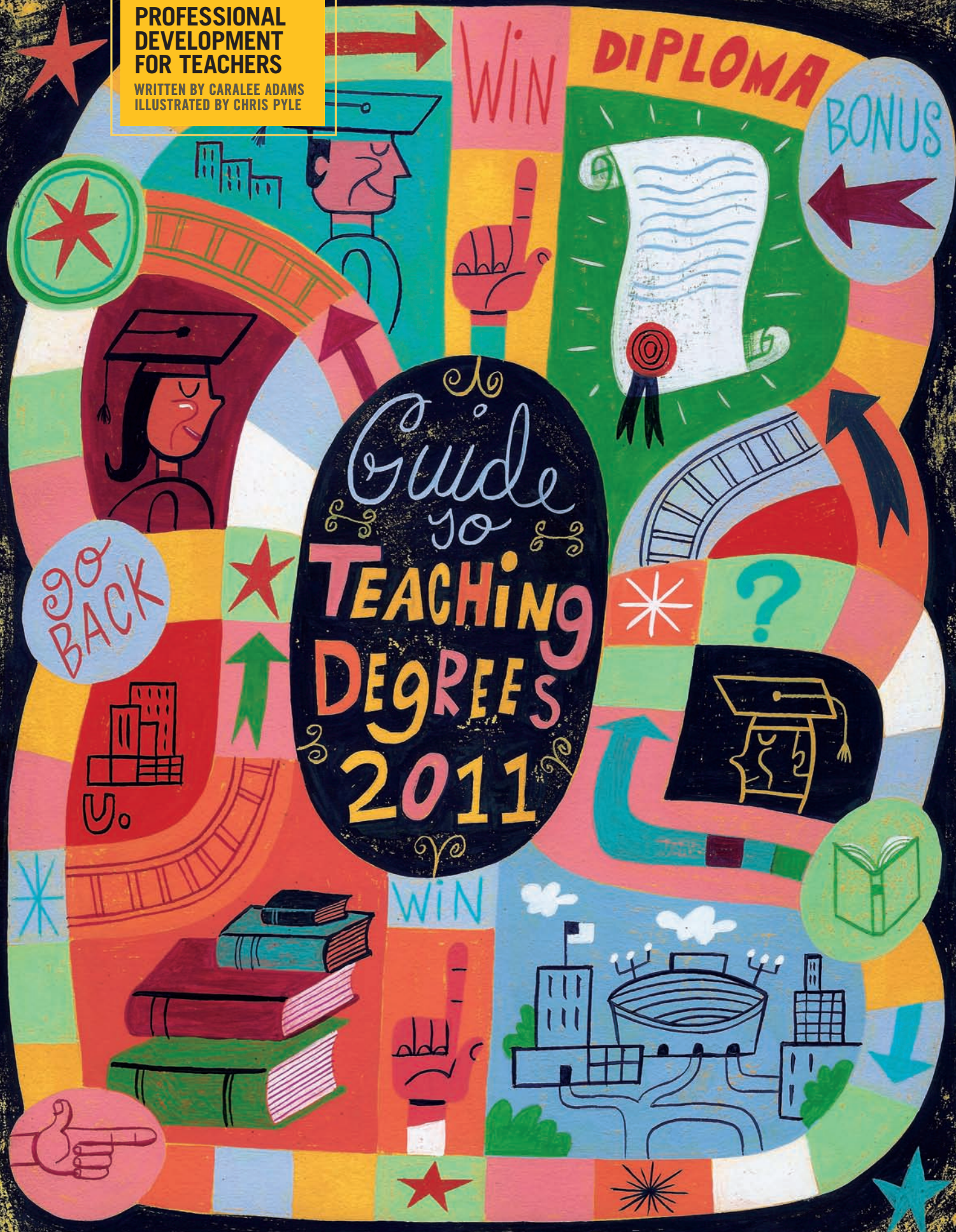


PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
FOR TEACHERS

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ILLUSTRATED BY CHRIS PYLE

Guide
to
**TEACHING
DEGREES
2011**



How Much Is a Master's Worth?

Getting a master's degree means lots of late nights, busy weekends, and probably taking on student loan debt. The commitment raises the question: Is it worth it?

