When Prahar Mitra meets with incoming international graduate students during orientation week, his main advice is that they take advantage of all the free food at Harvard. “When I was applying to graduate school back in India, I got really into PhD Comics and a large chunk of its humor comes from students searching for free food,” Mitra recalls. “But, while I knew about this free food culture when I arrived at Harvard, I only embraced it two years into my PhD. I’m trying to make sure new students don’t make the same mistake.”

(For more about PhD Comics, see Notes from the Dudley Underground on page 2)

While bringing up free food is always a crowd pleaser at orientation events, Mitra, a PhD student in the Department of Physics and one of the resident advisors (RAs) in Conant Hall, believes his responsibility as an RA goes beyond keeping students fed. “Essentially my main role is to be available for my residents and be the person they come to first with any problem,” he says.

All graduate housing RAs receive training that introduces them to the various offices and resources on campus so that when a resident approaches Mitra with a problem, he can direct them not only to the correct office at Harvard, but also to the point person at that office. “It makes a huge difference to tell a resident ‘go to urgent care and talk to this person, they’re very nice’ instead of simply ‘go to urgent care’” he explains. And his residents at Conant Hall are not the only ones who have benefitted from the added benefits.

For Prahar Mitra, being a resident advisor provides benefits that impact his research. By Fernanda Ferreira

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Winter in the Cambridge and Boston area can be a dark and cold time for graduate students immersed in their studies. Humor and empathy can be as warming as a good cup of coffee. Over the last few weeks, I chatted with graduate students to find out which Internet sites they visit to give themselves a mental break and find sympathy in #thegradstudentstruggle. Here is a list to peruse when you need a laugh.

**BuzzFeed Grad Student Lists**
www.buzzfeed.com/search?q=grad+school
BuzzFeed has many lists about the graduate experience capturing the ups, downs, and hilarity in images, memes, GIFs, and captions. Check out “21 Pictures that Perfectly Sum Up Being in Grad School” or “21 Photos that Perfectly Sum Up Grad School.”

**Grad School Problems**
gradschoolproblems.tumblr.com
twitter.com/gradschoolprobs
A series of memes and GIFs “because the life of a graduate student isn’t easy” can be followed on Tumblr and Twitter.

**Lego Grad Student**
www.facebook.com/legogradstudent
legogradstudent.tumblr.com
twitter.com/legogradstudent
This series documents the ups and downs of a toy grad student. You can follow Lego Grad Student on Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter.

**The Onion**
www.theonion.com
The Onion, a farcical and humorous fake news platform, shares articles about the graduate student experience such as “Pros and Cons of Going to Grad School” and “Mead Releases New Grad-School-Ruled Notebook.”

**PhD Comics**
phdcomics.com
PhD “Piled Higher and Deeper” Comics shares a weekly comic that “chronicles the life (or lack thereof) in grad school.” Written by current graduate students, this comic provides humorous empathy.

**The Professor Is In**
theprofessorisin.com
Written by a group of PhD graduates and professors, this blog offers commentary on higher education, the job search in academia, and post-academia careers. You can also follow the Professor Is In on Facebook (www.facebook.com/TheProfessorIsIn) and Twitter (twitter.com/ProfessorIsIn).

**XKCD Comic**
xkcd.com
XKCD Comic is a web cartoon series drawn with stick figures that explores ideas of “romance, sarcasm, math, and language”. Written by a PhD graduate in physics who now lives in Massachusetts.

Next time you need a brief Internet break and some specific graduate student humor, check the sites above for some relatable and laugh-out-loud fun!
RA training, which this year involved a campus-wide scavenger hunt for Harvard’s many offices. “For the first time in six years, I actually know where all the resources are located!”

The Prodigal Son Returns
Harvard graduate students have access to a myriad of housing options—the GSAS residence halls, Harvard Housing, off-campus, roommates—and Mitra has experienced them all. But one thing he missed while living alone was the ease of meeting new people and learning about their work and research. “Everyone is busy in this city, which makes it hard to get to know your neighbors,” he explains.

