Fall 2019 Pre-arrival Webinar – Graduate Student Professionalization

Andrea: Hello everyone and welcome to our first in the series of pre-arrival webinars, organized by the international student and scholar services at the University of Iowa for new International students coming in to the university in the fall of 2019. Our first webinar topic is about graduate student professionalization and support.

Let's talk about the webinar series and clarify what they are, and what the objective is. So the pre-arrival webinar series is an optional webinar series provided to Incoming International students before they arrive in Iowa City. The objective of the series is to help new international students to arrange plans for travel to and living in Iowa City, to understand orientation expectations and responsibilities, and finally to transition to student life and academics at the university of Iowa. We would like to remind you that all webinars are recorded and posted on the ISSS website and the web link is provided here on the slide.

During the webinar if you encounter any technical difficulties, please let us know in the chat function. However, if you have questions that are related to today's topic please use the Q & A function to post your questions. We will do our best to answer them live at the end of the webinar as time permits. If you have not received your immigration document, I-20 or DS-2019 form, please pay the e-ship global shipping fees so that ISSS can mail you your document to your current location. Once you have your document, then you can apply for your visa. The same information is also contained in the pre-arrival checklist in iHawk. If you have any questions whatsoever about your immigration documents or anything related to your pre-arrival preparation or orientation, please contact isss-orientation@uiowa.edu and one of our colleagues will be happy to answer your questions.

Let's review some important dates. May 1st is the deadline for undergraduate admission acceptance. Mandatory orientation for international students begins on August 13th through August 16th for international graduate students, and August 19th through August 23rd is the orientation for international undergraduate students. And August 26th is the first day of classes of the fall 2019 semester.

Let's do some introductions. I will let our presenters introduce themselves.

Lisa: Hi, everyone. I'm Lisa Kelly. I work in the graduate college here at Iowa. I'm in the graduate student success office.

Sofia: My name is YeJi, I go by Sofia. I'm a first-year student in counseling psychology Ph.D. program. I'm originally from South Korea, and this is my third year in United States.

Andrea: Thank you. My name is Andrea. Siebenmann, and I am an ISSS advisor and webinar moderator and coordinator. Let's begin our presentation of today.

Lisa: Alright, hello Everybody. So our webinar, the slides are essentially going to be a series of pictures to give you some ideas about what life is like here in Iowa. And then we'll be talking about some of the resources and things available to you as you're here as a graduate student. So this first picture is the old capital which is kind of a focal point of campus. In fact it used to be the capital of Iowa City long long
ago, and now we still have this capitol building which is on the pentacrest, which is kind of the main sort of area of campus. I actually work in the graduate college, which is a college for graduate students at Iowa. Virtually every graduate student is enrolled in the college of liberal arts and sciences, and other graduate students as well are part of the graduate college. We do several different things. One is on the more academic side, so this is a place where when you’re ready to down the road submit your thesis or dissertation we take care of helping you format it and submit it. We also take care of graduate students who maybe have issues with their departments or questions that need to be answered beyond the departmental level but more of the institutional level. And then finally the office that I’m in, we also have the office of graduate inclusion, which helps students with diverse backgrounds to acclimate to Iowa and to find kind of community here. And then finally I’m part of the office of graduate student success where we help out graduate students in all aspects of their graduate student life. So believe it or not, it’s not just doing coursework and doing your research and writing your dissertation but, you’re going to be here for awhile. So we want to make sure that you know about wellness and taking care of yourself, and how to get involved on campus, how to feel comfortable in Iowa City and get acclimated. So our office helps on a variety of levels with graduate students while you’re here, and also we help you to prepare things that you’re going to need for your future careers. So in the next few minutes, I’m going to talk you through some of the resources our office offers and our campus offers in general to help you both while you’re at Iowa and as you prepare for the next stage of your life.

So one of the things that’s very important for graduate students to get involved with early and often as I like to say is professional development. Again, you think of graduate school, you might think about spending time in a lab. Or taking courses, or writing a dissertation. Or doing research in the library. And all those are very important parts of your identity. But there’s also other things need to happen at the same time - you need to start building skills. They’re going to help you both build a CV or resume for a future job, and they are going to help you be successful in your future job. So what we do at the graduate college is we help connect you to the variety of resources both that are outside of your department to help you build skills that are going to help you in your future careers and help you enhance your educational experience.