Financially, you should see a gain. Some districts and states place a higher value on master's degrees than others, so it pays to do your research.

At the top of the scale is the District of Columbia, where teachers with a master's degree earn a minimum of \$66,250. At the other end of the spectrum is South Dakota, where that same credential translates to \$39,880.

Eight states reward teachers who have a master's degree with a salary of more than \$60,000 (see page 44). However, eleven states—Oklahoma, Nebraska, South Dakota, West Virginia, Tennessee, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, North Dakota, and Arizona—pay teachers who have completed graduate school less than \$45,000, according to the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) latest figures. The rest fall somewhere in the middle.

While it's good to know where the investment of graduate school pays off, it's also important to stay tuned



in to the changing political and economic winds in your district or state. The tight fiscal situation has many policymakers, including Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, rethinking pay increases for master's degrees.

"An automatic bonus for a master's degree should be eliminated," says Eric Hanushek, senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. "We should reward teachers for what they actually accomplish in the classroom." Hanushek acknowledges that any major change in salary schedules for teachers is likely a long way off. But the current climate makes getting a master's degree a riskier investment, particularly if the program is not related to your current teaching job.

Mary Cathryn Ricker, president of the St. Paul Federation of Teachers

and a middle school English teacher, says teachers will always seek ways to improve their craft, and they should be encouraged to do so. About 51 percent of teachers in Minnesota have a master's degree, and their base salary is \$55,040 compared to \$41,760 for those with only a bachelor's degree.

Ricker says school districts have agreed to pay teachers more for having a master's degree because they recognize the extra credential has value and addresses needs the district has for specialized staff, teacher leaders, and administrators.

The Goal Is the Same

Higher standards and performance expectations mean teachers need further education, says Ricker. When they do graduate work, their new learning

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should be evident in their performance in the classroom.

“We are still talking about people needing the skills to continuously improve their practice,” she says. “Does acquiring those skills deserve compensation? I feel there is still a valid argument for awarding compensation based on skills and knowledge. It is clearly cut in most contracts that skills and knowledge are recognized in graduate programs.”

Ricker says she thinks districts appreciate how pay based on degrees provides stability with budgeting. “They would be scared to death of a pure performance-based pay system because it would be wildly unpredictable.” Ricker cautions teachers to investigate a master’s program to make sure it will be rigorous and beneficial. “Not all master’s are created equal,” she says. “I’ve talked to teachers who spent all this money and didn’t feel they got out of it what they put into it. That should never happen.”

Almost half of full-time teachers in the U.S. hold master’s degrees, according to a 2011 NCES report. Some states require a master’s degree in special-

ized areas, such as literacy. Others, including Illinois and Oregon, mandate teachers get a master’s degree within 5 to 10 years of starting in the profession. Many states have tiered certification systems, which require teachers to have a master’s degree to progress to a higher level.

Before committing to a program, be clear about your state’s requirements and what is in demand, advises James Cibulka, president of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in Washington, D.C. Cibulka also advises contacting superintendents’ offices to identify areas where teachers are needed.

Staying Up-to-Date

When Lauren Ragland, 24, enrolled part time in a special education master’s program at the University of Kansas, she had worked for three years teaching life skills to students with severe disabilities in Lee’s Summit, Missouri. She saw an increasing population of kids with autism—and a need for more training.

“I wanted to get more techniques and stay up-to-date on the research,”

