

Being in the Minority in Graduate School

Things to think about as you are applying for graduate school:

- 1) Know yourself. Prioritize what is important in a graduate program for you. Is it the program's overall prestige? Is it specific research or clinical opportunities? How important are geographic considerations and being close to family?
- 2) Try to assess the general level of support in the graduate program. Do students work together or are they competitive? Typically you will need to visit and talk to students to be able to assess this one.
- 3) Explore what the broader campus and community are like. Will you have access to cultural opportunities that are important to you?
- 4) Don't limit yourself to programs where research on diversity issues is being done. There are programs that you will be comfortable that do not have such active programs of research.
- 5) Ask questions at your graduate interview about how faculty, students and the department, in general, addresses diversity issues. Remember you are interviewing the program just as much as they are interviewing you.
- 6) You may be eligible for specific scholarships or fellowships either through the university or national organizations (see handout with specifics for NIU). Do your homework.

Things to consider doing once you are in graduate school:

- 1) There are many universals about how to succeed at graduate school. For example, be organized, set goals and work toward them, and work collaboratively with others.
- 2) Most students, regardless of minority status, find it important to have a support network. This may be your fellow first year students; older students in the program; or it an organized group in the department or on campus. It also might be all of the above. Some students have mentioned they have gravitated to such formal and informal groups that are of others like them; while others have emphasized that it was important to give all their peers a chance and see how they respond when diversity issues arise.
- 3) Many students from an ethnic background have indicated it is important to maintain their cultural identity. If you are one of only a few students who are from a specific background, you may find you need to turn to the community to do this. One Latina grad student told us how she started watching Spanish language television during graduate school, despite never watching it before.
- 4) Maintain or make connections with senior scholars who have a similar background. These individuals have been in your shoes and can give helpful advice on ways to handle issues that may arise and be an added guide to your professional development.
- 5) Consider getting on the listservs of some national professional organizations. They can provide you broader information of what is going on in the field (e.g., Association of Black Psychologists; National Latino Psychology Association). There are also groups focused on ethnic minorities within national and state-level organizations(e.g., American Psychological Association).