After three years of living off-campus, Mitra became an RA in Conant Hall, hoping to foster the same friendly environment that welcomed him when he arrived at Harvard in 2011. “I had never travelled outside of India before moving to Cambridge, but I felt at home within the first two or three days,” Mitra says. For him, the choice to return to the halls as an RA was an easy one. “What better way to come back than as an RA and help people settle into the community,” he shares, “just like I was helped when I came here my first year.”

Much like Mitra’s suggestions to incoming graduate students, many of the community-building events he and the other RAs plan are food-based. “That’s what they like,” he shrugs. “You play a movie, you buy some pizza, or you cook them some pancakes.” Chocolate-chip pancakes are Mitra’s signature dish, and he whips them up at almost every event—surprising for those unlucky enough to have sampled his first batch. “They were terrible! But I’ve gotten much better with practice,” Mitra laughs.

Generating High Energy Excitement
GSAS’s four on-campus residence halls—Conant, Child, Perkins and Richards—house around 410 graduate students. A vast diversity of majors and interests are represented among this many residents, which Mitra found to be one of the most fascinating aspects of graduate school. “In India, almost everyone is focused on becoming a lawyer, a doctor, or an engineer,” he says. “But after moving here and talking with people about their work, I learned about many areas of research I hadn’t known existed!”

Mitra studies theoretical physics, which has historically covered string theory and particle physics. His research, however, does not quite fit into either of these categories. When two protons are smashed into each other in an accelerator such as the Large Hadron Collider at CERN in Switzerland, they release a number of things, including low energy particles. Mitra wants to understand the physics of these low energy particles, which is poorly understood, but he is not using the principles of either string theory or particle physics. Instead, he is tapping into the study of asymptotic symmetries and soft theorems, a new idea developed by Mitra’s advisor, Andrew Strominger, the Gwill E. York Professor of Physics.

Mitra’s complex research can often be difficult to explain, but as an RA he has benefitted from his interactions with graduate students from other disciplines. “You learn two things: how to explain your research in a way everyone can understand and how to get people interested in what you do,” he says. Those two lessons have proved extremely beneficial when it comes to setting up collaborations with other theoretical physicists. “What is exciting about asymptotic symmetries is that there are so many unanswered questions, which means there are so many questions to be asked and potential collaborations to explore,” Mitra explains. Thanks to his experience as an RA, he is now an expert in taking the first step in setting up any collaboration—getting people excited about the questions you are asking.

Help Make Harvard a Home: Apply to Be a Resident Advisor!

APPLICATIONS TO SERVE AS RESIDENT ADVISORS OPEN JANUARY 4, 2017

Do you have what it takes to be a resident advisor (RA)? RAs help to create a sense of community and a feeling of belonging among the more than 400 graduate students who live in the four GSAS residence halls. They serve as facility liaisons, advisors, mediators, and event planners, organizing social events throughout the year, including an ambitious series of welcoming events that orient newcomers to Harvard and—for international students—to the United States.

The RA application goes live on Wednesday, January 4, 2017, and closes at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, February 1, 2017 (you can access the application from the Resident Advisor section at gsas.harvard.edu/student-life/housing-dining). Compensation includes a room in the residence halls and 10 meals a week at the Dudley Café.

Learn More
Questions? Contact gsasreslife@fas.harvard.edu or 617-495-5060.
Radcliffe Institute Events

American Amnesia: Forgetting What Made Us Prosper
December 1, 2016, 4:15 p.m.
Knafel Center, 10 Garden Street, Cambridge

Jacob S. Hacker, the Stanley B. Resor Professor of Political Science and director of the Institute for Social and Policy Studies at Yale University, will discuss the importance of an effective public sector to America's health, wealth, and well-being and explore why so many of our economic and political leaders seem to have forgotten this perspective. He will explain these concepts in the context of recent political events, the historic 2016 election, and changing ideas about government itself. Register online at www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/event/2016-garth-risk-hallberg-lecture.

