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## SWIMMING WITH THE

## MAINSTREAM:

## RETURNING STUDENTS,

## WOMEN, MINORITIES, AND

## FOREIGN STUDENTS

I have been a stranger in a strange land.

—Exodus, 18:3

"Who's 'im, Bill? A stranger! 'Eave 'arf a brick at 'im."

—Punch, 1854

TRADITIONALLY, UNIVERSITY CULTURE HAS BEEN DOMINATED BY WHITE MALE academics. The preferred student was like the preferred army recruit—male, white, young, aggressive, well disciplined, and respectful of authority. Although times are changing, white male faculty, and to a lesser extent white male students, continue to predominate in most departments, and the institutional culture reflects that fact. The result is that "non-mainstream" students—older students, women, racial minorities, and foreign students—often suffer from culture shock. Minority students coming from heavily minority colleges may feel lost without their accustomed support group. Women students entering predominantly male departments may be acutely aware that in most disciplines the percentage of women in graduate school is smaller than on the undergraduate level. A foreign student not only may feel out of place in his department but will also have left behind his family and the entire culture of his native country.

Double or triple minorities, such as older Hispanic women, may be multiply challenged.

Although overt or intentional discrimination is relatively uncommon in graduate school—indeed, many programs actively recruit women and minorities, and foreign students make up majorities in many departments—studies show that subtle, often unconscious, types of prejudice frequently remain, including subtle (or sometimes not so subtle) differences in how students are judged and encouraged in class. Even where little prejudice exists, students may be handicapped by their own insecurities and fears of the foreign culture, by language difficulties or differences in modes of social communication, and by loss of their social support groups.

Before talking about specific types of students, I'd like to make a few generalizations. First, if you are a nonmainstream student, expect to work harder than mainstream students to be taken seriously, at least until you establish yourself with your professors. Studies show that teachers often expect less of nonmainstream students. Coupled with this is the "affirmative action" stigma. Some people may believe that you made it into the program only because you're a minority (or a woman or whatever). Set these doubters straight right away by excelling in your work and by taking an active role in class.

Second, you may need to work harder to fit in socially. If you are a woman student in a largely male setting or a Nigerian student in a predominantly Anglo-American department, the faculty or other students may overlook you because they're not sure how to treat you socially. Nonetheless, as I've said repeatedly, active participation in your department is critical for success, so reach out to other people as much as you can. As Samuel Johnson said, "If a man does not make new acquaintance as he advances through life, he will soon find himself alone." Carrell Horton, professor and chairman of psychology at Fisk University, says:

As a minority student you are likely to feel out of your own culture to the extent that your previous contacts have been predominantly with people of your own ethnic group. You do, however, need a cohort, so make yourself part of the departmental group. You don't have to love everybody, but don't exclude yourself.

A related thing to remember is that your failure or success in graduate school, as in most other essentially social endeavors, is a self-reinforcing spiral. If you make an extra effort to be outgoing, competent, and professional, most likely you will get positive feedback from your professors and fellow students, enabling you to continue doing well.

Several of the minority counselors whom I spoke with made a third

recommendation: avoid the trap of seeing prejudice where it isn't. Realize that most people will mean you well and that what you might at first perceive as prejudice may actually be only the isolation and lack of caring taking most students experience in graduate school. Indeed, many of the women, foreign, and minority students and faculty I spoke with said they experienced little or no discrimination during their graduate years. Raymond Winbush, a psychology professor and assistant provost at Vanderbilt University, says:

Don't confuse the everyday difficulties of graduate school with discrimination. You may feel ignored, but remember that most graduate students feel ignored. It comes with the territory. One of my fellow classmates at the University of Chicago was very unhappy with the program when he first arrived. He thought the atmosphere was unwelcoming to minorities and decided to transfer. But when he talked to graduate students at other schools, he found out that grad school was tough everywhere for everyone, so he decided to stay and did fine.

When you do run into discrimination, it is often unconscious discrimination by someone who would be willing to change if you ask him. Carrell Horton says:

Absolutely talk to the person if you feel they are treating you differently. Many people are unaware of the message they're sending, and if they realize it, they'll change.

You are more likely to be successful in changing minor discriminatory behavior if you take a nonaccusatory, objective approach. Focus on asking for the changes you want, whether they be for more guidance, attention, fairer grading, or balanced course content, rather than demanding apologies or immediate conversion of the professor to your way of thinking. For example, if you courteously but firmly tell the professor that you would like to be called on more in class, or would like the class to cover theories out of the cultural mainstream, then you are more likely to get what you want than if you call the professor a racist, chauvinist, or imperialist.

If you are unfortunate enough to run into discriminatory behavior that is frequent or flagrant, such as continued incidents of sexual harassment, and the person does not respond to firm but polite requests to change, you may need to take more forceful steps. These can include the registered letter described below in the section on sexual harassment or formal charges lodged with the appropriate university office. Recognize, however, that

there may be costs associated with such escalated responses, including being labeled a troublemaker, academic retaliation, or even the filing of legal complaints for libel (these have little chance of succeeding). Realize also that once you have begun open warfare with a committee member or another powerful faculty member, you may need to end up changing committee members or even schools for a fresh start.

Several minority graduate counselors and students said to me that they thought the best approach once you're in school is to not worry too much about discrimination and just get ahead with the job (obviously this isn't the case when there is harassment severe enough to cause you substantial pain). Worrying just takes energy you need to get your work done and produces stress you don't need. A counselor said:

I seldom give the grad students a shoulder to cry on. I just help them figure out what to do. They need to solve the problems, focus on their work, and put everything else aside. I tell them, "If you're being ignored in the classroom, don't get mad, just be more aggressive about contributing."

Raymond Winbush said:

Graduate school is like going out your front door when it's raining cats and dogs. When someone throws a bucket of water on you too, don't spend too much time figuring out which water is rain and which got thrown on you for discriminatory reasons, just get to where you're going so you can dry out.

A Hispanic student said of discrimination:

You learn to manage it. Live life. You just have to believe that you can handle what comes your way. You'll always face ignorance, but you just have to take care of it. I'm busy and don't have time to worry about people who are ignorant and bigoted. I've got too many goals to meet.

Finally, the most important thing, which I have been hammering at you throughout this book, is to do your detective work ahead of time. Find out before you apply to schools which ones have good reputations for treating students like you well. Are there good institutional programs for helping nonmainstream students? For example, if you're a parent, are there day-care facilities? Will there be a community of similar students, or will you be one of a handful of tokens? Find out before choosing an

adviser whether a particular professor has a reputation for making sexual advances to students or being culturally insensitive.

I suggest that you read each of the following sections on specific types of nonmainstream students, even if a particular section doesn't immediately apply to you. For example, if you are a male member of a racial minority, you should still read the section on women's issues, not only to give you perspective about the problems women face but also because the section describes tactics that can be adapted to your particular case.

## • RETURNING STUDENTS •

At seventy-seven it is time to be earnest.