So we do this by basically 8 key things that we think are really important. And these are fellowships, careers, communication, diversity, wellness, teaching, research and publication, and leadership. We find that graduate students who participate in professional development around some or even all of these categories are more successful graduate students that are also more successful in landing future jobs. So we think it’s really important for graduate students to think outside of their content area of expertise and to involve themselves in some of these things. I’m going to highlight just few of these things in the next few slides. But again, we think all of these aspects are important. I’ll touch briefly on wellness for example, I don’t have a slide on that, but we know that if you take care of yourself mentally and physically you’re going to be able to put more effort into concentrating on your studies and being a better graduate student and researcher. So things like going to the campus gym, or going to University Counseling Service to talk to someone when you’re feeling stressed, or you’re having trouble dealing with some of the things that are happening in school, or you’re homesick, or things like that. That’s all just as important as doing well your classes, because you can’t do well in your classes if you’re stressed about something else.
So it's important to think about your whole life, you know eating well and taking advantage of the great food options here in Iowa City, and working out even if it's just like, I just did running up the hill from one part of campus to the other. All these things are going to help you have the physical and emotional ability to be the best graduate student you can be.

Yeah, so let's move on to highlight some of the things, we have a lot of resources for you. So teaching is one of the things that you're very, very lucky to be involved in when you're at Iowa. If you're going for faculty positions, teaching is often one of the major components of a faculty position, besides research and service, right? So we want to make sure at Iowa that you feel prepared to teach both while you're here, and as a part of your future career. So there's lots of different things that are offered at this institution to help you. we have a great center for teaching that offers a new TA orientation for TA'S that are just beginning their experience, and TA is Teaching Assistant. They also offer workshops throughout the semester on aspects of education such as how to lead discussion sections, how to grade papers. How to make rubrics, how to answer difficult student questions. Things like that. Also a lot of departments offer pedagogy classes through their introduction to graduate studies class, or as a separate course where you can learn more discipline-specific pedagogy. Other departments such as rhetoric offer professional development programs where you can get a mentor and someone who can help you actually navigate through your early teaching experiences. And then there's also the certificate of college teaching. If teaching is something that you know you want to do and you’re coming here because you want to be a teacher, which some of you may be thinking, you can take a 12 semester hour certificate program through the college of education, but any graduate student in any college can enroll in it. You will take three classes around teaching in higher education, and then you do a practicum, so that's a more intensive program, but you can do that and get a certificate for your diploma. And finally there's the center that I'm involved with, that I run actually, which is the center for the integration of research, teaching and learning, or CIRTL. CIRTL is a national consortium of research universities, and our mission is to improve particularly STEM, but all undergraduate education, by developing a diverse and knowledgeable STEM feature faculty. so, the idea is that we want to make graduate students better teachers so that our undergraduates get better educations. And so there's lots of different things you can do in CIRTL, it's basically a three tiered program. the first level is the associate level where you can take a series of workshops or a course either online or face-to-face to learn more about teaching, and then you earn a certificate. The second level is you're bringing your disciplinary skills to bear on your teaching by doing what we call a teaching as research project, which you basically investigative a question you have about your teaching and analyze and assess that question using your students to figure it out. So, for instance, one question might be you know, what techniques work best in my 7:30 A.M. discussion section? And if you try a bunch of different techniques and analyze which technique works better for your students, you can then come up with the conclusion that says whichever method works better, And then you've done basically a project around teaching as research. So that's the second level. And then the third level is where you can then take that research that you've done on your teaching and present it at a national conference or write a paper about it. It is published. And then you can earn the highest level, which is the scholar level. So again, CIRTL is something that you can get involved with very early on by taking workshops and becoming a better teacher, and then you can improve that skill throughout obtaining the next three levels.
So Iowa is a place where if you’re interested in teaching, whether it’s at a U.S. institution or at a place in your home country, teaching skills kind of transfer across different environments. So you would be able to hone your skills here and take them to wherever you want to be a fabulous teacher.

One of my favorite events that we do in the graduate college every year is the three minute thesis. The three minute thesis is a program, and actually quite a few international students take advantage of this every year, which is really fantastic. It’s a competition that challenges you to clearly articulate your thesis or your dissertation research, or research you’re currently working on, in three minutes using only one slide. So this sounds like it might be easy, but in fact is actually quite difficult initially to figure out how to make your whole 200 page research project in three minutes to a general audience. So every year in the fall we have competition, this past year 80 students volunteered, signed up to talk about their thesis in three minutes. We ranked them and then we had finalists; they then presented at the second round, and those finalists we declared, we had 3 honorable mentions and a winner. And of those four, kind of the first 4, 3 of those were international students. So three minute thesis and programs like this are a great way for you to practice your presentation skills, to practice your pitch when someone says “what do you study?” and if you can answer it in a short statement, they’re going to be more interested in your research. Or somebody said last night, it’s a way to explain to your mother what it is you research. So a general audience. It’s also a really fun opportunity, and if you’re here in the fall in November we’ll have our first round of competition. It may not be something you’re ready to do as a first year, but you can certainly come watch the competition in your first year and think about entering yourself in your second year or beyond.

