



Ph.D. 's-To-Be

Pearls of Wisdom



BRUCE FERGUSON:

I'd say that the time that doubts most severely attack students is during the writing of the thesis. I've found over the years that, particularly women tend to begin to doubt that their work is good enough. Men on the other hand are often way too confident! So when they are writing, they need a lot more support than at other stages.

Other than that, there's never been a more exciting time to be in the field – lots of hot issues and most are acknowledged as issues. So I hope they have a ball!



CATHY HUMPHREYS:

My 'pearl' is maybe more costume jewellery or bling.

At the beginning of your PhD write down all the reasons why you decided to take this momentous step to leap into research and poverty for several years. Many students waste months/years with existential angst about 'why am I doing this' and 'what is the meaning of it all'. On reflection, at the end of the PhD, usually the reasons for doing it at the end are the same reasons you decided to do it in the beginning. It is good to not spend too much time 'en route' dealing with the meaning of life, but taking a more pragmatic view of the project and the job to be done.



CHRIS WEKERLE:

Remember that the Ph.D. thesis is a single course credit. Your committee members are there to help, so keep them updated over time and, yes, the thesis tends to go over time (and feels like on and on and on and will this thing ever be in good enough shape? ugh, aaah, jeesh, Scottie beem me up, help me Jesus...I need a miracle...aah, ugh, jeez!!!!)...and on these days, remember the sun shines for you, go out and enjoy it!



COLLEEN DAISY ECCLES:

When I started my doctorate many years ago I was given a book called "How to get a PhD" Phillips and Pugh. In it, it says one way not to get a PhD is to get distracted by changing jobs before you finish. I am one of those people who lives in the real world and I had to get another job or be without work and income!!! I am still trying to finish and am determined to overcome this and other obstacles - so I guess a top tip would be to never give in if you want a life which will need the status and skills of a PhD

My other top tip would be to ignore the book by Phillips and Pugh!



DEB CANTRELL:

My words of wisdom are simply these: savour every moment you have to be in the company of like-minded souls whose idealism will be renewed from the process and the possibilities. Also, make a pact to stay in touch with a few long after your journey concludes - this will sustain you.



DEBORAH GOODMAN:

As Thomas Edison best said, "Sticking to it is the genius". Buy the biggest, largest, most gigantic roll of dental floss you can. You'll look at it and think, "There's no way I'll ever use all of that". But if every day you take a little piece of it, one day, some day, in the future, that roll will come to an end. The PhD is like that – break off and do little pieces. The whole is too enormous to think about; so do small, manageable, achievable pieces. Sometimes that is getting a word on a page, sometimes it is finalizing an entire paragraph, sometimes it is reading a really, really dense article, or submitting a chapter. Put the parts together over time and viola` - you have a paper, a comp, a thesis! The PhD is a part of your life – don't make it your life – so rebalance when it starts to become more of the later than the former. And NEVER NEVER compare your Ph.D, journey to anyone else's PhD journey – each one is unique – each has bumps, smooth sailing and highpoints – personal and professional.



FIONA ARNEY:

Diseases to watch out for include:

1. Fraud Paranoia
2. Reading Depression
3. Never-Ending Story Delirium
4. Motion Sickness
5. Been there, Done That Illness
6. Pre-emptive-Strike Syndrome

An important tip is to have a great therapist (Supervisor/s) who will help alleviate these symptoms!

- It would be to have a t-shirt that reads "don't ask me about my thesis",
- Towards the start of the journal is something about re-discovering what it feels like to sleep in until 9 or 10 and to work all day in your jim jams with the Young and the Restless on in the background
- And that somewhere towards the end of the journal at the 2 year, 360 day mark you have the milestone "discovery of publication about study exactly like mine - argh!!!"



HEATHER SPIELVOGLE:

- Everyone has writer's block from time to time. Try not to get discouraged sometimes it takes several days of just sitting at the computer without writing to "gear up" for the writing.
- Put together a file with sample dissertations in your research area. Choose dissertations that range in quality (remember, each of those dissertations "passed"). Learn from each example what you would like to do the same or differently.
- In general, I would echo the input about peer support and learning.
- Listening to others' perspectives of the same issues can bring great insight. When you experience a sticking point, it can be helpful to draw on the support of your peers who may be in the same boat.



IAN MANION:

- It is not a race, take the time to get what you really want out of your program
- Balance in everything is a good thing to practice, even in graduate school
- Mentors are invaluable, don't limit yourself to just one



JEANINE WEBBER:

There will always be something else to do but don't forget to do something at least once per week to take care of yourself such as taking time to have lunch/coffee with a friend, watching a movie, working out



KATHARINE DILL:

Laughing is the best way to get through and laughing with friends makes it even better.



KATHRYN HIGGINS:

- Learn to take advice from critical friends in a really positive way - first few drafts can be a bit hard on the ego, but it is usually a way better draft in the end!
- It is hard to let go when you are close to submission day - make it the very best you can but remember it will never be pure perfection so let it go..
- Avoid gratuitous use of the worlds furthermore, however, moreover too much - it is a killer to read through
- Try not to let it take over your life the whole time - have a bit of craic throughout!!



LEAH BROMFIELD:

I wholeheartedly agree with all of the practical and reality checking advice - wish I had the benefit of this wisdom before I did my dissertation. My 'pearl' for what it is worth

You would not have been offered a PhD place if you were not incredibly intelligent and competent - you are able to do this. But a PhD is a long process and it is hard to be brilliant all the time! It's completely normal to get stuck or to procrastinate at times. It is also totally normal to have moments of self doubt when thoughts of "I'm a fraud, why did I think I could do this, I must have been crazy" prevail. Treat these as the normal occurrence that they are, have your go to strategies that work for you in getting back on track, and find yourself a peer or a mentor who will give you the you are competent and intelligent and capable reality check when needed! I would also put great faith in the restorative powers of a glass of wine with supportive friends! Good luck. And for some light relief when needed try www.phdcomics.com



SARAH BEATTY:

1. Stay focused on your thesis topic on all of your class projects.

You may be thinking that this will get a little boring, but it doesn't! This helps in expanding your thoughts about your topic in different ways. It adds depth to your comp and thesis proposal.

2. Interview all potential eligible professors as a thesis supervisor.

Get to know who the full/ associate professors are at the University, as you will need to select one as a thesis supervisor. Ask upper year students about their experiences with the professor (e.g., thesis supervisor, RAships, class professor).

3. Ask questions.

This may be simple point to surviving the first year, but critical!

There are seriously no silly questions - ask away. After all, that is what researchers do - they ask questions and seek answers.

4. Your cohort/ classmates are a huge support.

The upper years of the doctoral program can get lonely when you are writing your thesis therefore it is important to establish positive working relationships with classmates during the first year. They will be your support system throughout the first year -- remind you why you are doing this on so little sleep ;o)

5. "Never miss a movie because of your dissertation".

One of my professors told me that the advice she gives to first year students is to "never miss a movie because of your dissertation." You can't give up everything that you love because of this program. Take the process in strides... enjoy life, along with academics. However, child welfare professionals already know that too well! :o)



TANYA MORTON:

I would agree to ignore the book by Phillips and Pugh! I found it did not need to be as long as it is and was very repetitive. I would also say that to hopefully prevent any drifting, to be clear and directive to your committee about the kind of help and support you need and what you want to get out of your program



TERRY CHENG:

Don't forget to breath and laugh along the way.