—SAMUEL JOHNSON

Many professional programs prefer older candidates with work experience because they are more mature and better motivated. Even in academic programs, many professors believe more mature students do better in graduate school than those coming straight from college. At the same time, other professors prefer to admit younger students, who are seen as more committed to the field, with a longer career of academic contribution ahead. In either case, although your study skills may be rusty, you can use your greater maturity to sustain you in overcoming obstacles, give you more self-discipline in ordering your life, and help substantially in your interpersonal relations with professors.

Getting reacquainted with school can be tough. A George Washington University stress counselor says:

Reentry is very stressful, and returning students may initially be at a disadvantage compared with those that come in straight from undergrad. The first quarter is the worst—they're not used to taking tests, and they have problems with their sudden loss of status, what the students call "infantilization." They are very self-questioning and need a quarter or two to build confidence.

Older students may also face "ageism." One graduate school dean said, "Many departments feel that admitting older students is a waste of the university's resources because these students don't have as much time ahead of them to contribute." Faculty may also believe that older students, particularly women, aren't serious about their work ("They just want to get out of the house for a while"). They may be uncomfortable teaching

students who are as old as or older than they are, so they ignore these students in class or otherwise treat them differently. Such problems can partly be overcome by your attitude. If you are confident and friendly, participating fully in what goes on in the classroom, you will be taken seriously. One of my older friends at Stanford who succeeded on a combination of charm and talent is Harriet Doerr. She returned to Stanford to finish her undergraduate degree in English in her seventies—she had dropped out of Stanford more than fifty years earlier—and went on to become a Stegner Fellow in Stanford's graduate writing program, and published an award-winning book of stories based on her life in Mexico —*Stones for Ibarra*. She says:

At first I told myself I was a fool even to attempt going back to school. I was scared to death I wouldn't be good enough for Stanford. But once I'd started, I liked it very much, and the professors were very encouraging. I concluded that age doesn't matter if you are exercising your talents; it doesn't matter if you are twenty or ninety. Just be your natural self, and friendships will naturally grow with the professors and other students, even if they're not your age. Funny things do happen—I could tell the other students were often wondering if I was the teacher's mother, and once someone asked me if I was the chairman's secretary. I thought it was terribly funny.

Be aware also, before you decide to invest the time and money in graduate school, that you may also face discrimination once you have graduated. For academic jobs, hiring committees often put a premium on youth. Conversely, if you have been in the working world and are going back to school for a master's to improve your credentials, age may not be a handicap.

Before you actually start school, you can act to decrease your reentry trauma by doing homework to catch up. Read recent journal articles in your field. You can cover a lot of material rapidly by reading appropriate textbooks and general review articles in journals like *Scientific American* and *Bioscience*.

You should also be competent at using a computer to do word processing. If you're not, take a course in Wordperfect or a similar common word-processing program, or learn by using a computerized tutorial. Many public libraries have videos that instruct in the use of computers and specific word-processing programs. These can be more useful than manuals for computer novices, as they actually *show* you what you are supposed to be doing. If your typing needs work, typing tutor programs for personal computers can brush you up.

Once in school, if you have other demands on your time—a family or a job—you have to realize that you can't study in the same way you did when you were an undergraduate. If you are married or have children, you will have to balance your priorities—you may not be able to stay up until 3 a.m. every night during finals. Unfortunately, most schools are not yet very good about providing child care. One way around this time dilemma is to pace yourself—remember that the amount of work you have to do in most programs is not overwhelming, often less than in undergraduate school, provided that you work every day, just as you would with a job. Second, be smarter about what really counts and where to expend your energy. A good example of a place to put in minimal work is a class where the professor is outside your field, so you will never need him for a reference. Do the minimum you need in his course for an adequate grade, but conversely, do your best in a course taught by one of your committee members. Don't be perfectionistic where it doesn't pay off. One English student said:

In one class we had to read thirteen novels. I figured that because there are eighty people in the class, the professor would never know whether I'd read them or not. So I focused on reading the novels I was going to base my paper on, did some extra reading to back up the paper, and the professor ended up complimenting me on how well prepared I was. Another way I saved time in preparing for my orals was to pretend to my committee that I hadn't read some books I knew backwards and forwards. So they assigned me these to read for the orals.

One final optimistic thought is that many universities offer reduced tuition to senior students.

#### • SPECIAL PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN •

Most hierarchies were established by men who now monopolize the upper levels, thus depriving women of their rightful share of the opportunities to achieve incompetence.

—LAWRENCE J. PETER

#### FACING A MALE-DOMINATED ENVIRONMENT

First the good news. The number of women attending school has been rising in most fields, even those traditionally reserved for men. According to the National Research Council, in 1960 only 11 percent of Ph.D.s were earned by women, while in 1994 women earned 39 percent. In some areas, notably the social sciences, psychology, and the humanities, nearly half of the doctoral degrees are awarded to women. In chemistry, 28 percent of the Ph.D.s awarded in 1994 went to women, up from only 12 percent fourteen years earlier. Overall, this means that women have more role models and that the institutional climate is becoming more accepting.

Moreover, in many departments women experience little overt or intentional discrimination, to the point that one zoologist who received her degree in 1991 could say:

I had problems in graduate school, but discrimination wasn't one of them, neither because I'm a woman nor because I belong to a minority group. However, I did have friction with my professor, a woman in her sixties who suffered early in her career from being one of the few women in the field. She kept trying to get me to join a group for women in science and was very irritated with me that I didn't see the point in joining.

Nonetheless, women are poorly represented in many fields, including engineering (11 percent), mathematics (21 percent), the physical sciences (24 percent), and, to a lesser extent, the life sciences (42 percent). In the critically important field of computer science, only 15 percent are women. In science something mysterious happens to women along the career trail. Take physics, for example. According to an article in *Science* by Faye Flam, although 35 percent of students in high school physics classes are female, more women drop out at every stage along the way. Statistics compiled by the American Institute of Physics in 1991 show that women constitute only 16 percent of physics BAs, only 10 percent of Ph.D.s, 7 percent of assistant professors, and 3 percent of tenured faculty. Likewise in mathematics; although women made up 22 percent of Ph.D.s in 1991, only 4 of 303 tenured positions were held by women at the ten best mathematics departments in the United States.

Why is this happening? There may be several intermingled reasons. One is that in many departments role models are hard to find, so women may lack encouragement to continue. A second reason is that subtle discrimination may remain as the residue of an earlier policy of exclusion. Women weren't admitted at all to physics or astronomy pro-

grams at Harvard, MIT, or Caltech until the 1960s, and older faculty in many departments may still consider the presence of women inappropriate.