Still Time to See Wendy Jacob Exhibition at the Radcliffe Institute
Through January 14, 2017, 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday
Johnson-Kulukundis Family Gallery, Byerly Hall, 8 Garden Street, Cambridge

Wendy Jacob, RI ’05 is an internationally exhibited artist whose work bridges sculpture, invention, and design and explores relationships between art and perceptual experience. Working with vibrating walls, a live-streaming weather report, and architectural models from schools for the blind, Calm. Smoke rises vertically. explores the sensory experience through different modes of subtle perception. Jacob challenges visitors to place touch and movement on an equal footing with sight. www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/event/2016-wendy-jacob-exhibition

The Mahindra Humanities Center

Thursday, December 8, 2016, 6:00 p.m.
The Environment Forum at the Mahindra Center presents
Jedediah Purdy, Robinson O. Everett Professor of Law, Duke University School of Law
“The Politics of Nature in a Time of Political Fear”
Tsai Auditorium S010, CGIS South, 1730 Cambridge Street
Followed by a noontime luncheon for faculty and graduate students with Professor Purdy on Friday, December 9, 2016. RSVP required for the lunch by Monday, December 5, 2016, to mchclunch@fas.harvard.edu. More details at mahindrahumanities.fas.harvard.edu/content/post-natural-nature-writing-and-politics-anthropocene.

The Environment Forum at the Mahindra Center is convened by Robin Kelsey, dean of arts and humanities, and Ian Jared Miller, professor of history.

The Inventor’s Handbook provides an overview of technology development at Harvard and the ways you can interact with OTD.
Pick up a copy in GSAS reception in the Smith Campus Center or read it online at otd.harvard.edu/faculty-inventors/resources.
Don’t Miss!
OUR DUDLEY HOUSE PICKS OF THE MONTH. FOR MORE EVENTS, OUTINGS, AND GATHERINGS, GO TO DUDLEY.HARVARD.EDU/CALENDAR.

Accepting Toys for the Holiday Toy Drive
We invite the GSAS community to donate new unwrapped toys and bring a smile to a child this holiday season! Drop off toys in the box located on the third floor of Dudley House. Suggested cap on individual gifts is $20. Questions? Contact dudleypublicservice@gmail.com.

Dudley Classic Films Presents a Holiday Film Evening
**Friday, December 9, 2016, 6:00 p.m.** The Sound of Music (1965) on the big screen in the Dudley House Common Room. Crisp apple strudel, hot apple cider, Julie Andrews, Captain von Trapp, nuns, Alps, a scheming baroness...and all those children! Irresistible for so many of us...we can’t help it. Great fun and everyone is welcome!

Submit Your Work to the Dudley Review!
**January 15, 2017,** Deadline for Submissions. The Dudley Review is an annual journal for student creative writing, photography, and visual arts. Submit your work for the 2017 edition! Learn more at dudley.harvard.edu/news/submit-dudley-review-0.

Dudley House Ski Trip
**Monday, January 16, 2017, through Thursday, January 19, 2017, and Thursday, January 19, 2017, through Sunday, January 22, 2017** (Dates are tentative). Get out into the powder and catch some vertical motion this January! Head up to Sugarloaf Resort, Maine, on one of two three-day trips during the last week of J-term. Weekday and weekend trips leave from Harvard Square. Each package includes: coach transportation to and from Sugarloaf, three full days of skiing including lessons, three nights of condo accommodation, three restaurant dinners, access to pool, saunas and hot tubs, fitness center and snowshoeing/x-country skiing. If you need to rent equipment (snowboard or skis+poles, and boots), there will be an extra cost. Also, if you have a ski season pass or otherwise don’t want to purchase a ski pass, you can pay less for the package. Ticket cost and sale date TBA. Cash/check only. We do not accept sign-ups by phone or e-mail. Dudley House members may bring a guest. Please download, print and sign the waiver ahead of time. Questions? Contact outings@dudley.harvard.edu.