Another very important part of graduate student life is learning how to find funding. Some of you will come in with a funding package from your department or a scholarship for a fellowship awarded to you from the University. Others will have to be searching out for teaching assistantships or fellowships or things throughout your time here. Others of you might be interested in applying for prestigious external fellowships that are offered by private organizations and different organizations that give fellowships to graduate students. So the graduate student success office, we help with workshops and appointments, and help you learn more about how to write grants and how to write fellowship applications. The people in our office have learned how to think like reviewers, so we can look at your applications and help you figure out how to make that application stand out from the rest of the applications, and how to answer the questions in the way that these particular organizations are looking for, so you can have better success. Now, you might say again, that sounds really fun and really good, but I’m not going to need that for a few years. We actually find that graduate students who think about this early on are also more successful in winning fellowships because they’re more prepared. A lot of the prestigious national fellowships require almost a whole year ahead of time of preparation before you actually join the application cycle. So if you’re only starting to think about these things in your third or fourth year, you may actually be too late. So we encourage all graduate students to come to our office even in the first year to start finding out what opportunities might be available, and making a plan for when they’re going to apply for them. So they have that in their timeline and they’re ready to take these opportunities when they come. If you wait until late in your career when you’re desperate for funding, you may be too late to apply for some things. Also things like travel grants. If you need it to say do some dissertation research in archives somewhere internationally or even just somewhere else in the United States, or you need money to do a research experiment that your advisor maybe isn’t exactly in their lab...
but you want to do something that’s similar. The graduate college can help you identify funding sources, so that you can do these research projects that are going to help you with your career.

Another thing that’s very important to do while you’re a graduate student is to think about networking. Again, many of you might be thinking that you want to be faculty, and that’s a fantastic career path. Others might want to work for a government or be a teacher, or work in a private industry, or do any number of other kinds of careers. It’s important while you’re a graduate student to not just think about the content you’re learning and the courses you’re teaching, but to think about how to get to know what other careers and options are available to you, and set up yourself with contacts and information to prepare yourself to do that. So again, we do appointments and discussions and workshops around How to Meet people in different industries, in different types of careers, how to get to know what it is they do, and how to prepare yourself to do those things in the future. So a couple of examples. We have something called dinner for 12, where we bring 12 graduate students together with some usually alumni of Iowa who is working in an industry in some way, and that alone will host a dinner, so free food which is always nice, and you’ll get to be able to ask them questions about what they did, how their career path has gone, how they prepared to get there and some tidbits about things that they have learned that you can take into future interviews and things. Another thing that we do which we are actually doing tomorrow, is the Jacobson graduate conference which is a conference where graduate students at Iowa can present papers in their research to other graduate students at Iowa. But in the morning of this we host a series of workshops around things like networking, building your CV, creating what we call in America the elevator pitch or a very short description of your dissertation. So you can attend these conferences and events and get a lot of different information about a lot of different professional development opportunities, and at the same time you’re getting to know graduate students and faculty from across campus so you’re building your networks. We also help you with preparing for conferences and things like that, so that when you’re out in your field and getting to know people you can take advantage of the knowledge you gained at Iowa to speak with senior scholars in your field and to get to know professionals who are doing the same kinds of things you want to do, so that by the time you hit the job market in the latter part of your PhD or Master’s career, you are ready to know the things you need to know in order to get the jobs.

Finally, I’m going to talk about three resources that are particularly important for international students, but are mostly available to all students on campus. And this is the speaking center, the writing center and the conversation center. The Speaking Center is a center on campus that can help you with any kind of presentation skills that you want to practice. So let’s say, for instance, you are concerned about your English language skills and you’re being a teaching assistant for a course, you can go and practice your lectures and they can give you feedback. or if you’re going to a conference presentation and you want to practice speaking and get feedback, you can go to speaking center to get feedback on a conference presentation. Or you’re doing a research talk for your lab, you can practice this ahead of time. The speaking center also offers appointments to kind of help you with particular skills you’re having trouble with, like how to get students to talk more in class, or how to get my students more engaged in my courses and things like that. So you can go to speaking center and practice your public speaking skills and become better at the things that you’re worried about.

We also have the writing center. And this is a center where, there’s actually several writing centers, both one kind of main writing center for campus and others that are hosted in different departments. And
the writing center is a place where all graduate students and undergraduate students and even faculty can bring their writing to get feedback on it. So if you're writing a paper for a class and you want to make sure that your organization is right, or that your evidence makes sense, or that your structure is something your faculty member can follow. You can bring your paper to the writing center and get feedback on it. They offer it two ways, you can do it online by submitting your papers online, or you can go face to face and get an appointment as well. This is, again like I said, something that's open to all graduate students, both domestic and international. the writing center gets very busy throughout the year and it's used by faculty, graduate students and undergraduate students. So anyone who knows that they, everybody knows that we all need help on our writing pretty much. So it's important that everybody use that resource because it's there for all of us.