Furthermore, even if intentional discrimination isn't present, a number of factors operate to make graduate school tougher for women than for men. They include:

- The male-dominated social structure creates an institutional "climate" that encourages men at the expense of women. You can read about the causes and effects of this climate in an excellent study by Roberta Hall and Bernice Sandler, *The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women?*—available from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (1818 R St. NW, Washington, DC 20009, phone: 202 387-3760). It describes how people rate work by women as of lower quality than identical work by men, and negatively judge women who show behaviors that are interpreted as "masculine" rather than "feminine," even though these behaviors may be essential to excel in graduate school. Males who act dispassionately may be viewed as "objective," but females are "cold." Men may be "forceful," while women are "hostile." Moreover, subtle differences in the way faculty treat male and female students, such as giving less eye contact to women and interrupting their comments more, may leave students of both sexes with the belief that women make less valuable intellectual contributions.
- Women themselves enter graduate school with a set of learned behaviors and values that put them at a competitive disadvantage. These include feelings of academic insecurity. A study reported by Hall and Sandler has shown that women undergraduates feel less prepared for graduate school than men from the same institution. Some women also hold beliefs, previously reinforced by society and school experiences, that women should stick to feminine fields, speak deferentially, and otherwise act in a feminine manner. These factors may actually convince women not only that it is difficult for them to succeed but that they *shouldn't* succeed if they are to successfully fulfill their role as "feminine" women.

*The Classroom Climate* notes that researchers on sex differences in language have shown that women, along with other low-status individuals and groups, use particular speech patterns that signal lack of status to the listener. These patterns include hesitation and false starts ("I think . . . I was wondering?"), high pitch, "tag" questions ("This is important, don't you think?"), and excessive use of qualifiers ("Don't you think that maybe sometimes . . . ?").

- Family structures often dump more of the household duties and child rearing on women, even if both parents work or are in school. This makes for an interesting situation in which single women get through graduate school more easily than married ones but married men—with the support of their wives and the motivation of ultimately being the breadwinner—are more likely to finish and to finish earlier than single men.
- There may also be stressful sexual tension between female students and predominantly male faculty. This often makes it difficult for women to develop the same degree of comfortable "buddy" camaraderie with their male advisers that men are able to develop, which gives the men an advantage when it comes to the bestowal of teaching assistantships, job recommendations, and the other benefits of a close relationship with your adviser. A graduate student in American studies found:

This was one of my greatest frustrations in grad school, that it was impossible to develop the same level of camaraderie with male professors as the male students could. The feeling between the professors and me was more formal. The men could go drinking beer with their advisers, or play tennis, which didn't feel appropriate to me. I think informality helped the male students in feeling that they could more easily approach their professors for help. I do think that buddy-type relationships develop between female professors and students, one reason I recommend that female students search out women for advisers.

Additional bad news is that whatever discrimination exists in graduate school, it is much more severe on the professional job front. For example, in a survey of astronomers, almost 40 percent of women reported that they had experienced discrimination of some sort. The result is that many women persevere through graduate school only to find they have trouble getting jobs or advancement at later stages, as indicated by the statistics above for mathematics and physics.

#### EVENING OUT THE ODDS

Here are some things that you can do to try to even out the odds in graduate school:

- *Check out schools ahead of time.* When you are scoping out schools and professors, as described in Chapters 5 and 6, pay extra attention to whether the departments you are interested in provide a welcoming environment for women. Are there women at the top levels of the uni-

versity? If the president, vice presidents, and all the deans are men, there's likely to be a problem. Is there a university-wide or departmental association of women graduate students? Are there courses that deal with women? If you're in history, art, psychology, or music, and there is nothing about women, this should be a tip-off that the department isn't particularly interested. If you are headed for a nontraditional field, are there special programs designed to welcome and smooth the way for women? For example, some engineering departments go out of their way to recruit women, implement a buddy system whereby new women students are teamed with more experienced ones, and otherwise try to smooth the way.

- *Choose your adviser extra carefully.* Female advisers are obviously likely to be sympathetic with your aspirations and understanding of the special effort you will have to make. When evaluating male professors, look for ones who have already produced female graduate students, particularly ones whose students have been successful in finding jobs. One way to get this information is to search through the literature for publications by women whose work interests you. Note their home institutions and call them for advice and ask them about their own experiences. If they aren't recent graduates themselves, do they know any who might be willing to talk to you?

- *Look for support from other women.* Join women's professional groups or support groups. If none exist on your campus, you can form one of your own, at least an informal one. One way to locate groups is to contact your local branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW)—some, but not all, of their branches have groups for graduate students. The AAUW can also be a source of information if you run into trouble. If your local branch can't help, try their national office (1111 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036; phone: 202 785-7700).

- *Think hard about whether you have a pioneer temperament.* It takes a strong personality to overcome the bias you will confront if you are one of the few women in a field still dominated by men. Therefore, try to assess how hard it will be by talking to women grad students or recent graduates in your field. Try to realistically assess whether you have the drive it takes. In some cases it might make sense to switch to a related field that is more accepting of women.

These days there are also advantages to being a pioneer. If you can excel in an untraditional field, and if hiring in the field is subject to the effects of affirmative action, you actually have an advantage at hiring time, compared with a field, like English literature, where more than half the students

are women. Moreover, unfortunately, the fields with many women are also the fields that are overcrowded, with poor job prospects overall.

- *Be aware of the risks of academic "ghettoization" and soft subjects.* It is tempting for women who are conscious of their struggle for equality to devote themselves to research focused on women's issues. These studies are important, but there is a danger. Women's studies are often seen by the academic establishment as substandard compared with more traditional fields, a perception that can hurt your career. The way around this problem is to make sure that your research is well grounded in traditional research, in a traditional department, even if your main focus is women. This is particularly important early in your career. Your job chances in English literature are better if you are a specialist in nineteenth-century novelists, with a few papers written about women novelists, rather than a specialist in women novelists per se. It is much easier to get a job in a women's studies program because you have a strong grounding in your primary discipline rather than vice versa.

A related problem is that, even within fields, women are often tracked into "softer," qualitative areas of concentration, which have less prestige. Instead of becoming economic anthropologists, women head for descriptive anthropology. Instead of molecular biology, women become field-ecologist types. You can increase your prestige and employability by entering more rigorous, quantitative specialties. Before going to graduate school, pay extra attention to figuring out which field holds out the best chance of success.

- *Think carefully about teaching versus research tracks.* Careerwise, academic women tend to choose or be tracked into teaching positions rather than the more prestigious and financially rewarding research positions. This happens early in graduate school, in terms of both what type of thesis is chosen and whether women get teaching assistantships rather than research assistantships. A women's graduate school counselor says:

I recommend that women think carefully about whether to try for TAs versus RAs. TAs offer the advantage of letting you get to know more professors, assuming that you teach a variety of classes, but an RA carries much more professional weight. In some cases a research assistantship may even pay you to carry out some of your own research.

- *Strive for scholastic visibility.* A researcher on women's issues says, "Women are often in the idealistic mode. They think, 'If I do good scholarship, I will be rewarded.' They don't think about how to get their scholarship seen." This "wait to be noticed" strategy won't work, in part because women's work is often devalued. Instead, you must actively strive to build your reputation.
- *Watch out for your personal safety.* Women on campus are prime candidates for assaults because the friendly atmosphere lures them into dropping their guard, and graduate students are particularly vulnerable because they're often on campus late at night or during breaks when the campus is empty. Consider taking a self-defense class, take care not to put yourself in dangerous situations, and use campus escort services when you must travel across campus late at night.

