

A Guide for Incoming Graduate Students

Tips on essentials, how to get around, ways to de-stress, and financial hacks

Getting into graduate school is always exciting, but it can also leave you feeling a bit nervous. Whether you are just starting your career, in a career change, or mastering your profession, graduate school is a considerable change for anyone. It can also be quite daunting if you are moving to Houston for the first time. Luckily, UH has a strong community of Coogs who are always there to help. Here are a few tips and tricks to make the transition a little easier.

Essentials to carry with you

We all know being prepared pays off time and time again. When it comes to being a graduate student, there are a few items that you will never be sorry you had with you. Here are the things you should carry in your backpack, trunk, or locker:

1. **A small umbrella.** With the unpredictable weather in Houston, an umbrella is a must have for every graduate student. A small sized umbrella can fit in the pocket of your backpack so you will always have it with you.
2. **A first aid kit** with painkillers for the occasional headache.
3. **A few backup outfits.** Whether you are surprised by the upcoming career fair or have a chance opportunity to work out, carrying a few essential outfits like a suit or athletic clothes will ensure you are always ready for anything that springs up.
4. **A water bottle.** It's important to stay hydrated throughout the day, and fortunately, there are plenty of purified water stations around campus where you can fill up your water bottle.

How to get around

You may often hear that a car is essential to explore Houston. However, that may not always be the case. Here are a few ways to get around, car options included.

1. **Bike around.** Investing in a bike is likely a wise investment for any graduate student. Biking around will limit your time traveling outside when the Houston weather decides to go over 100 degrees. However, if you are not quite ready to own your own bike, you can also use the bike share program [Houston Bicycle](#). Houston Bicycle has 6 stations on campus and stations throughout Houston points of interest including the Menil Collection and Axelrad. Best of all, they have a discounted UH student membership. You can also access other parts of the city through the [Brays Bayou Path](#) and connecting bridges.
2. **Take the Metro.** Whether you are traveling from the suburbs or other Houston neighborhoods, UH offers several connections to the [METRO](#) busses and the METRO Rail. You can get a discounted student Q-card that can be reloaded to pay your fare.
3. **Rent a Zipcar.** For those days when you are traveling longer distance or the weather is not ideal, [Zipcar](#) has two locations on campus (University Lofts and Cougar Village 1). A \$35/year membership gives you access to several vehicles at a small hourly charge.
4. **Join COAST.** [COAST](#) is an incentive program for students who use alternative and sustainable options to get to campus. Each participant gets fare credits or vouchers for the aforementioned travel options including Uber/Lyft.

Ways to de-stress

Graduate school can get overwhelming at times, so it is important to slow down occasionally and focus on ourselves. Here are a few ways to clear your mind so you can go back to being your best self:

1. **Explore campus.** A great way to reset is to go for a walk. So many graduate students have never explored the campus beyond their college. Walking around will reveal what UH has to offer and you might stumble upon a new study spot or a favorite public art installation. You can take a planned [route](#) or explore freely.
2. **Join a Group Fitness Class.** It is no secret that exercise can help with stress and anxiety. The UH Campus Recreation and Wellness Center offers [group fitness](#) classes included in your membership. You can get your heart pumping with yoga, pilates, or zumba and leave empowered to take on whatever graduate school throws at you.
3. **Visit the Houston Zoo.** If you are feeling restless, a visit to our mascot Shasta at the Houston Zoo might help. UH students receive [free admission](#) when you present your student ID.
4. **Attend a game.** A great way to step away from your school work is to attend a game on campus and cheer on your Coogs. [Register](#) to get free admission to your favorite UH sport events.
5. **Attend "Let's Talk."** This program, through the Counseling and Psychological Services at UH, provides free and easy access to informal confidential consultations with therapists. Call 713-743-5454 to get connected Monday through Friday, from 3-4pm.
6. **Get Involved.** Engaging outside the classroom can help you achieve a work-life balance by socializing and connecting with your peers while helping the community. [Get Involved](#) allows students to explore organizations, programs and events, volunteerism, and leadership opportunities.

Figure out your finances

A significant part of attending graduate school is the financial responsibility it comes with. It is always important to plan ahead to ensure you are not caught off-guard by your spending or tuition bill. Here are a few tips and tricks that can help any graduate student financially:

1. **Work.** Working while in graduate school is sometimes not ideal with a heavy course load, but it can also offer balance and help you stay out of significant debt. Ask the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid about [Work-Study](#) or a [Graduate Assistantship](#). You may be eligible to get hired in a part time position to earn money for college expenses.
2. **Enroll in Cougar Cupboard.** [Cougar Cupboard](#) is a partnership between UH and the Houston Food Bank. Once you enroll, you will have access to fresh fruits, vegetables, frozen and refrigerated foods from the pantry located at the Campus Recreation and Wellness Center. This program is completely free for enrolled students.
3. **Check out COOG\$ave.** [COOG\\$ave](#) has a convenient list of retailers such as Apple, Amazon, J. Crew, and Nike that offer discounts to UH students. They also provide instructions on how to register for PerksConnect, a free membership program that gives you access to several more discounts and promotions.
4. **Open a Checking Account.** If you are working, you will most likely need a checking account to receive your direct deposit. There are several options out there so it is important to do your research. One option is [TDECU](#) which has a convenient location in the UH Student Center. They offer a checking account with no monthly fees or minimum balance and give you access to over 55,000 ATMs. TDECU also provides free online and mobile banking so you will be able to keep track of your expenses.