And finally the conversation center. And this is one that is primarily for international students. This is a newer center on campus, and this is where you can go and make an appointment to just talk to somebody, to practice your conversation skills. We have undergraduate students and I believe even graduate students who are enrolled in a course, and also sign up for practicum or internship experience to talk with people from other countries. And you can talk about anything you want. It's usually done over coffee or maybe you might meet in, you know the campus union or some other building nearby, and just have a conversation where you can practice your skills without anybody judging you or that anybody kind of giving you criticism or feedback on how you sound. A really nice thing about the conversation center is that if you're coming to Iowa with say your family or your partner, they can come to the conversation center as well, and they can also practice speaking. So if you're coming with people who are also working on their English, they can take advantage of conversation center and practice their English with students. You can meet with them just once or some people have developed kind of relationship and they start meeting as you know, as conversation partners throughout the whole Semester. So you can practice your skills.

So all of those things are things that we encourage all graduate students to be a part of, and are particularly useful for international students who are both having to read work and write in the academic language that might not be your first language. So it's really important to take advantage of these resources as well. I'm going to now turn it over to Sofia, she is going to tell us a little bit about her experience using some of these resources and other resources, and her experience transitioning to Iowa.

Sofia: Yes. Actually, I didn't know there is a speaking and conversation center, but I am definitely going to use the speaking and conversation centers. They look really useful and I didn't know about them. In terms of the writing center, I know the University offered the writing center, But also departments offer the writing center for graduate level. But as far as I know, not all departments offer a writing center opportunity for all Ph.D. students, so you might want to check if there is a graduate level writing service in your department. Because as college of education students, the college of education offers writing class for Ph.D. students. So for Ph.D. students academic writing is really hard, so you might want to, I think people still want to have more opportunities to pursue their academic writing.

Lisa: Are there any other resources that you've used or know about on campus that you think are particularly helpful for international students?
**Sofia:** I think I would recommend to you ISSS. if you don’t have any experience in the United States because I found out ISSS offers some programs to build up a relationship with the people in Iowa, and have a chance to connect with the Iowa community. Also a chance to travel in Iowa and learn about Iowa, I think that’s really helpful to incoming international students to feel welcomed and involved in the community. Yeah, this is my thing, I think everybody has a Facebook, so I recommend to follow on Facebook Pages Graduate College Facebook page and ISSS facebook page, so then you don’t need to check the web page every day because they’re going to be posted for you in your Facebook.

**Lisa:** As a graduate student, especially since you’re a first year student here. How do you, what do you suggest about networking with different graduate students? Can you talk about that experience?

**Sofia:** I think it’s really hard to build a network beyond my program. Yeah, that’s really hard. But some departments offer international gatherings. So you can take advantage of those to meet and know more about the people outside of the program. I also really think it is so important to build a network beyond your programs. Because living as an international student in a different culture in a new environment is really hard, so having a network is more like a social support, I guess.

**Andrea:** I’m sure there are some organizations that you have discovered and found interesting or for your purposes. Could you mention that, or any clubs, anything for international students to be involved in?

**Sofia:** Unfortunately, so far I haven’t really had a chance to look up that because my last semester was really busy, but I started to find some community involvement recently. I wanted to participate in International Advisory Board, that’s given me a chance to work with other international students, And also you can check that out to get more advice and information about how to live as international students in University of Iowa.

**Lisa:** I know there’s also via email, there’s a lot of international student organizations for both undergraduate and graduate students and they often highlight kind of key events in different cultures throughout the year. So if you pay attention to your email you can find different organizations, different cultural organizations that you can either join in be a part of, or that you can visit and kind of get to know different diverse students at Iowa. So there’s opportunities to be involved with organizations of many many different kinds of organizations, particularly for international students.

**Sofia:** Thank you for saying that because I really regret that I didn’t get involved in activities in the community that I wanted to my first semester because before I came here I thought I should focus on my academics, or I should pay attention to academics and I should not do anything else. But actually the developing profession world is more than just studying and writing articles. So I really recommend you to involve more and not make a mistake as I did.

**Lisa:** Yeah, trying to think if there’s anything else. I think I mentioned this earlier but I’m going to reiterate, taking care of yourself in all of the aspects of your life is really important. So if you are someone who is involved with religious organizations, there are lots of churches and religious organizations around campus. Not necessarily just on campus but off campus there are opportunities to get involved in the community as well. There’s lots of theater organizations and sports organizations and
activities and things you can get involved with. It's also really important to take care of your mental health, so going to places like University counseling service to kind of get a handle on stress, kind of get a handle on life as a graduate student because life as a graduate student is stressful. There is a lot going on, you’re asked both to do research, take classes, teach classes, get involved with different things in your department, and maybe also some of you are coming with families and things. So there's a lot of things that you're involved with your life. So it's important to take care of yourself that you can be effective in all of those areas. And I think that is all the formal presentation. So now we have several questions.

