will no longer get a ticket, but rather a tow-truck, and there are lots of tow-trucks in the area.

4. How does the money situation really work for graduate students at NU?



- ◆ At this point, you have already received a letter from the department telling you how much your salary will be. Read this letter carefully. Most first year graduate students don't realize that their salary will decrease after their first year due to the pay out of your signing bonus, if you received one. This is a standard procedure at most graduate schools, but not expecting this change can be really detrimental in terms of financial planning.

- ◆ Taxes are not automatically withheld from your paycheck, at least during your first year. At the very beginning of orientation you will fill out forms for the business office. Be sure to fill out the W-4 form indicating that you want additional withholdings taken out of your check. A good way to figure out how much you should withhold each month is to go to the estimated tax form on the [IRS website](#) before orientation begins. For further explanation refer to the payroll website: <http://www.northwestern.edu/hr/hris/>
- ◆ Your funding source will change in the spring of your first year. At this point you will have to fill out these forms all over again. Some funding sources automatically withhold taxes while others do not. Ask other group members about your particular situation. Additionally, your funding source may change suddenly without your knowledge, so it is important to check your paychecks to see if you need to fill out forms again.
- ◆ Any general questions regarding your funding or taxes should be directed to the Business Office in room K138 in Tech or payroll at 720 University Place.
- ◆ There are various different banks in the area. You cannot miss them when you are in downtown Evanston. Also, the University requires direct deposit; see the business office (Tech K118) for details and forms. This can also be done online through the Human Resources self service website.
- ◆ You will not get paid until the end of September, so don't expect cash flow for moving in.
- ◆ Make sure to figure out your taxes and all the forms associated with taxes, as soon as possible. To avoid catastrophe and chaos, make sure that you know what is going on and have conferred with the business office with all your questions.

5. What are the placement exams?

- ◆ During orientation in September, one of the first things you will do is take 3 placement exams in organic, inorganic, and physical chemistry. These are ACS standardized exams.
- ◆ If you fail, you will have to take the corresponding Principles course. Consult the current "[Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Chemistry](#)" for more information.
- ◆ The American Chemical Society provides a study guide for the Organic proficiency exam. Visit the [ACS website](#) for more information and ordering costs.
- ◆ Placement exams should not be taken lightly and early preparation is the key. Students who do well and pass will be better off since the exams can be easier than taking the required make-up classes.

6. What classes should I take?

- ◆ Minimum of 9 courses are required to receive a Ph.D, including the principles courses, for which most students pass out of at least one.

- ◆ The principles classes are often useful even if you have passed the exam. If you have a free slot, try to audit one or two just for some lectures to get a broader view of chemistry at the graduate level.
- ◆ What you should take will be more obvious once you get here. Don't worry about it now. Giving you a bunch of course numbers and titles will only scare you, not help you.
- ◆ You can pass out of a core or required course by talking to the professor who is teaching it. He/she may grill you so don't try to bluff it. This may require showing the professor your undergrad notes, knowing the book you used, and providing the grade you received.
- ◆ If you have a Master's Degree, you are still required to take 9 courses but you may pass out of as many as two in addition to the principles courses.
- ◆ You need to register every quarter, even if you are finished with classes. You need to sign up for research and seminar credits, so that the graduate school recognizes you as a full time student. Ask the Graduate Assistant if you have questions.
- ◆ Get textbooks and notes for classes from older graduate students. It helps in saving money and this is a lifesaver.
- ◆ Try to get your classes done a.s.a.p. They are not that hard to finish within the first two or three quarters and it will be a big relief to have that first requirement done!!
- ◆ You must maintain at least a 5.25 average on an 8.0 scale (A = 8, A- = 7, B+ = 6, B = 5 etc.)...The University calculates GPA on a 4.0 scale, and considers a number of classes that Chemistry does not when calculating GPA. For further explanation, please refer to the "Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Chemistry."
- ◆ The ability to audit classes is there, so take advantage of it. Classes offered in other departments, like biology, materials science and physics are often useful, so give it a go. If you don't like it in the end, you can always stop going.
- ◆ One B-minus isn't the end of the world. If you are struggling in a class and are worried, then talk to the instructor to see what you need to do to earn a B instead.

7. How do I choose an Advisor?

- ◆ This is important folks!! Read up! This is one of the most important decision since choosing graduate school!!
- ◆ You should spend a lot of time researching and thinking about which group you want to work with. How do you do this?
- ◆ Go to group meetings, talk to graduate students in each group, meet multiple times with the professor, read papers, talk to graduate students, talk to graduate students and one very important thing, talk to graduate students.

