

Professional Student's Strategy for Perpetual Funding at CMU

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May 14, 1993
CMU-CS-93-000

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This research was partially supported by the School of Computer Science and monitored by the Assistant Dean on her own time at no expense to the university.

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Keywords: Perpetual funding, Black Friday, N-1, buckling down.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank the Department of Computer Science faculty for teaching me to be patient in the face of adversity, when awaiting the results of the semiannual evaluation of all students at which the faculty reviewed my progress toward the Ph.D. Having spent the past 20+ years as a graduate student, I have come to hold the Black Friday rite of passage very dear, and owe a debt of gratitude to each and every faculty member for taking the time to teach me this valuable lesson. I would especially like to thank Professor Mary Shaw for her contributions in the preparation of this document.

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- Year 1** Pass 2 courses¹, ignore advisor. Get "work harder" letter.
- Year 2:** Pass 3 courses, spin exciting fantasy about the impact of the work you might do. Advisor gets excited.
Get "we hope your topic works out" letter.
- Year 3:** Pass 1 course, fail 1 course, write some code.
Get "your research looks promising, but pass some courses" letter.
- Year 4:** Fall: Teach; claim teaching took all your time.
Get "OK, now time to do your research" letter.
Spring: Pass 1 course, fail 1 course, fiddle with code.
Get "N-1 letter.
- Year 5:** Change advisors and area. Pass 1 course.
Get "well, it will take a while to get up to speed in new area" letter.
- Year 6:** Serve on admissions committee.
Get "Thanks for serving, but it's time to buckle down" letter.
- Year 7:** Create confusion about advisors.
No advisor -> no Black Friday letter in Fall.
This is discovered in spring; another N-1 letter.
- Year 8:** Your cat dies. The resulting personal anguish impedes progress.
Get "well, one more time" letter.
- Year 9:** Pass last course. Write some code. Outline thesis proposal.
Get "propose next semester" letter.
- Year 10:** Fall: Hack on advisor's demo.
Get "Thanks, but propose next semester" letter.
Spring: Advisor on leave. Forgets to send letter to Black Friday meeting.
- Year 11:** Experiments invalidate thesis topic.
Get "better luck with next topic" letter.
- Year 12** 5 PM day before Black Friday - 60 pages of text to advisor saying it's draft of new thesis proposal.
Get "we look forward to your thesis proposal next semester" letter.

¹really expert students also fail one course