#### HANDLING HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment happens to both women and men, but the large majority of cases occur when male professors or students harass female students. Bernice Sandler, senior scholar at the National Association for Women in Education, estimates that more than 90 percent of harassment is by men directed toward women, and that over 30 percent of women graduate students report some form of sexual harassment (including relatively minor incidents such as sexually explicit comments). However, the following discussion can be applied to male students harassed by either men or women. *No one should stand for harassment.*

Graduate students are easy marks for sexual pressure from professors because they are relatively powerless and dependent upon faculty for the help that will lead to a job, and because they are older than undergraduates and therefore lack the protection of being "underage." Further, it can be difficult for a student to prove harassment, particularly in its subtler forms, and a student may risk her career by formally complaining. These fears mean that 90 percent of sexual harassment experienced by graduate women goes unreported. However, in February 1992, the Supreme Court ruled that the federal law barring sex discrimination in schools and colleges permits students to sue for damages for sexual harassment and other forms of sex discrimination. This ruling may put pressure on schools to prevent harassment.

One reason this area of sexual harassment is a messy one is that when professors and students date, it can be difficult for outsiders, in the absence of objective evidence, to judge whether the relationship is exploitative or not. Nonetheless, many cases of harassment are clear-cut, as the following

story shows. In the words of a departmental chairman at a highly regarded school:

A few years ago a female student came to me, closed my office door, and confided that she was being sexually harassed by her adviser. The guy was married, but he told her to be his mistress, saying, "I want to be free to visit you at any time." She initially gave in, but was now at the point of bringing charges to free herself. I took the matter to the provost, who handled it quietly. A senior colleague spoke to the adviser, and persuaded him to leave her alone. She was convinced not to file charges because the adviser was up for tenure and it would have hurt his career. The woman eventually left the department and now has a good career in business.

The weakness of this departmental response, which seems common, suggests that you should not place great reliance on formal university procedures, particularly given the difficulty of proving harassment and the possible repercussions to yourself. Although you may eventually need to resort to formal complaints, you are better off dealing with the issue informally if you can.

In this case, what should you do? Ignoring continuous harassment generally doesn't help—the harasser often takes this as tacit consent. Therefore, your first line of defense is to make it absolutely clear to the offender that his behavior is unacceptable. Say, "No," clearly and firmly. If this doesn't work, the Center for Women Policy Studies suggests:

- *Keep records.* Keep a journal of events and preserve any letters or notes you receive from the person harassing you. Record the dates, places, times, witnesses, and the nature of the harassment. This evidence can be used as substantiation for any later case you need to make.
- *Tell someone.* Talk with other students to find out whether others have been similarly harassed. What kind of action did they take? Were these actions successful? Often you will find that the same person has also harassed others. This evidence can be used to substantiate a formal complaint or at least to help you feel less alone with the problem.
- *Identify an advocate.* Find a counselor, ombudsman, or other sympathetic faculty member who can give you advice, discuss the formal and informal options available to you, and perhaps intervene on your behalf.
- *Write a registered letter.* Sending a particular type of private, but registered letter to the offender has proven to be very successful at stopping harassment. Such a letter should have three parts. In the first part, you state the objectionable behaviors. ("On November 17, in your office, you

put your hand on my knee during a discussion of my thesis draft.") In the second part, you tell how these behaviors make you feel. ("This made me feel afraid and angry.") In the third part you ask for specific changes. ("I want you to refrain from touching me and to leave the door of your office open when we are meeting.") Dr. Sandler says that this type of letter has a high success rate, stopping 90 percent of harassment, and carries more weight than an oral communication. It works because it gives the harasser a chance to see his behavior from your point of view, and it also warns him—the registered letter lends gravity—that he cannot continue without formal repercussions. This technique was developed by Mary P. Rowe, a labor economist, who is special assistant to the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Rowe says that this letter is "the *only* method that usually works and at little 'cost.'" To read more about this and other methods of dealing with harassment, order articles on harassment from the Center for Women Policy Studies (2000 P St. NW, Suite 508, Washington, DC 20036, phone: 202 872-1770; there is a small charge for the articles). Your counseling center or women's support group may have someone familiar with this type of letter to help guide you through the process.

Finally, despite the fact that there are remedies available to you to deal with sexual harassment, remember the overwhelming importance of maintaining good relations with your adviser and committee. In most cases, it isn't enough to stop the behavior. You must stop the behavior while maintaining or reinstilling goodwill. If you can't do this, if you continue to have doubts about whether your adviser will do his best for you given your interpersonal history, you may be best off changing advisers.

#### ■ MINORITY STUDENTS ■

In this section, I will talk about challenges that minorities have in common, while trying to note situations specific to different ethnic groups. I will confine my analysis to the four official minority groups recognized by the federal government for purposes of affirmative action—namely, African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans. However, many of the observations and recommendations will also apply to other students of unique cultural background.

If you are a minority student, it will be hard for you to find many role models of your own race among faculty. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that as of 1993, across all institutions of higher education,

African-Americans held only 5 percent of regular full-time positions, although they make up 12 percent of the total U.S. population; Hispanics held only 2 percent of positions, although they comprise 9 percent of the total population; and Native Americans made up 0.5 percent of tenured faculty and 0.8 percent of the U.S. population. Asian-Americans were slightly overrepresented; although they make up only 3 percent of the U.S. population (as of 1990), they held 5 percent of full-time faculty positions. Whites dominate, with 88 percent of full-time faculty positions. Minorities, including Asian-Americans, are concentrated at the lower levels of academic employment and are more likely to be nontenure track.

These patterns in faculty concentration roughly reflect the percentages of minority students in graduate programs. In 1992, African-Americans earned 3.7 percent of all doctoral degrees, Hispanics earned 3.0 percent, Asian-Americans 2.5, Native Americans 0.06, and whites 88 percent, according to Deborah Carter and Reginald Wilson in a report published by the American Council on Education. The following statistics are also from their report.

Between 1983 and 1993, the number of African-Americans earning doctorates held steady, and African-American master's degrees rose by 6 percent between 1981 and 1992. Asian-Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans increased the number of both Ph.D.s and master's degrees they earned during this period (the number of Asian-American master's degrees rose by 101 percent!).

In some fields you will find more of your peers than in others. For example, in 1993, 28 percent of all African-American doctorates were earned in the single field of education, while only 15 percent were earned in the physical and life sciences combined, and only 3.7 percent in engineering. On the other hand, Asian-American students are increasingly concentrated in engineering, this field alone holding 24 percent of them, and their share of all engineering doctorates increased from 3.7 percent in 1975 to 9.7 percent in 1993, more than three times their representation in the general U.S. population.