- ◆ It is a good idea to glance through the NU website <http://www.chem.northwestern.edu/faculty/> and read about the professors' current research. Consider publication history and tenure situations.
- ◆ Throughout Orientation, each advisor will give a 30 minute talk; this will only give you the flavor of their research. If you are interested, make an appointment to talk one-on-one. Make several appointments with advisors and begin early. Also, attend their research group meetings. Attend all of the 30 minute talks during Orientation even if they are not in your chosen field. It is important to know the research going on in your department and the resources other groups may have.
- ◆ Attend departmental seminars given by 4th year students, as these presentations will often give you a better understanding of the course of projects within a group. The research presented will include both ongoing research topics as well as the recent history of the group's research. This can be helpful in determining the overall future path a group will be taking. (There's no point in joining a group if the research you want to do has already been done!)
- ◆ You will have to meet officially with four advisors and have them sign a form saying that you discussed research opportunities. Don't be shy about asking them to sign the forms; they know that you have them and that you have to get them signed.
- ◆ Prioritize what is important to you: a great, interesting scientific project, a friendly, mellow advisor, or a dynamic group of graduate students and post-docs. Ideally, you will find in one research team what you are looking for in a project, advisor and group. However, you may not. It is important to think about what is top on your list of needs and wants from your research during graduate school. If you haven't a clue, don't worry about it. Once you get here, see how things work, talk to a lot of older students, chat with a lot of people who have some experience, and discuss with a lot of students who have already been through the process (this was not a typo... we are trying to stress that you should get advice from older graduate students who are happy to share their experiences, impressions and advice). You will soon understand everything a bit better.
- ◆ Think about this decision very thoroughly, after gathering as much information as possible.
- ◆ Professors are often more inclined to take students that have shown interest in their group. Be sure that you not only meet with the professor (or professors – it's best to have multiple groups you're interested in joining), but also attend their group meetings and ask questions that demonstrate knowledge about and interest in their research. Don't assume that you will be placed in a group just because you list that group as your first choice!

Make sure to ask several students from one group and not go on just one person's opinion. Here are some questions you may want to ask **graduate students**:

- ◆ What are the typical demands of the professor? What is his/her working style? Hands on or hands off?
- ◆ What do you feel you have learned from your advisor?

- ◆ What is the average time required to graduate from the group?
- ◆ Does your advisor travel a lot?
- ◆ What is your standard work week?
- ◆ What are the typical hours of a graduate student in this lab?
- ◆ Would you choose this group again if you had the chance to do it over?
- ◆ What would you have asked that you didn't if you could do it over again?
- ◆ If the professor gave you a potential project to work on, ask graduate students if they think it's a viable project.
- ◆ Do students get to choose their own projects?
- ◆ How much control over a project do you have from start to finish? Can a student come up with their own original ideas for research projects?

Questions you may want to ask **professors**:

- ◆ Are you accepting students? How many? On what research projects?
- ◆ What is your working style?
- ◆ What do you believe is the advisor's role?
- ◆ What is the average time required to graduate from your group?
- ◆ How does your group interact with each other?
- ◆ What is your travel schedule?
- ◆ Specifics about their field of research are?

8. Where will I work/study/put my stuff during the day before I choose an official advisor?

- ◆ Each first year graduate student is temporarily stationed in an graduate student office belonging to a research group which you may or may not be interested in joining. You will have a desk and access to computers. This is a very good opportunity to see how a research group works.
- ◆ Listen closely to what the other graduate students in this office have to say. They probably have information on any group you are considering even if it is not their own.

- ◆ These graduate students may also have used textbooks or old class notes that you can borrow. They are really a great resource; take advantage of this opportunity.
- ◆ Don't feel uncomfortable working in your temporary office.

9. What will my teaching/tutoring responsibilities be?

- ◆ You may teach during all three quarters of your first year, possibly the summer and possibly the first quarter of the second year. On average, students teach four quarters. Generally, organic students serve as organic chemistry TAs or tutors and everyone else teaches general chemistry. The organic classes are under the supervision of [Prof. Owen Priest](#), and [Prof. Shelby Hatch](#) supervises the general chemistry division. You will meet them during orientation and receive your teaching/tutoring assignment.
- ◆ In general chemistry, you will TA two sections of 18 students each per week. Each lab period is 2.5 hours long and you will also have office hours. In organic chemistry, you will teach one 4-5 hour lab per week and keep 1 hour of office hours. You will give a pre-lab talk, supervise the student's work, answer any questions, grade their lab reports, and grade exams. Some students will be assigned as "super-TAs" for general chemistry. The time commitment is the same, except that you will grade quizzes and exams from the lecture section and conduct extra tutor hours and review sessions.
- ◆ There will be a TA/tutor meeting once a week. Do not miss these meetings.
- ◆ Meeting your teaching requirement effectively is very important at NU. It will be taken into consideration along with your grades and research when you are being considered for candidacy.

