As I prepared for graduate school, I interviewed a number of faculty and other professionals about their own graduate school experience. I noticed a commonly recurring phrase: “It was both challenging and interesting.” Having recently completed my master’s degree at the University of Wyoming, I now understand why almost all the interviewees felt the same way. Graduate education can be very challenging. To be successful, an individual needs to have the right mindset, discipline, endurance, and aptitude for scholarship. In this article, I list a few things that can be initially frustrating as a graduate student and how it can be an advantage when approached with the right attitude.

Academic standards for graduate education in the U.S. are high. In most institutions, one is required to take courses and conduct rigorous research for both master’s and Ph.D. programs. In addition, the grading scale is tough; and for those of us on a graduate assistantship, we are expected to maintain a minimum of 3.0 cumulative GPA (80% on average). In most countries, 80% is equivalent to a GPA of 4.0. This can be overwhelming, especially during the first semester as an international student in the U.S.

However, international students should remember that prospective advisers and graduate schools review student application packages and determine whether they have the prerequisites for the program of study before admitting them. This should convince all graduate students that it takes to excel. Attending classes regularly, reviewing materials and relevant books, keeping up with assignments and asking questions in class or scheduling appointments with instructors when you do not understand something will greatly help. Conducting thorough literature reviews before initiating your thesis research, keeping constant communication with major adviser and research committee, and engaging other scientists with expertise on your research will broaden your expertise.