Minorities show shifts in fields in recent years, in part due to an increased emphasis on earning potential. For example, there has been a large shift by African-Americans away from education degrees on the master's level—down 25.5 percent from 1981 to 1992—while at the same time the number of African-Americans MBAs increased nearly 70 percent. Hispanic education degrees remained steady during this period, while MBAs increased 124 percent, and Native American MBAs increased 42 percent.

The lack of minority graduate students in certain fields has been a continuing frustration for departments that go out of their way to recruit

both minority graduate students and minority faculty. The dean of graduate admissions at a top school that does have relatively high African-American attendance said:

Good African-American graduate students applying in some departments are so rare that, for example, I can still remember the name and file information on a magna cum laude student who applied to our government department four years ago. We admitted him, as did Berkeley, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, and everywhere else. After being accepted with full support, he decided not to go to graduate school at all, so no one got him. Highly qualified black applicants can make so much more money outside of academia, for fewer years of preparation, that it's difficult to keep them in doctoral programs.

This continuing shortage of minority graduate students in many fields will make substantial increases in minority faculty difficult to achieve because there will be no large pool of qualified applicants to fill faculty vacancies. Reginald Wilson, senior scholar at the American Council on Education, has warned:

We have the potential for achieving parity for minority faculty, but if we don't have the faculty there to hire, then the chance will be lost. Unless there is a substantial change in the production of black and Hispanic Ph.D.s, that parity won't be achieved.

Michelle W. Zak, director of faculty development for the University of California, asks:

What's this country going to look like in the next couple of decades if we have a population that's 55 or 60 percent nonwhite, and all the educated people, all the leaders, are white?

If you are a prospective minority graduate student, this very shortage of minorities can be good news for you because universities are hungry for qualified minority grad students. This doesn't apply as much to Asian-Americans because they are already overrepresented in many fields, but if you are African-American, Hispanic, or Native American, your minority status can help you with admission and later with getting a job. A dean of graduate admissions says:

Many of the blacks and Hispanics who notify us of their status on the application get their application fees waived. In addition, for

professional degrees, like the two-year MBA or the foreign service master's, the department tries to shape the class to be culturally diverse and therefore minorities have a definite edge on admission. For academic master's or Ph.D. programs, the minority advantage isn't so clear-cut. You still have to make the first cut as an acceptable candidate by the department—unlike in undergraduate admissions, there is no adjustment of GREs or other criteria for minority admission. We're very strict on having students meet the academic criteria because we only want students who can succeed. Unlike with undergraduate programs, there is no support system to help underqualified students through. However, once you've made this cut, minorities get very, very, very special reading of their files. Qualified minority candidates are so rare in most fields that we jump at them.

#### PROBLEMS

Many of the problems minorities face are analogous to those faced by women in a male environment.

- *Lack of role models.* Because only one of every 344 full-time faculty is a Native American, one out of 51 is Hispanic, one out of 22 is African-American, and one of 21 is Asian-American, you may very well end up in a department with no faculty of your race.
- *Loss of cultural support.* The demographics of graduate school mean that there will be fewer minority students to provide you with a community than there were when you were an undergraduate. African-American students, for example, in 1994 made up 10 percent of the total undergrad enrollment in higher education institutions, but comprised only 4 percent of graduating doctoral students. Hispanics made up 7 percent of the undergraduate population, but only 2 percent of graduating Ph.D.s.
- *Social differences and preconceptions.* You may suffer from the paradox of "too little" and "too much" attention, in which minorities receive less attention from professors during normal scholastic activities, but are called upon to speak for their race during discussions of culture or ethnicity. ("Maria, can you give us the Hispanic perspective on this issue?")

Cultural and language differences that exist between whites and minorities will cause miscommunication and misjudgments, even though all parties have the best intentions. For example, Sarah Nieves-Squires, author of the report "Hispanic Women: Making Their Presence on Campus Less Tenuous," says:

The closer personal space that is comfortable for some Hispanics may make Anglos uncomfortable or may be perceived as inviting intimacy. . . . Overt hand and arm gestures, coupled with a Spanish accent, may be perceived as a lack of verbal ability.

- *Academic "ghettoization."* Just as for women who focus on women's issues, there is a tendency for the academic mainstream to reject or devalue work by minorities on minorities. A related issue is that minority philosophies and attitudes toward mainstream academic interpretation may not be welcomed. A minority professor says:

We find that minority students seem to feel less intellectually isolated, less alienated, in mathematics, engineering, and the sciences, because here the measure of their work is objective—opinions don't matter as much. Students in the humanities and social sciences have a harder time because determining the "right" approach is more subjective, and often the opinions of minorities are out of sync with the mainstream. One example is the recent controversy over how to treat the "discovery" of America by Columbus.

- *Fewer research and teaching assistantships.* Although there are special aid programs for minorities, minorities overall receive fewer of the research and teaching assistantships vital for career progress and financial survival. For example, a 1994 report by the National Research Council shows that while 78 percent of Ph.D. students in the physical sciences received university support (primarily teaching and research assistantships and fellowships), such support was received by only 59 percent of African-Americans and 64 percent of Hispanics. As a result, cumulative debt at graduation due to school loans is greater for these minorities than for the general student body—63 percent of African-Americans and 65 percent of Hispanics graduate in debt, compared with 47 percent overall. These differences may be caused less by discrimination than by resources available at schools differentially attended by minorities.
- *Overwhelmed advisers.* Like female advisers, minority advisers tend to be overwhelmed. One adviser said, "Because of the paucity of black professors at my university, I am placed in the dilemma of being all things to all black students."
- *Double whammies for minority women.* Minority women not only have the difficulties of being minority, but suffer the inequities, described in the section above, of being female as well. According to Yolanda T. Moses, author of a report called "Black Women in Academe" for the Association of American Colleges' Project on the Status and Education of Women,

"A double bias exists in which black women are judged on the basis of preconceived notions about women and blacks."

- *Competition between and within ethnic groups.* One graduate adviser said, "Although our minority affairs office technically takes care of all minorities, in reality it focuses primarily on black students, who are the dominant minority on our campus." Even within an ethnic group, such as Hispanics, there can be friction. One Hispanic master's student told me:

At our campus there was a Latino group, which was composed mostly of upper-class students, primarily with parents from Central or South America, and a Hispanic group, primarily lower- or lower-middle-class students from the United States. There was almost no interaction between them, because the Latinos perceived the Hispanics as lower-class, and the Hispanics thought the Latinos were snobs.

#### EVENING OUT THE ODDS

The steps you can take to succeed are similar to the common-sense things for women to do:

- *Investigate the school ahead of time.* Contact the minority affairs office on campus to find out what's available in terms of financial aid and general campus tone. Find a school where your particular minority group is treated well. Note, as I just mentioned, that just because there is a minority affairs office doesn't mean that it will look out for the interest of your group.
- *Choose a school with a critical mass.* Raymond Winbush advises:

Try to choose a school with a critical mass of minority grad students and faculty, so that there are a reasonable number of people like yourself for support. When I went to grad school, I was fortunate that there were three other black students in my program, so we could bounce ideas off each other. If there aren't enough students of your race, you can make common cause with other minorities.