Mark Your Calendars for Dudley Music Events!
**Friday, December 2, 2016, 7:30 p.m.—**World Music Concert in the Graduate Student Lounge
**Sunday, December 4, 2016, 8:00 p.m.—**Dudley Chorus Concert in Main Dining Room
**Saturday, December 10, 2016, 8:00 p.m.—**Dudley Jazz Concert in Main Dining Room

Dudley House Your Graduate Student Center since 1991
Lehman Hall, Harvard Yard + www.dudley.harvard.edu + 617-495-2255
Faculty Deans James M. Hogle and Doreen M. Hogle + House Administrator Susan Zawalich
Develop the Skills to Succeed

The Dissertation Proposal as Investment
By Cynthia Verba

As many students will attest, the process of writing a compelling and highly-polished dissertation proposal for a fellowship competition can be a demanding task, but one that greatly enhances the prospects of winning a fellowship. Of equal importance, it helps students to identify for themselves and to communicate to others what is most compelling about their project (for tips on this process, see “Writing the Dissertation Proposal” in the November 2016 GSAS Bulletin). What is less well-recognized is that this process is an investment: Once a polished dissertation statement is achieved, students are able to put it to good use at further junctures in the graduate program and beyond; it becomes a vital form of professional development.

At a recent meeting of the GSAS Alumni Association Council, a discussion focused on careers turned to the importance of a strong presentation of the dissertation project and how it could enhance not only fellowship prospects, but also prospects on the job market—whether within or outside of academe. Similarly, at a recent panel discussion on how to get scholarly research published, Sharmila Sen, an editor from Harvard University Press, emphasized that a successful cover letter and proposal to an editor must present a clear and concise account of the topic and why it is important, doing so as early as possible in the writing process—precisely the advice that is to be followed in writing a winning fellowship proposal. As a further benefit, these same skills can be invaluable in enhancing teaching performance.

The points below seek to highlight the vital links between these critical activities.

Affinities between the World of Fellowships and the Job Market

■ The worlds of both fellowships and the job market are highly competitive; there are more people seeking slots than there are available slots. There is a need to seek funding in fellowship competitions. Scientists are increasingly aware that the hard work of writing a strong proposal is an investment, an important head start for building a career, whether in academia or in other arenas.

■ Typically we tend to treat these skills in separate compartments. All too often a strong fellowship proposal is tucked away after the competition is over when it could be put to good use, with modifications, for the next important junctures in professional development. There is a need for all of us to have a greater awareness that the hard work of writing a strong proposal is an investment, an important head start for building a career, whether in academic or in other arenas.

■ People often note that some of the same skills involved in scholarly competitions will serve candidates well who are seeking a nonacademic position. Knowing how to make a compelling and effective case for the strengths of your project can only help when approaching a potential employer in any field.

■ In terms of the academic job search, we have known for some time that there is a shortage of available tenure track jobs. An increasing number of positions are non-ladder and the candidate is back on the job market, along with newly-minted PhDs. Similarly, the increasing number who take postdoctoral positions eventually land up on the job market, making the competition even more challenging for newly-minted PhDs.

■ The selection criteria for both the academic job and the fellowship application both revolve around the dissertation: the sooner the applicant masters a compelling formulation, the better.

■ In this context, students, with the help and expertise of their advisors, need to search for a dissertation topic that they will find personally rewarding, but that will also make a contribution to the field. It also must be a topic that can be accomplished in a timely fashion, and within realistic funding limits.

■ In approaching a potential employer in any field.

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CONTACT
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gsas.harvard.edu/fellowships

After GSAS: The Science of Filmmaking

Valerie Weiss, PhD ’01, medical sciences, is an award-winning director with numerous credits as a producer, writer, and director. But in the late 1990s, she was a student wondering whether she should follow her love of film or dedicate herself to a career in science. Hedging her bets, she enrolled in PhD studies at GSAS, where she joined the Biological and Biomedical Sciences program in the Division of Medical Sciences. But she never let go of her more creative ambitions and found an outlet for them through Dudley House, where she received tremendous support as a Dudley Fellow. In the end, Weiss gained expertise in science that continues to impact her filmmaking today. “Dudley House was a crucial part of my time in graduate school,” Weiss shares, “as well as my path to becoming a film and television director.”

