Introduction to Special Issue
“Maintaining Sanity in Graduate School”

“Maintaining Sanity in Graduate School: A Brief Commentary on the Significance of Informal Networks”, was a crisis piece for us. Having found ourselves worn down by the daily grind of graduate school, we submitted a reflection piece to The Geographical Bulletin with the hope that it would stimulate discussion among graduate students pertaining to effective coping strategies. At that time we had no idea what insightful comments this topic would generate, we merely wanted to engage with students beyond our own university regarding critical issues that often go overlooked and unspoken.

We also hoped that by crossing disciplinary boundaries that we would elucidate the importance of collective struggles of graduate students – regardless of field of study. This dialogue however, should reach beyond graduate students and we are grateful that this roundtable project was recognized by the Association of American Geographers and that Beth Schlemper has contributed research collected as part of the “Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education (EDGE) in Geography” project.

Overall, we are more than pleased with the responses to our call for papers. The works presented in this roundtable touch on many of the same issues as our own submission. Each paper addresses the significance of informal as well as professional networks in maintaining sanity during graduate school. For some, such networks are crucial when seeking advice pertaining to time management or teaching. Others reflect on the value of such networks for international students, remarking on the significance of organizations at their academic institutions such as the International Student Office.

In addition, our piece represents a personal reflection of our own challenges to remember what brought us to graduate school and to rekindle the excitement that one initially feels when beginning graduate studies. We can perhaps do no better, however, than to reference Anaz’s piece in this issue which equates a graduate career with a marriage: “That fire won’t burn as bright in the eighth semester as it did the first, but the ember is still there, as hot as ever, if a little less volatile. A crush, in many cases, does not last long. Love does.”

It is our heartfelt desire that this special issue provide solace and assistance to those continuing to struggle to maintain a passionate engagement in their work and some semblance of a personal life while obtaining graduate degrees. We have enjoyed reading each of these pieces and are thankful to Steve Schnell for allowing this roundtable to take place.

Amanda Fickey and Erin Pullen
University of Kentucky
Guest Editors