Andrea: Thank you both very much for a great introduction to this topic and for providing the in-depth information on what the students can expect in terms of resources.

Q&A

Andrea: We do have a few questions here that we have received and I would like to take this opportunity to again encourage students who are participating in this webinar with us, feel free to send us any more questions if you have them using the Q & A portion of the zoom application, and we will make sure or try to answer them during the remaining time of the webinar. So let's start with the first question that is asking about the assistantship. there are a couple of questions actually regarding the assistantships, so first let's look at the one that is related to the funding. So are there student funding options and assistantships for master students? if yes, then what are the different opportunities and how do we apply for them?

Lisa: To be honest, it is easier for Ph.D. students to find assistantships, but there are some that are available for master students as well. The first place you want to go is through your department. They may even be able to before the semester even starts provide you with an option for an assistantship. Some departments have that. If your department doesn't have one, you might also check the graduate college website where we list assistantship opportunities across campus. So there's some assistantships that are hosted in the department, and those would be research assistantships and teaching assistantships, but there's some assistantships that for instance, we have three graduate students who work in the graduate college as interns. That's kind of a cross-campus assistantship. Or we have student technology assistants who work in the office of information technology. That's an assistantship that anybody can apply for, master students or Ph.D. students.

So I would encourage you even basically anytime over the summer, probably now would be - there might be a few posted for the fall, but certainly over the summer to check the Websites and to contact your departments to find out what opportunities exist. like I said master's students, there are a few less options, but there are some. Do you have any ideas on that yet?

Sofia: As a person who has already gone through Master's students as an international student, unfortunately it's really hard to get some assistantship during my master program, but I don't want to say it's not possible at all. But I will really encouraged to evaluate your capacity clearly, because it is a lot because soon you will need to adjust to a new culture, a new language and a transition from undergraduate student to graduate student is a huge transition too because expectations for graduate
students are different from what is expected of undergraduate students. So I encourage you to think about what’s your capacity, and then think about the next step and there is also, you also can work in the school to be honest. So on an F-1 visa, you can work 20 hours per week. But I also encourage you to think about your capacity and what’s the reason to come to United States. If you commit to 20 hours per week you might have a lot less time to study what you want to learn, so I recommend to think about that.

Andrea: Thank you so much, great answers. And let's move on to other questions here. So this is about the conversation center that was mentioned earlier as one of the resources. And the question is if the conversation groups or discussions are organized every week or how students can get to know about the conversation activities how they could tap that information.

Lisa: I don't know the website off the top of my head, but if you go to the Iowa homepage, you can in the search bar just write in conversation center and it will pop right up, and it will have all the Information about how those are arranged. My understanding is that you can you get a signed up conversation partner, and then you and your partner can decide how often you want to meet and how many times do you want to meet, and if that relationship doesn’t work for some reason or other you can also find a different partner. So they’re one on one conversations for the most part and they’re based on your interests. So they can continue as long as you want them to, or at least through the course of a semester, typically the interns change out after a semester. So once you've gotten to know them you can, you know get to know them on social media and things and continue the conversation if you like, but it's based on just you basically fill out a short interest application, and then you get paired with someone.

Sophia: I also just remembered I looked up the conversation center before, I just remembered. You’ll just need to Google Conversation Center University of Iowa, and Google will help you to find which front page.

Andrea: Thank you. Let's move on to other questions. We are receiving really good questions, so keep them coming. The next question is about, If you can tell the participants of the webinar about living in Iowa City as a graduate student. What is your experience like?

Sophia: my living experience in the University of Iowa is amazingly great, which is surprising to be honest. Because I know like west coast and East Coast in the United States are really diverse but also the University Iowa because it located in the Midwest. So I don't really expect this much diversity in the university of Iowa, but you can find there is a lot of international students in University of Iowa. And also there is a lot of ethnic foods is available here too. So if you want to find a people and friends from your home country, I don't think it's difficult to find someone here.

Lisa: Do graduate students typically live like in places that are similar to each other or do you have roommates, how do you-

Sophia: To be honest, I'm looking for my roommates now. But I know like the Chinese community has their own web page to help them get connected, and I also use Facebook Web page, roommates and housing in Facebook page to find roommates.
Andrea: Thank you. That was a great answer and hopefully that addressed the question that one of our participants has asked. We have other questions that is about the topic of getting the teaching diploma certificate. Can you further clarify that topic? How do you get that teaching diploma certificate while being a graduate student?