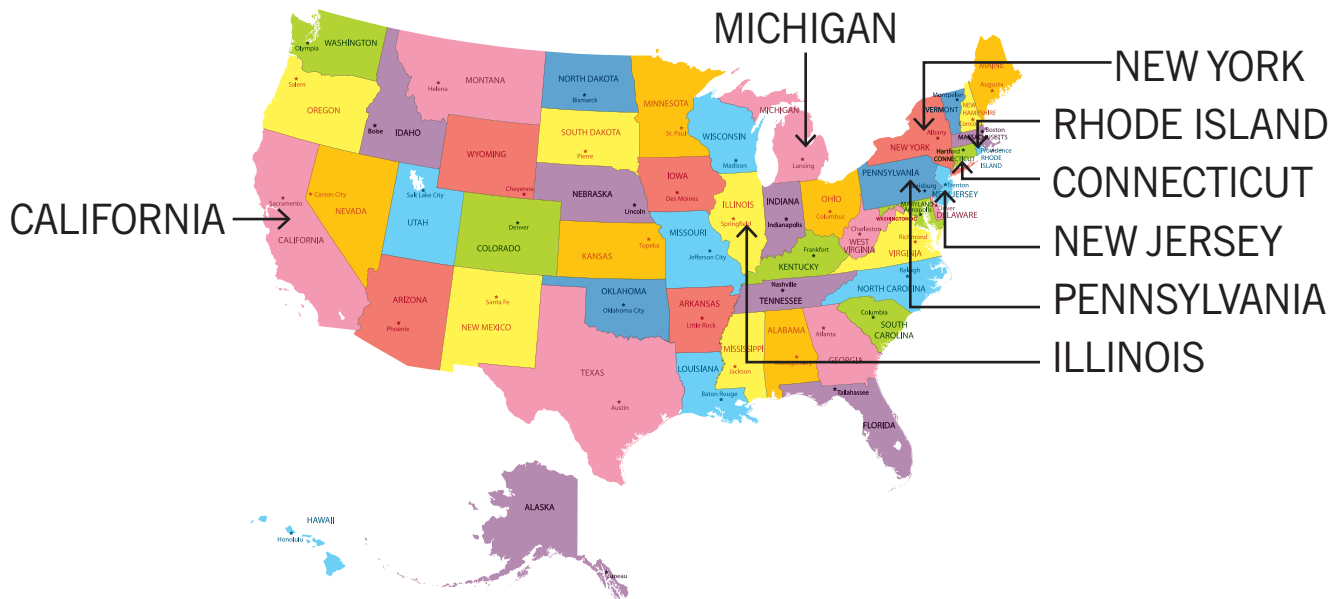
says Ragland. “As a teacher, I want to be sure I’m using effective strategies.”

A pay freeze for teachers in Missouri means that Ragland’s degree will not immediately translate into a pay raise. Disappointing? “Yes, a little,” she says. “But it’s something I wanted to do anyway. It was not just for the pay benefit.” Eventually, she hopes the master’s will give her a bump in pay—perhaps \$5,000 if the pay freeze is lifted.

Having an advanced degree in special education is in demand in Missouri, as in many states. So is having a specialty in teaching English language learners. With the recent emphasis on STEM careers, schools are also seeking teachers with math and science concentrations.

To expand a teacher’s knowledge and improve performance, Hanushek suggests the best plan may be for teachers to get a master’s in an advanced subject area or where there are shortages and specialized training is needed. “It needs to be a strong program that is not just more of what they already know. It must challenge the teacher, bring her to a higher level. That’s when it’s truly worth it.”

8 STATES WHERE TEACHERS WITH A MASTER’S DEGREE RECEIVE A SALARY OF AT LEAST \$60,000



Choosing the Right Master's Program

In her first few years as an elementary school teacher in South Phoenix, Arizona, Nicole Baumgart worked hard and enjoyed teaching but was frustrated with the way her school was run. Even if she accomplished great things with her kids, there was no guarantee the students would have a good experience in the next grade.

That inspired Baumgart to go for her master's in school administration.

"As a teacher, I can make a difference in the classroom, but an administrator can have an effect on an entire school," says the 26-year-old, who completed her graduate degree this year at Arizona State University.

Baumgart hopes the administration degree will put her on a path to be an instructional leader or assistant principal in the next five years.

Despite having a baby in the middle of her program last year and the stress of continuing to work full time during her graduate studies, the investment was worth it for Baumgart. The extra credential translated into an additional \$5,000 per year in her new job as an English teacher at Tolleson Union High School, in a Phoenix suburb. And eventually, becoming an administrator may boost her pay by as much as \$20,000.



So, just how do you decide what master's degree program to pursue?

You have lots of options—from a master's in education pedagogy to a graduate degree in a content area, such as history or science. Some districts have high demand for certain specialties, but balancing what is in demand with your passion can be tricky. You also have to consider how to finance your master's degree and what kind of program can work with your schedule.