10. Does anyone have advice to help me survive this first year?

"Beware of library fines. Late fees from late material can add up quickly (as much as \$5 per hour)!"

"If you have to take four courses at once, take four courses the first quarter rather than the second."

"Get a bike or roller blades. The lake paths are too beautiful to pass up."

"Don't forget to complete and mail out the NU health forms. You don't get many reminders and forgetting leads to registration holds, a late fee, and a lot of unnecessary bureaucracy."

"Talk to the professors early and often, even if you feel unprepared. Go to group meetings. Talk to all the graduate students that you can find—find out what questions they asked and what questions they wish they had asked."

"Make sure you have some idea of what your project will be before you join a group. That's not a good thing to be surprised about."

"Work in study groups for your classes. The competition here is not great, and you will learn a lot more than studying alone."

"Find anybody who has taken the class before and get their notes and exams. This is extremely helpful."

"Take the safety exam seriously during orientation, or you could find yourself sitting through the 3 hour lecture again."

"Your enjoyment of your time here is almost completely dependant on your ability to find research that excites you and people you like spending time with. These are probably the two most important factors to consider when selecting a group."

Important Phone Numbers, Locations, Etc.

Utilities

1. Electricity (ComEd): 800-334-7661
2. Gas (Nicor Gas): 800-642-6748
3. Telephone (SBC): 800-244-4444
4. TV Cable and Internet (Comcast): 866-594-1234



Post Office and Stores

1. Evanston Post Office - 1101 Davis St.
2. Target, Best Buy, Office Max (General goods for apartments, etc.) 2209 Howard St.
3. Dominick's (Groceries) North on Greenbay Rd.
4. Jewel (Groceries) 2 Locations - South on Chicago St., Howard St. (next to Target), and North on Greenbay Rd.
5. D&D Foods - West on Noyes street near the "El" stop. Close to campus.
6. Food 4 Less – 2400 West Main Street
7. [Other items in Chicago Area](#)

Questions/Problems?

Feel free to email any of us (Graduate Liaison Committee):



E-mail and Your NetID

Students and full-time faculty and staff are automatically eligible for an email account at Northwestern. Your email account is associated with your NetID, and allows both POP/IMAP and Web Mail access. Your Northwestern University Network Identifier (NetID) and password identify you to the NU network and allow you to access a variety of resources and services such as NU calendar, NU email, library resources, IT lab printing, **Blackboard and CAESAR**. You **MUST** have an active NetID to register for classes, you will need to change the password for this regularly.

To obtain a NetID and set up your e-mail account:

- you will need your wildcard
- go to the IT Information Center at NUIT Support Center
Phone: 847-491-HELP (1-4357)
Address: NUIT Support Center
1800 Sherman Avenue
Evanston, IL 60208-2212

Note: Once you have obtained an e-mail account, please be sure to send an e-mail immediately to the graduate program assistant (GradAsst@northwestern.edu) to let them know your account information. Be sure to include your full name in your e-mail message. **You will need this account to register for classes on CAESAR, check student accounts, and utilize Blackboard for classes. DO NOT FORGET YOUR PASSWORD.**



Your WildCARD

This information was obtained from the following website:

www.univsvcs.northwestern.edu/WildCard

WildCARD will be one of your most valuable possessions. This all campus ID card is used to access meal plans, vending machines, University facilities and events. It can also be used to make purchases at the University Bookstore and other on- and off-campus locations.

You will need your WildCARD to:

- establish your Net ID and e-mail account
- check out library materials
- gain admittance to the library during restricted hours
- cash checks at the Bursar or in Norris University Center
- use the Information Technology computer labs
- use the Student Health Service
- gain admittance to university sporting events
- Obtain event tickets (sports, music and theatrical)
- Use shuttle bus services
- Obtain discounts from local merchants. For a list of participating merchants, visit <http://usev.gensvcs.northwestern.edu/wildcardadv/>
- Cash to card feature
- Copier and vending services
- Purchase parking permit
- Enter the Sports Pavilion and Aquatic Center (SPAC)
- Banking services

You can obtain a WildCARD at the WildCARD office.

WildCARD Office
Norris University Center
1999 S. Campus Drive (Underground Level)
(847) 467-6843
Email : wildcard@northwestern.edu

Hours of Operation
Monday thru Friday 8:30 a.m. - 6:30 p.m.