The University of Alberta is considered second home to most graduate students. Most of our waking hours are spent on campus for our research, teaching obligations and meetings. However, at some point in our graduate studies some of our responsibilities may be completed off-campus.

For example, while studying for your candidacy examination or writing your dissertation, your presence on campus is not imperative and you may choose to do these tasks at an alternative location.

Regardless of the reasons for being off-campus, you are still obligated to report and discuss your progress with your supervisor and abide to the Department’s and FGSR’s rules of students’ conduct. This article aims to bridge the gap on how to be away from campus and at the same time connect successfully with the obligations on-campus.

### Tips

1. **Prepare yourself**
   
   For a smooth transition away from campus some advanced preparations are needed. Most important is to discuss the option with your supervisor and some matters to iron out include: goals, duration, funding, modes of communication and respective responsibilities. Other things to consider include: your new study space and equipment/resources that you will need while being off-campus (such as internet access or local library access). If you are moving away, you will also need to assess your living arrangement. Think about storage options for your belongings and where you will stay when you return to campus for meetings.

2. **Off-campus status**
   
   By being off-campus, you may be eligible for reduced fees. This fee assessment is different from the usual calculations. For example, GSA health/dental plan is still eligible to paying students who live off-campus, while certain usage of facilities, such as access to the Van Vliet Centre or the Health Centre, may be restricted. Please consult with your department or the FGSR.
   
   - [http://www.gradstudies.ualberta.ca/regfees/registration/offcampus.htm](http://www.gradstudies.ualberta.ca/regfees/registration/offcampus.htm)
   - [http://www.gradstudies.ualberta.ca/gradmanual/6.25.html](http://www.gradstudies.ualberta.ca/gradmanual/6.25.html)

3. **Communication, communication, communication**
   
   This is extremely important. In order to have a successful long-distance learning experience, you will still need to connect and establish the on-going relationships with your academic peers: supervisors, team-mates and colleagues. Exploit whatever communication outlets that you have, for example: **teleconferencing**, **emails**, **online chats**, and **videoconferencing**. Remember that the other side needs to be mutually comfortable with the type of communication method that you have selected. There is no point pushing for videoconferencing if he/she does not own the appropriate tools for it. Be aware that the Centre for Teaching and Learning offers all students/academics eClass Live which enables users to have live chats and white-board mark-up abilities if you want both parties to be able to see and write on existing documents.

4. **Progress report**
   
   One of the things that you may want to discuss during your communication sessions with your campus group is your progress. For example, most supervisors will be happy to hear of your weekly/biweekly report and this may lead to further advice and direction. This step also ensures that both of you still have the same common
goals. It is also advisable to keep a written record of the conversation. Emails are great because they can be saved and used for future referencing.

5. Networking and travelling back to campus
Depending on the nature of your collaborations, you may be required to travel back to campus occasionally. This is not unreasonable, considering that you are still a part of the campus learning community and networking with your peers is also an important part of your academic career. Plan ahead so that you can be as productive as possible while on campus. For example, if there is a seminar that you are attending, schedule in a progress report meeting with your supervisor on that day too. Planning ahead may also be economical for those who are travelling from out of town. For example, organize carpooling, purchase students’ ticket packs from bus companies or shop early for discount airline tickets.

- http://redarrow.ca
- http://greyhound.ca
- http://www.aircanada.com
- http://www.westjet.com

6. Keep copies of your work:
With some travelling/relocating on your agenda, it is a good idea to make additional copies of your work and data. Perform frequent back-ups on your computer and store data on separate storage devices such as: CDs, DVDs, memory sticks, an external hard drive or simply email the most recent draft copy of your work to yourself. Ask yourself the question, what if I lost access to my computer (stolen, lost, or crashed).

7. Off-campus resources
While being away, you may still be able to connect to some of the on-campus services provided. For example, the U of A library offers off-campus access to their database and eJournals (http://www.library.ualberta.ca/remote). You may also access the computer in your office or lab remotely via the “Remote Desktop Connection” feature on your home computer. To do this, you mainly will need permission from your supervisor and the I.P address of the work computer. Seek out this possibility with the I.T technician in your department or consult with AICT. (https://www.aict.ualberta.ca).

8. Sense of belonging
Sometimes, long-distance learning can be lonely and may blur your expectations of being a student. While away from campus you may feel that you do not belong to that community anymore but still carry student obligations. Stave off any mixed feelings by focusing on your goals. If you are away from campus to write your dissertation, make writing your main goal. Remember to also communicate frequently with your peers and colleagues, who may provide support and encouragement towards your goals. Also seek support from your friends, family and the community.

9. International students
You are still enrolled as a student at the University of Alberta; therefore, it is imperative that you study permit is up-to-date.

Other Resources
- Off-campus counselling services: http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/counselling/off_campus_referrals.cfm