Lisa: So to get the certificate that’s actually on your transcript, you would take the certificate and college teaching program. And again, it’s offered through the College of Education, but any graduate student is eligible. They just happen to house it. So you take three courses over the course of your time at Iowa. There’s a few courses you can choose from and once you’ve completed those three courses, then they give you two practicums where you help in a class in some capacity. Maybe you help a faculty member assess some research they’re doing in their class or you guest lecture in a class. Or you help them change how they’re teaching an aspect of the class. So that you can become, so you can kind of get to know what it’s like to teach a course. Then once you’ve done the three courses and the practicum, then you’ve earned the certificate, and that is something that is on your transcript. So, it’s actually, it’s an actual transcript of a certificate. It takes some time, not all graduate students have the ability to take 12 hours that are outside of their content. So you need to talk to your advisor early on if you’re interested in this. So you can plan how to do this, you’re probably going to take one course per semester for a few semesters. So it’s not something you can do at the last minute, you’ll need to plan early to do it but it looks really good on a CV or resume to have done this and can be something that can set you apart from other candidates for jobs.

Andrea: Excellent. Alright, thank you. Let’s move on to some other questions that came in regarding the balancing between the graduate assistantship, either teaching or research assistantship, and then also how it goes along with the permission for students to be working at how many hours, specifically. One of the questions was asking having an F-1 visa, will I be able to work as a teaching assistant on campus in my first year, while the second question is do we get on campus jobs as international students and what kind of work does it involve, how much do they pay, will there be enough to fund my living expenses in Iowa? So what I’m going to do is I’m going to ask my colleague Michael Bortscheller who has been here also helping behind the scenes with the webinar to answer these questions. He’s a senior director at ISSS so he will be able to address that.

Michael: Sure. And I believe we’ll have webinar on this later in the semester. So you’ll be able to get more information then, but in short, one of the benefits of being an F-1 student is that you are allowed to work on campus for up to 20 hours per week when classes are in session. When classes are not in session, during the summers, you can actually work more, up to 40 hours per week. And there’s a variety of on campus jobs that international students can apply for. Some can be simply working in a cafeteria helping to serve food, which is a great way to improve your English if you’re worried about that, or if you want to meet Americans that you can become friends with. Another option, and this is the one that people really want to have, is to get an assistantship. And the reason that one is great is because the assistantship has more monetary compensation. Research assistants and teaching assistants get a stipend and a tuition scholarship which allows that to cover the vast majority of costs while they’re here at the University of Iowa. Depending on the specifics it might not be everything, but it usually is. It is for most people. Most on campus jobs are just going to pay an hourly wage and an hourly wage is probably not going to be enough to cover all of your expenses. But as I said, there are other benefits, like improving your English and meeting other people.
Andrea: Excellent. Thank you very much. In fact, students are eligible to start working in very first semester.

Michael: Yes. Thank you. I am sorry. I forgot about that. Yes, as an F-1 student you can do that immediately. So, on-campus work can begin just as soon as you get here and get registered for classes.

Sophia: In terms of, I think some of the question asked is it possible to TA in the first year. Unfortunately, I think it would be difficult, especially at the very first semester. It will be different depending on the major. Because if you are offered to be TA with your admissions you can do that. But if you haven't had a TA offer with your own admission, you need to find something for yourself. So then you need to take ESPA test, which is an English test for the TA. I believe that you can take that test in August, which is I think that is the only one. if you want to have a TA position at your first year, you might want to check that test time before you find some TA positions.

Andrea: Great. And there was one other question that was related to the assistantship, whether that work continues during the semester breaks, it typically does. It depends on the assistantship. Yeah, it’s teaching the breaks are not the teaching periods usually, so it would be mostly RA’s or any other.

Lisa: If it’s a departmental, if it’s a teaching assistantship you would likely not be working in the summer unless you got offered a course in the summer, which would be almost like a separate semester, but some assistantships that like, let's say if you work for the graduate college or for ITS, or for University housing or something like that. Those are 12 months assistantships. So it will stipulate in the assistantship whether it’s for 9 months or 12 months. So you can look at that and help make decisions based on that.

Andrea: Great. Let’s move on, we have more questions to address. So one of the questions is do you have International students club?

Sophia: Of course. Of course, there is an international student club.

Andrea: OK great. There’s lots, I think for many different there are so many focuses, bicultural interests and any other.

Lisa: I would say there’s something like 500 different student organizations. First there isn’t one you want to have you can start one. Any group that is four students can start an organization. So if you don’t happen to find one that already exists you can start your own.

Sophia: As I said, the University of Iowa embraces a lot of diversity. There’s a lot of diversity.