Read more at gsas.harvard.edu/news/stories/science-filmmaking
Upcoming Events at the Office of Career Services

The Office of Career Services (OCS) provides a wide range of services and resources tailored specifically to the needs of master’s and PhD students. Advisors work confidentially with GSAS students on a wide range of career-related issues, from broad self-assessment and decision-making to specific advice on resume, CV, and cover letter preparation for academic and nonacademic job searches. OCS also offers monthly events designed to help graduate students with their professional development.

Business Strategy for Scientists
Tuesday, December 6, 2016, 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., Northwest Labs, B101 (pizza will be served)
Understanding a company’s strategy is critical for an effective job search and successful transition into industry. This workshop is designed to teach bench researchers how scientists develop and execute strategy. Participants will learn how to determine a company’s strategy using the company’s website and will apply basic concepts of business strategy (e.g., identifying stakeholders, determining value proposition, and vision). This workshop is geared toward graduate students pursuing a career in industry or business of science.

Space is limited, and the workshop is open only to GSAS students. Participants are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. Registrants will be provided pre-workshop assignments (time commitment approximately 2-3 hours). Please commit to attending the event and to viewing the requisite videos and reviewing selected company websites before the December 6 meeting. Register through Crimson Careers.

Next Gen PhD: Where PhDs Land and What the Data Say
Thursday, December 8, 2016, 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., Biolabs 1080
This workshop will provide an up-to-date assessment of the current career landscape facing science PhDs. Author Melanie Sinche will share proven strategies for landing potential occupations for advanced degree candidates, along with her research and profiles of science PhDs across a wide range of disciplines. This event is co-sponsored by the FAS Office of Career Services and the FAS Office of Postdoctoral Fellows. GSAS students, RSVP through Crimson Careers.

GSAS: Resume and Cover Letter Webinar
Thursday, January 19, 2017, 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Are you a PhD looking at nonacademic careers? Are you concerned about how to write an effective resume and cover letter? Join this webinar to learn tips on how to tighten and tailor your resume and cover letter to help you land an interview! Please register through Crimson Careers.

Writing Your Way off the Island
Thursday, January 26, 2017, 2:00 to 4:00 p.m., Dudley House Common Room
Speaking of the titular hero of the musical Hamilton, its creator Lin-Manuel Miranda remarked that “this is a guy who wrote his way out of his circumstances from the get-go.” He points out that Hamilton’s writings were what got him off the island and into the city where he wanted to be. Manuel suggests that Hamilton’s story is about “writing your way out of your circumstances, writing the future you want to see for yourself.” How can writing be used as a vehicle for change? How can writing help you to craft a bridge between where you are now and where you would like to be? “Writing Your Way off the Island” will feature a panel of speakers whose academic and professional lives have been changed by writing, including Suzanne Smith, director of the Center for Writing and Communicating Ideas. Please register through Crimson Careers.

CONTACT
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54 Dunster Street
Phone: 617-495-2595
ocs.fas.harvard.edu/gsas-advising

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Heather Law, Assistant Director, Graduate Student and PhD Advising
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Get Out
EXPLORATIONS AND ADVENTURES ON AND OFF CAMPUS

▷ Start the New Year with a Laugh
Send off 2016 with a laughter-filled New Year’s Eve at Improv Boston! Choose from one of six comedy shows, beginning with a 4:00 p.m. family show and ending with a 10:00 p.m. 21+ show with a champagne toast. Improv Boston’s acclaimed National Touring Company will keep you laughing with improvised scenes, quirky characters and audience participation that will make sure 2016 is a year to remember. All shows include party hats, favors and interactive comedy countdowns. Learn more at www.improvBoston.com/nye.

JANUARY@GSAS
JANUARY 9–20, 2017

Make the Most of JANUARY@GSAS!
Explore Events, Seminars, and Workshops
January@GSAS provides numerous opportunities for graduate students to acquire essential research and professional skills, prepare for careers, and master new interests. Work on your writing at the Bureau of Study Counsel’s Write@5 Linden events or take part in a Fellowship Proposals Boot Camp. Get ready to teach during the Bok Center Winter Teaching Week. Advance your research skills.

Find out what’s available and sign up at gsas.harvard.edu/january.