

Oliver's nightmares

A few weeks after coming to (this job) in Autumn 2009 I had my PhD Viva and was failed. I was as shocked as my supervisors, but I made a successful appeal to the independent adjudicator for higher education, who has allowed me a year to rewrite and new examiners. They found lots of irregularities about how my university set up my Viva, including the choice of a chief examiner who had never examined a phd in his life! Also neither of the two examiners knew anything about my subject areas. I only got that decision in December 2011, which means I have this year to write it. I now know from taking advice from other academics that I had really terrible supervision as well through all my part time years.

The problem remains of not having good supervisors. On advice taken I requested new supervisors to take me through this last year, but because I had acted morally in not pointing the finger and criticizing them or anyone else. So the adjudicator has given me the same supervisors back! They were also responsible for the awful choice of examiners, whereas they should have chosen examiners who would be sympathetic to my thesis. When my research proposal was accepted in 2001 so I could begin my research, it was accepted by the research degrees committee as a 3 subject project. Neither they nor my supervisors ever suggested it should not be three. Indeed, in 2005 the same committee and my supervisors passed it to progress from Masters level to a PhD, they were so pleased with the work I was doing.

But since I saw my supervisors post the Viva and the adjudicators' decision to let me have another chance, my supervisors are insisting that I make fundamental changes more in line with the examiners' assertion that it should be one subject in depth. I do not have to totally cut out two subjects, but I have to pare them down. I will also have to update my material because of the huge time lapse now since I submitted it. The new examiners are not to be told anything about this fail. Given that my thesis is based on 3 years of fieldwork based on 3 subjects, and all my literature searches, and also given that I first submitted my thesis to the examiners in 2007, it is a horrendous task. Other academics have also said that it is very unfair to try and fundamentally change it at this stage.

Of course I am wondering why my supervisors did not give me all this advice a long time ago, and I regularly have nightmares about it now.

I do not think there is much point in trying to go back to the adjudicators because they have a very rigid system requiring any new complaints to be treated as a new appeal, which would probably take another two years. My heart is broken because I devoted so much of my life to it and I have not too many more years to play with, I put on hold so many other things in my life and isolated myself to do the work.

Anyway, millions of people round the world have a life of great suffering, and so I

know that really my life is very blessed....

Thanks for reading this.

Team task

What lessons are there here for

- 1. Phd students**
 - 2. Supervisors, and**
 - 3. Institutions?**
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