If you do want to choose a school with a concentration of minority students, there is a publication that can help you called *Minority Enrollments: A Guide to Institutions with the Highest Percent of Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Native American Students* (Garrett Park Press, PO Box 190B, Garrett Park, MD 20896, phone: 301 946-2553).

- *Make it known to the admissions committee that you're a minority.* This will help you get admitted and considered for special financial aid.
- *Look for special financial aid.* Check with any schools you are attending for special programs for minorities.
- *Network.* Network with other minority students and faculty. Reach outside your department for advice and support—alumni are an often overlooked resource, but they can be particularly helpful, since they've already been through the course.
- *Get counseling if you need it.* Even if you have had past negative experiences with counselors, give it a try if you're under stress or experiencing other problems.
- *Participate fully in classes.* Be assertive about speaking up. An African-American master's student says:

Classes are for communication, so I say what I want to say. Being loquacious, the professors sometimes cut me off, but it's better to talk too much than too little.

An Asian-American said:

Because people assume, as an Asian woman, that I'll be soft, passive, and submissive, I compensate by being ultra-aggressive in class. Once you act like that, people will take you seriously. You just have to establish yourself.

- *Be aggressive about competing for RAs and TAs.* As I've said before, teaching assistantships and, even more so, research assistantships are important for your career. Be aggressive about searching them out. Go directly to professors to ask if they have TA or RA funds.
- *Be extra careful about choosing an adviser.* Look for one who has a proven record for treating minority students well. It would be ideal to get an excellent, politically well-connected adviser of your own ethnic group, but recognize that this may be impossible. However, as long as the adviser you choose has your best interests at heart, then good guidance skills, academic excellence, and political connections are more important to you at this stage than ethnicity. An African-American student says:

Don't discount people who aren't black. Most of the people who have got me where I am have been white, so you *can* connect with white people. White professors took an interest in me as a person and helped me.

- *Be aware of the dangers of academic "ghettoization."* My advice here is the same as that I gave for women. Don't insist on doing ideologically pure research at this stage if you have reason to think this may hurt your career. Focus on the mainstream. As an African-American student said:

The name of the game is getting through with solid training. Once you're a professor or other full-fledged professional, then you have the power to effect change. Once you're a prof, you can make an African-American language class or a Hispanic culture class part of the standard curriculum. But first you have to get through the standard way; that's the key, whether we like it or not.

- *Have self-confidence.* The trait that stood out most clearly to me when I was interviewing successful minority grad students, faculty, and administrators was their strong sense of self and self-confidence. A student in international relations said:

I'm the only person in my family's history to go to college, but my father was telling me I would go to Harvard from the time I was seven years old. He said, "There's nothing you can't do; race isn't going to be a barrier." Now that my program is nearly over, I'm interviewing for jobs in international banking. I'm competing with primarily white men, and I do feel different, but not disadvantaged.

Carrell Horton, who got her Ph.D. twenty years ago, says:

Students are always asking me how I kept my identity in a predominantly white school. I tell them, "How could I lose it? I had it when I arrived, and I had it when I left."

#### ■ FOREIGN STUDENTS ■

Modern man . . . is educated to understand foreign languages and misunderstand foreigners.

—G. K. CHESTERTON

I've always had a weakness for foreign affairs.

—MAE WEST

If you are a foreign student planning on attending a U.S. program, you won't be alone. Peter Syverson, director of information services at the Council of Graduate Schools, writes that the numbers of foreign students in U.S. graduate schools are increasing rapidly, at about 5 percent a year. In 1992-93 there were over 200,000 foreign graduate students enrolled. They composed 11 percent of all U.S. master's students and 26 percent of U.S. doctoral students, for a total of 14 percent of all graduate students. Foreign students are heavily concentrated in engineering and the sciences—they earned 61 percent of all U.S. engineering doctorates in 1994 and 43 percent of doctorates in the physical sciences.

Although coming to a foreign country can be exciting, it can also be difficult to find yourself for a long period away from your friends and family, getting used to a new language and new customs. Nevertheless, take confidence in the fact that most foreign students do well; actually, foreign students are more likely to finish their Ph.D. programs than are U.S. citizens.

#### APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

Foreign students have the following special concerns when choosing and applying to graduate programs. You should:

- *Judge your capabilities carefully.* Be aware that increased competition for graduate students among U.S. universities has made what the Council of Graduate Schools calls a "buyer's market." This means that schools are actively recruiting foreign students, and in some cases you may be recruited to attend a school even if your academic or English-language capabilities are too weak for you to ultimately succeed. Therefore, be realistic in evaluating your potential. The dean of one school said:

A lot of universities in the United States are hurting financially, so they are taking students whose English isn't ready for them to do well. To make sure all *our* students are qualified, we have a strict policy that graduate students must have a TOEFL score of 550 or above, and 650 or above if they are going to teach. Even so, we have

had a few students whose spoken English wasn't good enough for them to continue in the program.

If your contact with U.S. schools is through private, profit-seeking organizations, scrutinize them carefully to ensure that they are reputable. The Council of Graduate Schools says:

Many such agencies are legitimate and provide useful services; others are not. When an institution works with any external recruiting agency, there is always the possibility that the student's main objectives in pursuing graduate study may be neglected.

If you do consider using a recruiting service, ask students who have previously used the service about their experiences. You can also get information about specific recruiting organizations by writing to Sarah Herr at NAFSA Association of International Educators, which maintains records on third-party recruitment agencies (1875 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20009, phone: 202 462-4811).

- *Attain English proficiency.* The better your English is before you start school, the easier your life will be. Schools will generally require that nonnative speakers of English score at acceptable levels on any of several English proficiency examinations, the most common of which is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Other tests you may be asked to take include the Test of Written English (TWE), the Test of Spoken English (TSE), and less frequently the American Language Institute of Georgetown University (ALIGU) or the Michigan Proficiency Test (MPT). The TSE is often required of students who want to be considered for teaching assistantships. For information on the TOEFL, TSE, or TWE tests, write to TOEFL, TSE, or TWE, PO Box 6151, Princeton, NJ 08541-6151, USA.

If your English is below the acceptable standard but close to it, some schools will admit you provided that after admission you take English classes and pass the appropriate English exam. If you are given this opportunity, make sure that you plan carefully for the extra time and money you will need to attain acceptable proficiency.

- *Take standardized tests early.* In addition to English-language proficiency tests, you will have to take standardized admissions tests, such as the Graduate Record Examination. Given that your educational background and language may put you at a disadvantage in taking these tests designed

for U.S. students, you should practice carefully and take them early. Because foreign students are at an obvious disadvantage when taking the GRE verbal test, many departments accept lower verbal scores from foreign students than from U.S. citizens. In deciding when to take the tests, remember that it will take at least six weeks to report scores to the institutions you are applying to.

