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Grad 101: Hack Your Academic Library

Submitted by Regina Sierra Carter on May 29, 2017 - 8:22pm

Blog: [GradHacker](#) ^[1]

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Summer is almost here! Do you know what that means?

Well, for starters, it signifies that school is technically out. *Happy dance!* Time for a vacay, but *wait...!* You and I both know that summer is the time to do

some serious grinding.

My previous posts have been about the virtues of libraries. This one is slightly different. It is designed to help you become develop a competitive advantage in grad school by becoming acquainted with and wisely utilizing the library during the summer months.

Here's my list of top things to do this summer at the library:

1. **Return/renew ALL library materials.** When I was in graduate school, I was notoriously known for being the lady with the luggage. What luggage... you may ask? During the academic year, I would accumulate a ridiculous number of books to write papers, study for my qualifying exams, and prepare my literature review. I would request maybe 5-7 books at one time and NEVER return them during the school year. By the time summer rolled around, I had 60+ books in the bedroom. It got so bad that I had difficulty keeping up with what books I had and where I had placed them. So I started keeping all books in suitcases. That way I did not have to worry about any being misplaced. (I cannot tell you how many times I had a close call and almost lost a library book!) So please learn from my headache: if you are NOT using those books (or other library materials) that you currently have checked out, please return them. This will free up space in your place and lessen the likelihood of you losing (or misplacing) materials. Lastly, please remember to renew any items that you still need. You don't want overdue fines to prevent you from receiving your diploma or causing other complications.

2. **Use (or become acquainted with) reference/citation management tools.** A number of [GradHackers](#) [3] have shared the good news about [reference/citation management tools](#) [4] (e.g. Mendeley, RefWorks, Zotero, etc). If you have not already, please become acquainted with these tools. Oftentimes there are workshops or training sessions offered within the library. Contact your academic library to learn if these workshops are offered at your institution or reach out to an academic librarian near you. Familiarizing yourself with reference/citation management tools early in your academic career will save you time, energy, and help you keep your references organized!

3. **Learn a new skill.** While you are becoming familiarizing yourself with (or are continuing to use) reference/citation management tools, set aside time to learn a new skill (or skills). A number of academic libraries host workshops during the academic year and may continue to do so during the summer months. Check your academic library's calendar to see what courses they are offering. At the University of Virginia (UVa), the library offers workshops [5] on web scraping, Github, Python, etc. The UVa Library also subscribes to Lynda.com, which enables users to develop their skills in a number of areas such as business, instructional design, media, etc. In addition to taking formal and online classes, you may also want to look into Do-It-Yourself (DIY) books and other resources that your academic library or local public library may offer. The summer months are a lovely time to engage in professional and personal development.

4. **Meet (or treat) a librarian!** I am teasing about the treat part. However, I am totally serious about getting to know librarians. In an earlier post [6], I shared how librarians are an invaluable resource. Schedule an appointment to meet with a subject librarian during the summer months to learn more about the resources that the library offers. Who knows... maybe you will make a new friend and it does not hurt to have a library professional in your corner when qualifying exams roll around or you are in an information bind.

5. **Load up on library freebies!** Most academic libraries are packed with free resources. These can take the form of study spaces (e.g. group study rooms or carrels), loanable technologies (e.g. video/audio recording equipment, flash drives, microphones, headsets, etc.), DVDs, etc. At UVa, university affiliates goers can try out our Oculus Rift, HTC Vive, One Button Studio, and watch streaming videos that are part of the library's collections. As I emphasize in Tip #4, it is a good idea to become acquainted with library professionals who can share more about what the library has to offer to enrich your professional and personal pursuits.

Summer is almost here! Capitalize upon this time by taking advantage of the rich resources offered at an academic library near you.

How do you plan to creatively use your academic library this summer?

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[2] <http://static.lib.virginia.edu/directory/staff/rsc9j.html>

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[4] <http://guides.lib.virginia.edu/c.php?g=515042&p=3520292>

[5] <http://data.library.virginia.edu/training/>

[6] <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/hidden-figures-librarians>

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