Andrea: Thank you. What about, let’s talk about something different. talking about the wellness part, is the gym available to all students and what are the subscription fees, Times that is open, and I know that this may not be a question, we are qualified to answer very clearly or with precise information, but we can try.

Lisa: I think between us we know a little bit. Yeah, all students can use the gym. I believe that it’s included in your students fees, so it’s totally free, the hours are pretty good. I think the big gym is open from five in the morning until late at night.

Sophia: 11 to midnight.
Lisa: Um and then some of the smaller ones may have more like less busy hour or less hours but pretty much anytime that you are reasonably awake there is a gym available. And campus is also quite walkable. So you can walk across campus on nice days, just walking outside is also something, the gym offers course classes like zumba classes and aerobics classes and All kinds of things, and there's a rock wall and a Lazy River. It's kind of like a resort actually.

Sophia: I really encourage you to go to a gym in University Iowa, the place is really awesome. And there are a lot of resources, there are many classes offered and everything is free. I believe the rock climbing cost some money but most of them are all free.

Lisa: And you can also I think, for pay you can also get a personal trainer. So there's lots of things you can do, some of which cost a little bit extra. But the general use it is free.

Andrea: Excellent. So I hope that we answered that question. There was another question regarding the CIRTL center. and the question was actually is it mandatory to get the consent from the supervisor before participating in such Extra-curricular activities for CIRTL, the central for integration of research...

Lisa: In general no, but it's kind of a qualified no. if you want to actually do the certificate in college teaching, you would have to let your advisor know, because it's going to require a significant amount of your time. If you want to do the CIRTL program, which is related to that but different, you don't technically have to tell your adviser until you get to the second level where you're doing a research project. And again, because we're going to ask for about 20 to 30 hours of your time over the course of the semester, they want your advisor to know that you might be at the lab occasionally, to attend workshops and things. Mostly it would be kind of in the case of like, especially for those of you in stem fields who are in a lab, you might have to negotiate with your PI’s or your lab managers to be out for an hour or hour and a half for a workshop depending on with your lab hours are, but it wouldn't require permission per say, just kind of negotiation with people to make sure that you can be free when those workshops are offered.

Andrea: Ok. I would like to, since we're nearing - we have still about 10, 11 minutes before the end of the webinar, but we will be posting a survey for the webinar, so I would like to ask all participants to please give us your feedback on today's webinar, so that we can hear what else you maybe would like to hear on this topic, or if we addressed most of the information that you were expecting to receive today. So please do complete the webinar survey. We will continue with further questions. We have some more here. So let's continue. How do we connect with graduate students related to our program of interest? would you be able to address this Sophia? Or both of you if you'd like.

Sophia: I don't really get the question, does it mean,

Andrea: If there are students who, their program is pretty large and they are focusing on one specific area of the program. For example, in the College of Engineering or college of medicine or others, education for example. there could be some more specific, and students may not be necessarily meet each other. So how would you ensure you meet other students from your program?

Sophia: In the department you can see there is like, department seminars. So if you are willing to participate in the seminar, you can have a chance to see the people in your program who have the same interest with you.
**Lisa:** Yeah, other things – most, not all, that most departments and colleges and places offer orientations that they have at the beginning of the semester where you can orient yourself to your department and get to know all the other new graduate students. And often they’ll bring in more senior graduate students to get to know the new students and mentor them. Some departments offer actual mentorship opportunities. You can take advantage of, a lot of departments offers social events that they’ll put on up on the department list serv, the graduate students are all going to go get frozen yogurt or go to see a movie, or an arts event or something. So getting on your department list servs which you’re probably getting already, and getting, reaching out through social media, you may even notice if your department has a department Facebook page or a linkedin page or Twitter account. go ahead and become a follower of that right now. So you can get a sense of what kinds of information they post before you even hit Iowa City.

**Andrea:** Thank you. There are some more questions here. Is the professor whom I might work with as a RA or TA, is he also or she also my primary PhD advisor?

**Lisa:** Not necessarily. you can get a teaching assistantship with, let’s say you’re in math, you might be a teaching assistant for college algebra, but your particular advisor is, you know, Someone who studies calculus. I don’t actually know much about math. But something that is very different, right. So the assistantships are based on typically in the department they’re based on undergraduate enrollment. So big classes like foundations of biology. There’s you know, 2000 undergraduates take that class every semester. So they need 40 people to teaching assistant for that class. But most of those people are specializing in a lab that has nothing to do with that class. it might happen to be that your advisor says, hey, I’m teaching a class next semester would you like to be my RA, be my Research assistant or my teaching assistant, in which case it could be that. But more likely you’re going to be assigned a research assistantship or a teaching assistantship based on what the department needs.