- *Choose your school carefully.* Because you probably won't be in the United States when choosing a school, it may seem difficult for you to do the research necessary for identifying good schools and advisers. Nonetheless, you should still try as hard as possible to approximate the methods laid out in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 for choosing an adviser and a school, particularly if you are going into a Ph.D. program. You can write directly to professors whose work you know about. A Venezuelan student said:

I found my adviser by meeting one of her graduate students who was doing fieldwork in Venezuela. I was very interested in the work the student was doing, and he contacted his adviser on my behalf. Then his adviser and I corresponded, and my husband and I both ended up coming to the United States to study under her. This really worked well, because the graduate student ultimately got a position with the New York Zoological Society and was able to fund much of my thesis research.

You can write directly to schools, addressing your letter to the office of foreign students, to inquire about how many foreign students are enrolled and what special counseling or other programs are available to make your life easier.

Given that the happiness of graduate students differs dramatically from school to school and department to department, speak to current students or recent graduates of the programs you are interested in. Ask the department or the office of foreign students for the names of students whom you can write or phone.

A further source of free information and counseling about graduate school programs are the offices of organizations in your country that specialize in educational exchange. They include the Fulbright commissions and the offices of the United States Information Service, the Institute of International Education, and America-Mideast Education and Training Services, Inc.

- *Start the application process at least one year before application deadlines.* You need to start early to deal with the slowness of international

mail, the need for special forms, and U.S. immigration requirements for a passport and visa. Some schools will also require that foreign students file a preliminary application, which is reviewed first to see if you meet minimum requirements. Once the preliminary application is approved, then you can formally apply.

Some students report considerable difficulties with their own nations' bureaucracies, which may be unfamiliar with U.S. procedures. So leave time for this. A student from Gabon said:

One of the greatest troubles was getting a transcript. No one in my country knew what a transcript was. Getting one that was acceptable to the American school was very hard.

- *Take special care with your application.* Type your application if possible. Make sure that your name is written the same way on all forms. Transcripts of your previous academic record must be official, bearing the signature and academic seal of the registrar—photocopies are not acceptable. Do not send documents that cannot be replaced. All documents must be in English. If your previous school cannot issue documents in English, include the original non-English documents accompanied by notarized translations, which must be complete and exact translations of the originals.

- *Letters of recommendation and essays are especially important.* Because application committees may have a hard time evaluating an undergraduate record from a foreign institution, your letters of recommendation and application essays, which can show the clarity of your thought and your reasons for wishing to attend graduate school, will carry special weight.

- *Financial aid for foreign students.* Much of the foreign aid available to U.S. students will not be available to you. According to the Council of Graduate Schools, as of 1994, 45 percent of foreign grad students depend upon private sources of funding. Nevertheless, about one-third of foreign students receive either research or teaching assistantships from the institutions they attend, so make sure you fill out the appropriate school applications. Policies differ significantly from institution to institution; some routinely offer support, particularly to doctoral students, while others will not admit foreign students who are not entirely self-supporting. Therefore, although the U.S. school may provide some help, you also need to look for aid elsewhere. Try your own government, fellowship foundations in your country, your employer, and the U.S. embassy or Fulbright commission in your country, which may have a

limited number of fellowships. You can also read *Funding for U.S. Study: A Guide for Foreign Nationals* (Institute of International Education, 809 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017-3580, USA, phone: 212 883-8200).

Note that before you can receive your student visa you must be able to demonstrate that you have enough financial resources to support yourself during your studies, from either private funds or financial aid.

Don't count on supporting yourself by working part-time while you are a student; the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) places many restrictions on international students and their spouses. For example, if you are on an F-1 visa you may be restricted to on-campus employment during your first year at school. Students caught doing unauthorized work may lose their student visa and be sent home. *Because INS regulations are complex and presently being changed, for up-to-date information you should contact the international student adviser at the school you wish to attend.*

If you are restricted to on-campus work, you will find out that jobs are hard to get and are poorly paid. Kathy, a student from England, tells this story:

Last summer I was desperately short of cash, but because I have an F-1 visa, I can only work for the university. I tried to get a job waitressing for conference services, but apparently my personality wasn't winsome enough. So I was put on a dorm-painting crew at \$5.50 an hour. Because I'm from England, the locals who ran the crews couldn't understand me. They thought I couldn't speak English, so they put me on a crew where everyone else was Chinese. My crew painted 300 rooms, which was incredibly tedious. The only good thing about the job is that it was so excruciatingly boring that we developed a jaunty camaraderie.

- *Budget carefully.* Living expenses in the United States may be greater than you are used to. For example, many U.S. communities are designed so that a car is nearly essential if you want to live a fulfilling life. You may need a car to get to the supermarket, see a movie, or simply visit friends. So find out before you arrive at school whether you will need to budget for this major expense. Yves Djoko, a student from Cameroon, said:

I went to school in Mobile, Alabama, where the public transportation system isn't very developed. If you don't have a car, you stay home. I stayed home.

Housing can likewise be expensive—it varies greatly from school to school. Don't assume that the school will find you a place to live. Graduate students are usually forced to find their own living arrangements off campus, and rents can easily be more than \$300 per month for a room in a house shared with other students.

Health insurance is something that most foreign students don't think about. Unlike some countries, the United States has no national health insurance, and a relatively minor accident, such as breaking an ankle, can cost you \$5,000 or more in medical care. Many schools will provide health insurance for students, and sometimes for their dependents. If the school does not provide insurance, it can be *very* expensive to buy on your own. If there is no insurance provided, you can contact the National Association of International Educators, Washington, DC, for referral to recommended programs designed for international students.

Don't forget to budget for expenses during the summer. Anticipate, even if you originally planned to go home over the summer, that unexpected research, extra English instruction, or other demands may keep you in the United States.

- *Additional information.* You can order two publications that may be helpful from the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), 1 Dupont Circle NW, Suite 430, Washington, DC 20036, USA. They are *Graduate Study in the United States: A Guide for Prospective International Graduate Students and International Graduate Students: A Guide for Graduate Deans, Faculty and Administrators*. The second guide, although not specifically for students, is more helpful because it is more detailed and provides samples of "Certification of Finances" and other forms. Because these guides were published in 1991, check with the international-student adviser where you will be attending school to make sure any vital information is still current.

There is an excellent report, which I drew on for some of this section, by Nathalie Friedman for the Institute of International Education. The report, called *Mentors and Supervisors*, compares experiences of U.S. and foreign graduate students at six universities. It is filled with interviews and will help you understand the challenges faced by foreign students. You can order it from ERIC Document Reproduction Service/DynCorp

I & ET, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153, phone: 800 443-3742 or 703 440-1400 (ask for document ED 295-541).

#### PROBLEMS FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

The genius of you Americans is that you never make clear-cut stupid moves, only complicated stupid moves, which makes us wonder at the possibility that there may be something to them we are missing.