Before enrolling in a graduate program, do some research and soul-searching. If you choose the right field of study and find a quality program it can pay off in job satisfaction, and in your pocketbook.

"It's a big investment. It takes a lot of time and energy," says Laura Perna, a professor in the graduate school of education at the University of Pennsylvania. "There are also opportunity costs. Look at costs and

benefits, including tuition, financial aid, and convenience factors, such as travel time."

What Are Your Strengths?

Aside from the logistics, choosing a master's degree should be about what interests you and what will help prepare you for the next stage of your career, says Mari Koerner, dean of the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. "A good graduate degree should transform the way you think," says Koerner. It should challenge you intellectually and help you think as a researcher so you can make better classroom decisions.

Julie Waite, a life coach who works with teachers in Janesville, Wisconsin, says considering what kind of degree to pursue needs to be about more than salary. "I ask clients, 'What would give you more mean-

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ing? Where do you want to go?” says Waite, who was a teacher herself for 20 years.

In her work, she sees many teachers who are at a crossroads. Waite meets with them weekly for four to ten weeks to sort through the options and help them develop a plan. “You are going to get more from grad school if you are doing what you love,” she says. “You will stay in teaching longer and you will be better at it.”

Is It the Right Fit?

After you’ve considered your reason for getting a degree, you need to look for the right program. The quality of a master’s program can be a big factor in how transferable the skills are to your job.

The NCATE is encouraging institutions to gather data, measure performance, and be transparent about their results, says its president, James Cilbulka. He suggests prospective grad

students ask to see the track record of graduates to gauge whether the program seems effective.

You should also check out each program’s website and class offerings. Find out its ranking, as that often reflects the quality of the education. Think about the size of the program and the student-to-faculty ratio.

When you’ve narrowed your choices, meet with faculty and ask about the types of programs offered. Ask for names of graduates willing to talk about their experiences. Consider if the program focus is more theoretical or practical. If you’re going to school part time and continuing to work full time, ask about support provided to students and how much of your research can be based on your own classroom.

Above all, “look for programs that have very close and productive relationships with the local schools,” says Kay Merseth, director of the Teacher Education Program at Harvard University. “Being in a strong mentor-mentee relationship is perhaps the best training a new teacher can have.”

Prospective students should inquire, too, about how mentors are selected, what the teacher training is, and who in the program is responsible for placements, suggests Merseth.

“Master’s programs vary widely in quality,” adds Mary Cathryn Ricker, president of the St. Paul Federation of Teachers in Minnesota. “Thirty hours of coursework without a direct connection to learning doesn’t do a teacher that much good.” The best programs can help an educator become a mentor teacher who is able to design and implement her own research.

In the end, “anything that makes you do your job better is a good investment,” says Deb Tully of the Ohio Federation of Teachers.

“Teachers are people who value learning so much,” adds Koerner.

True, though we don’t always have time to keep up on the latest research on teaching. Taking the time to get your master’s degree is one way to reflect on your own teaching practice and bring it to a whole new level.

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I GOT MY MASTER’S THAT WAY. We still had to meet face-to-face for three classes, but overall it was very good. Being able to go camping (and submit work at the Wi-Fi hotspot) and not miss a class was wonderful! —*Celina D.*

I’M AN OLD-SCHOOL GAL. I need the teacher interaction and actual class discussion. —*De’Ven R.*

I LIVE IN A VERY RURAL AREA, so online was a must. I have completed ALL of my higher education with online classes, including two separate master’s degrees. —*Kathy B.*

IT’S NOT FOR ME. The discussion suffers. Unlike regular classes, you don’t get to enjoy all the different personalities in the room. It is just so impersonal. —*Laurie E.*

YOU GET OUT WHAT YOU PUT IN. I got my master’s online. My first time on campus was for graduation. —*Erika M.*

IT WAS THE ONLY WAY to get a master’s with a baby and toddler at home. —*Lisa W.*

Finding a Balance in Graduate School

Like many teachers pursuing their master's degree, Lacey Rozycki is juggling a full-time job and taking classes part time. The 27-year-old teacher in Lee's Summit, Missouri, is pursuing her master's degree in special education.