**Andrea:** Thank you. go ahead.

**Sophia:** I though it is depending on the major, I believe as far as I know chemistry department, all the assistantships from there are primary academic advisor, but like me who is in the College of Education, the cultures and work collaborate. But students in the college of Education get assistantships from of different resources. And those are available.

**Andrea:** Thank you. I hope that that answered the question of one of our participants. we have some more than I would like to ask and convey to you. Just a clarification, can you please name the test that students should take in order to become a TA during the first semester, can you spell that name of that test?

**Michael:** I can actually answer that since I used to work in the ESL department. the test that you’ll need to take in order to become a TA is called the ESPA. It actually has a couple of components to it. However, you should not ask about taking the test. if your department wants you to be a TA, your department will request that to the ESL department, and then they’ll send you a letter saying when you should go there so that you can sign up for the test. That test is given during orientation, and we actually schedule our orientation so that there won’t be any time conflicts with signing up for that test or taking that test. but it’s the ESPA, and you can find more information about it on the website for ESL programs.
Andrea: And ESPA for?

Michael: The English Speaking Proficiency Assessment.

Andrea: Thank you, Michael. Some very short questions. So let’s just go through them. When can the students in a master’s program with thesis start their research?

Lisa: I think that’s based on departments, they’ll give you, you know they basically tell you what courses you need and what the master’s thesis research is. I don’t think there’s an across the University, I think it’s very departmental based. You’ll want to ask your advisor in your department about that.

Andrea: OK great, can faculty members of the students use the gym as well?

Lisa: They can for a fee. there is a discounted fee for people who are families of, but there would be a fee involved.

Andrea: OK. Does the offer letter, probably assistantship and offer letter, detail information about the professor who will be their primary advisor?

Lisa: I don’t know. I haven’t seen official offer letters. I don’t think so. it might say the name if they’re your boss, but they wouldn’t give you more information than just the name of your supervisor.

Sophia: it depends on departments, like some departments have a chance to change their primary academic advisor. it really depends on the department. So I think you want to check with the department coordinator and check your department handbook.

Andrea: OK. Thank you. Thank you so much and now another question, how safe is the campus and surrounding areas?

Sophia: I think University of Iowa is a pretty safe campus. It’s really close to downtown. But most people, most of the residents are students. So relatively safe, but I think safety levels are different by country to country. So if you think your country’s a really safe place, I think you need to be aware of that component too. Because, use me as an example, I’m from South Korea. South Korea is really save, But I found out that I shouldn’t walk around at 9 P.M. by myself at night, and that’s not a good idea. so, I would not do that. So that’s my answer.

Lisa: There’s a lot of resources to help, there’s buses that run through till pretty late at night. There’s a night ride program you can get a ride on or even off campus, stuff two miles away from campus. There are apps you can use on your phone at the University, that asks students so you can track your walking. I think like any place else common sense is really important, and it’s important to be aware of your surroundings. We are safe, but it’s also a reasonably sized city. So there’s things that, you know you have to be aware of where you are and who you’re with and what’s going on, but in general, I think that most people find it to be pretty safe place.

Andrea: Alright, thank you. And maybe we have time for just one more question. And that is, what are the leadership opportunities that the University of Iowa offers?

Lisa: There are many. first of all, there’s departmental leadership opportunities where you can get involved maybe in being a department representative or graduate student representative to your department to faculty meetings and things. There’s the graduate student senate, which you can get
involved in. There is graduate student and professional student GSPD which is a different form of a student government you can get involved with. You can start to get involved with professional organizations as a graduate student representative or graduate student committees. So there's lots of opportunities, you can, depending on how you define leadership, some departments offer MTA positions as you move through where you can mentor new TA’s or new graduate students. So certainly look in your department, and look at your professional organizations, and look at student organizations are always looking for people to step up into leadership positions. So if leadership is something you want to do you should have no trouble finding opportunities.

Andrea: Thank you so much and let's close our webinar with that, with the Q&A part of it. and I really appreciate Lisa and Sofia’s help with addressing all of this. And again, we would like to encourage you to please complete the quick webinar survey for us, your feedback is appreciated. And just a reminder that if you have any questions about pre-arrival checklist or any other issues before arrival or the orientation, please contact our orientation team at isss-orientation@uiowa.edu. And also if you're looking for any other resources for new students, we have a wonderful website for new students with a lot of links, useful links that could be helpful for you. And, of course, you can always contact us as well. And then we would like to invite you to attend our future webinars, and some of you have already pre-registered. And please, those of you who have not, take advantage of future sessions. you are very encouraged to attend them. as graduate students who are participating today, there will be still about two Very focused webinars for graduate students and then there are going to be joined topics for both graduate and undergraduate students. So you are welcome to attend those as well. Thank you again, very much for attending today's webinar and we will be posting the recording in about two or three weeks after today. Thank you. And we look forward to having you join us next time. Bye.