—GAMAL ABDU NASSER

*Culture shock.* If the culture of your native country is very different from that of the United States, even the food here can be hard to get used to. Even more important, the social atmosphere of American departments may seem strange. For example, students from Asian countries often have trouble with the relatively informal manners of U.S. classrooms. A professor said:

We have a real problem with the Asian students. Their cultural upbringing makes it difficult for them to be aggressive enough about seeking out help from the faculty. In the case of my students, I practically have to order them to come in to talk with me. This makes it difficult to establish a friendly rapport.

At the other extreme, Latin American students often experience U.S. academic culture as cold and impersonal. Here is what a zoology doctoral student from Venezuela had to say about her department:

In Venezuela I was used to different human relationships, more friendship and socializing with faculty and students. Even the U.S. grad students make a hierarchy. In my master's program in Venezuela, students and professors invited each other for meals, or we would all go dancing together. There wasn't a need to always maintain a professional front. In the United States, my husband and I invited the professors and students to dinner a couple times, but it was a disaster. Everyone was too stiff. I said to my husband, "The last time I was at a party like this I was twelve years old." So we gave up and got nonacademic friends.

According to Nathalie Friedman's study, foreign students, who have left behind their family, friends, and entire culture, suffer much more in an emotionally cold atmosphere than U.S. students. They need friendly and

supportive faculty, and when they don't get it, not surprisingly they are unhappy. She quotes a Chilean's cry of grief:

This is a terrible university! Grotesque, I would call it. I did learn a lot in my field, but you're left too much on your own here. Everything is very individual—no relations with anyone. I did some graduate work back home before coming here and it was very different. I was treated very well there. Faculty there related to you and worried about you. Here, it's a different system—faculty are too busy publishing to pay attention to you.

• *Poor advising.* Foreign students don't get worse advising from the faculty than American students, but, as a group, they suffer more, particularly during the dissertation process. Again, I quote Friedman describing the difference between how American and foreign students respond to poor advising:

American students are angry, annoyed and resentful but, at the same time, not devastated by the absence of attention, assistance and input from the advisor. They tend simply to get on with the task of finishing the dissertation, sometimes turning to peers, sometimes to another professor, for support and feedback. They were generally quite acute in diagnosing the cause for the situation: an advisor who was overloaded with administrative responsibilities or industrial consulting, or a general departmental or university-wide ambiance of indifference to students.

Foreign students, in contrast, were devastated and in several cases seemed almost paralyzed, powerless to move ahead, to get on with the task at hand. They spoke bitterly about advisors who did not read their material, who were unavailable for meetings, and who were not willing to provide concrete direction and assistance. But even more, they spoke of advisors who were unconcerned with their needs, uninterested in students, unprepared to offer encouragement and support during the difficult dissertation years. In other words, while the American students interviewed complained about the lack of instrumental help from nominal advisors, foreign students missed both the instrumental and the expressive support that they felt should be forthcoming from a dissertation sponsor. . . . Apparently, foreign students—particularly those from the Middle East and Latin America where faculty-student relationships are on a warmer, more informal footing—acutely resent the lack of such relationships during both the early and the later graduate years. . . . Asian students, who tended

to form their own peer networks, seemed less distressed than other foreign students. . . .

- *U.S. education is aimed toward problem solving.* Some foreign students were raised in more "memorization"-oriented systems and have trouble adapting to the American system, which emphasizes creative thought and problem solving over knowledge gathering and analysis.

- *Language difficulties.* Passing the TOEFL is no guarantee that you won't have language problems. Expect to have some frustration when you start. Yes Djoko found:

I passed the TOEFL without being able to speak English. It's easy to pass. When I got here for school, English was a big problem. I learned to speak it by sitting in my apartment for the summer and watching television ten hours every day, only with a break to play soccer. In school, my first class was in marketing, and I didn't know anything about U.S. culture. The teacher was talking about General Foods, and I wondered who that was. In one quiz, I was supposed to write about the packaging decisions I would make as a marketing director for Campbell Soup, but I didn't even know what Campbell Soup was.

Even if you speak English fluently before you get here, you may still run into hidden difficulties because your natural speaking patterns and conversational signals may be different from those of native U.S. English speakers. For example, a case study by John Gumperz and Deborah Tannen presents a graduate student from India having a discussion with several U.S. graduate students. The Indian student interrupts the other students frequently, although she doesn't intend to; moreover, they interrupt her. The result is that everyone is frustrated, and the American students perceive the Indian as irritating. The reason is that U.S. and Indian speakers of English use different language cues to signal when they are finished speaking, so that each erroneously believes the other is finished when in fact she has more to say. This cultural difference in the language patterns is analogous to the differences between minority and mainstream white language patterns within the United States, but on a larger scale.

Another problem observed by a grad school dean is that the language capabilities of some foreign students actually decrease after they arrive here:

We have had problems with foreign students who only hang around with their compatriots. They don't spend enough time with American students, and therefore their English skills go down. Some eventually

had to leave school because their skills deteriorated to the point that they couldn't function in the lab.

- *Separation from family.* A stress counselor says:

Many of our students are foreign, and the master's students often leave their spouse and children in their home country for the two-year program. You can imagine that this causes a lot of stress.

#### EVENING OUT THE ODDS

- *Learn all the English you can.* English is the key to getting teaching assistantships, being noticed in class, relating well to professors, and otherwise excelling. If your English is poor enough so that you are having problems keeping up with your work, consider asking your department for permission to defer courses to lighten your load while you focus on English.

- *Be assertive about getting to know professors.* If, because of cultural differences, you're not sure about the cultural rules for how to act with professors, ask American students or counselors at the office of foreign students for advice.

- *Be assertive about teaching assistantships and research assistantships.* Look into the options for additional financial aid once you have established yourself in the department. If you are seen as a good student and you have made good political connections, new sources of departmental support may open up. You may have to do an especially good job selling yourself to get teaching assistantships because some professors don't like to give these to foreign students; they are worried about language difficulties or believe that foreign students don't know how to handle U.S. undergrads.

- *Understand your undergraduate students.* Many foreign students who do teach feel they don't understand their American undergraduate students. Accept the fact that American undergrads will be informal and rambunctious, and may not treat you with the respect you expect. However, if you overlook this and treat them warmly, your teaching career will be more rewarding.

Also, don't worry about appearing perfect to the students—just be human. If you don't know something your students ask, don't try to bluff them. Just say you don't know but you'll find out the answer. Or ask if anyone else in the class knows the answer. The best attitude to take is

that your job as a teacher isn't to have all the answers; it is to help the students learn by themselves.

- *Contact the office of foreign students and other foreign student organizations.* Although many students only approach the office of foreign students for necessary bureaucratic reasons, the personnel are also there to help you adjust, they can counsel you if you run into problems, and they often provide social activities. The office also may be able to act as a mediator if you have culturally induced misunderstandings with your adviser or other professors. Ask whether there is peer counseling available for foreign students.
- *Reach out to your fellow American students.* The more interaction you have with American students, the better your English will become, the faster you can adjust to American culture, and the richer your stay here will be.