Being able to apply what she is learning at the University of Kansas keeps Rozycki going. "Many assignments are directly related to my classroom—it's not busywork," she says. Rozycki does the majority of her work at night and on weekends. While it's demanding, balancing teaching and grad school has not been as overwhelming as she anticipated.

To make it work, Rozycki has had to give up most Saturdays and forgo some family time on Sundays. "Everyone's been very understanding," she says. "School is my priority."

Having a support system in place, relying on coworkers, and keeping your principal in the loop are all strategies that teachers can use to make it through graduate school. There are also many ways to go about a master's program, from taking evening classes to



full-time residency programs to online options that provide some flexibility. With some planning, you can achieve balance, be successful in graduate school, thrive in the classroom, and still have a life.

Dive in With Gusto

Getting a master's degree is too big of an undertaking to do halfheartedly.

"You have to make a commitment," says Rick Ginsberg, dean of the School of Education at the University of Kansas. "Think carefully about why you are pursuing graduate training. What will it do for you personally and professionally?" Make a list of life goals, he says. Is another degree one of them?

Going to graduate school can be a sacrifice emotionally and financially for you and your family, says Mary-Jeanne

Raleigh, president of the American College Counseling Association (ACCA) and director of counseling at St. Mary's College of Maryland.

"You have to be passionate about it," says Raleigh. "If you don't have that burning desire, don't do it."

Make the Most of Your Time

Deb Tully, director of professional issues with the Ohio Federation of Teachers, agrees.

Tully's advice is to find a graduate program, like Rozycki did in Kansas, where coursework can be linked to the classroom. "Apply the concepts you are learning in your program to your classroom," she says. "Your graduate work will become a way of reflecting on your classroom practice."

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"A lot of teachers are control freaks. It's OK to let go a bit." —Dina Bangle, teacher, Flagstaff, AZ

Arizona University was the right fit for Dina Bangle, 46, a second-grade teacher in Flagstaff, Arizona, who went back to school for her master's in child development last year. "The appeal was the flexibility and working at your own pace," she says, adding that sometimes she works online at 4 A.M. "If you are in your pajamas, nobody knows."

Bangle also enjoys swapping ideas with fellow students from Idaho, Washington, and even Japan. "Now I'm getting all these different perspectives on teaching," she says.

Although not a "whiz-kid computer person," Bangle says she's learned the technology and has never felt alone in the program. She misses some of the body language of in-person communication, but says it can work with a good facilitator. "It was not impersonal at all. The professors opened up and responded quickly by e-mail."

There are other options, particularly for those changing careers. Gianna Brisbane, 26, was working in a research lab in Philadelphia when she decided to become a high school science teacher. "I felt I was called to teach," she says. "I've never been happier."

Brisbane just completed her first year in a full-time residency program at the University of Pennsylvania to get her master's degree in education. At first, she was paired with a mentor and worked as a classroom assistant. Then, she eased into teaching a biology class; she will be mentored for four years.

The pace has been exhausting at times, but Brisbane says she is buoyed by the camaraderie with other residents going through the master's program. Not only do they take classes and work on papers together, but they also set aside time to have fun and go to the movies or out for dinner.

Get Organized

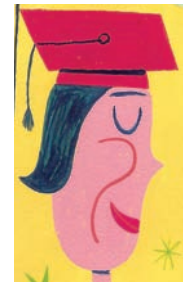
Keeping a calendar hour by hour was the most important thing for Brisbane

while in her master's program.

The ACCA's Raleigh agrees. Although computers and smartphones can keep you organized, sometimes having a large paper calendar prominently displayed, with due dates noting research papers and tests, can be the simplest solution, she says.

Graduate school requires you to plan ahead, says Ramona Mellott, dean of the graduate college at Northern Arizona University. "You have to prioritize and really be aware of deadlines. As an undergraduate, you were only

4 KEYS TO SURVIVING GRADUATE SCHOOL INTACT



1 Think of Grad School as a Job You are in control of how much you learn, and you will be expected to take initiative in your own learning. Ask questions in class, reach out to peers, be an active member of the community.

2 Communicate Your Needs Talk to your supervisor, your colleagues, and your family about your grad school responsibilities. They'll be more understanding if you do.

3 Find a Mentor It could be a professor or a teacher who's "been there, done that." A mentor can help you keep it real and stay on track. Sometimes it helps just to have someone to talk to about everything.

4 Give Yourself a Break Reducing expectations for yourself can be a huge relief. You cannot be all things to all people. So what if the house is a cluttered mess during exam period?!

responsible for yourself and could pull an all-nighter. That's hard to do when you are balancing work, school, and family. You have to be organized."

When you set your weekly schedule, include all the tasks you have, from studying to laundry, advises Mari Koerner of Arizona State University. "I tell students not to pretend they don't have this other life."

Be Realistic

For Bangle of Flagstaff, her family and classroom are her first priorities, so she was initially scared about adding graduate school. Part of her coping strategy was to lower her standards at home and recognize she was doing her best. "A lot of teachers are control freaks," she says. "It's OK to let go a bit."

Bangle also relied on a good support system of family and friends to pick up the slack when she was busy.

Think about which family members, friends, or classmates can be there for you, suggests Raleigh. Talk with your boss and coworkers about your graduate school schedule. "Make sure your supervisor knows there may be times when you can't do extra duties like field trips. You may need to leave at 3 P.M.," says Raleigh. "Recognize you have to communicate to get people on board." It's also a good time to take advantage of professional learning communities and collaborate with other grade-level teachers on lesson plans.

Take Care of Yourself

When you have a packed schedule, sometimes the first thing to go is taking care of yourself physically and emotionally. Yet being successful still comes down to the basics: eating right, exercising, getting a good night's sleep, and taking some personal time to rejuvenate, says Raleigh.

Whether that's going for a walk or having coffee with a friend, you'll likely be more productive after some personal time. "Students need to recognize that they are worthy of taking time out for themselves," adds Raleigh.

If you start to feel overwhelmed, you can always turn to the affordable

mental health services available on most campuses. Since many graduate students don't live on campus, they sometimes don't realize those resources exist and thus don't take advantage of them, says Raleigh.

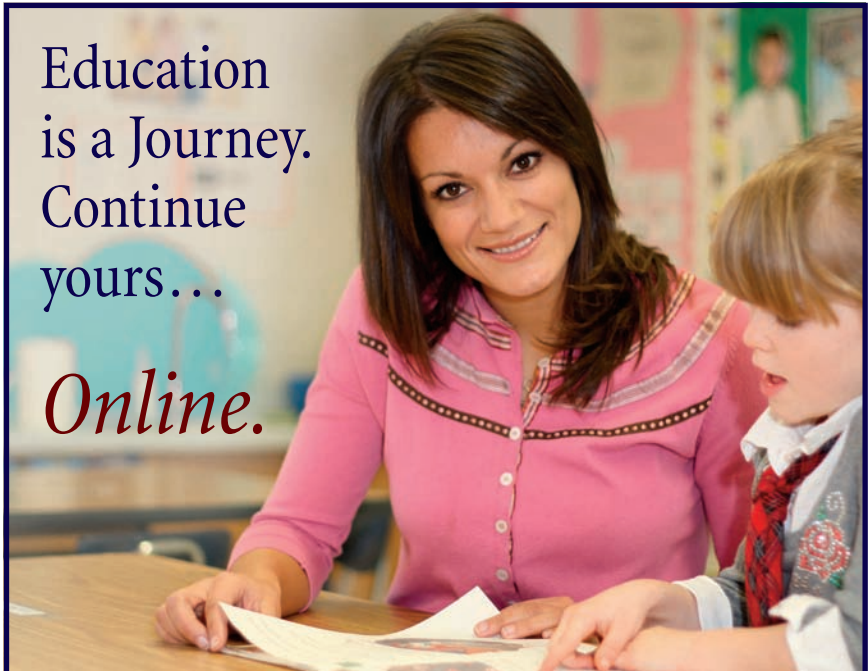
The bottom line is, graduate school requires sacrifice and managing multiple demands. However, as you further

your education, you can gain new perspectives and often are rewarded with higher compensation.

Amid all your deadlines, keep this thought in mind from University of Pennsylvania education professor Laura Perna: "A master's degree program is a finite experience. It has an end, and you will get there." □

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