

The FORUM

The Newsletter of the SPSP Graduate Student Committee

Summer 2009

We all learned early in our graduate careers that summer is not a vacation time, it's a working time! For many of you, the summer will entail preparing application materials for the impending job search. This issue of the FORUM is devoted to advice for job seekers, from the valuable experience you can gain by mentoring undergraduates to various types of jobs, both academic and non-academic, you should consider. Even if you are not going on the job market this summer or fall, the information in these articles should be a useful guide for years to come.

The road frequently traveled, but less talked about: Non-academic jobs for PhD's

We've all sat through one of those meetings. You know the one I'm talking about. The nausea-inducing meeting where faculty members say things like, "Well you could just postpone your graduation," "Exactly how many publications do you have?" and my personal favorite, "Well there are...other... options." A statement which is generally followed by some mumbled reference to government jobs, statistics, and before you know it, silence falls over the room. Yes, we've all been there.

Let's face it – now more than ever, we need to start expanding our horizons in terms of job prospects. University budgets are being slashed and job postings are being cancelled. We need to dispel the collective myth that our skill set is only relevant in the academic setting and realize that taking a different career path could yield

life-changing results. Taking a job outside of academia does not mean you have to abandon your love of research or your passion for writing. I'm sure there are even non-academic jobs out there that would be willing to offer you that 70 hour work week you were so looking forward to! In all seriousness, it is time to stop talking about alternative career paths as if they represent worst case scenarios or personal failures, and time to start using our research skills to investigate the diversity of options that the 'real world' has to offer us.

A quick search on the internet yielded dozens of helpful websites. Here are just a few of the best to get you started.

APA Online: Great section on non-academic careers for scientific psychologists, complete with profiles of shiny, happy people who left the 'ivory tower' and haven't looked

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Job Alternatives within Academia

One viable (and somewhat popular) option for people with social/personality psychology PhDs is searching for jobs in departments other than psychology, and they have found jobs in almost every academic department.

Results from a recent survey suggested many currently employed social/personality psychologists applied to multiple departments after graduation. Outside of psychology, the departments receiving the most applications were Medicine, Public Health, Management, and Communication. Following is a summary of the similarities and differences between psychology and these other departments.

Job Qualifications

Medical School: More emphasis is placed on research qualifications and less on teaching. While research applicable to the specific department is desirable, one could obtain a job relying primarily on methodological skills.

Public Health: Application of your research is critical. There is also more emphasis on research than teaching.

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Expanding Your Horizons: International Jobs

If you are thinking about broadening your job search to include international positions, keep reading for some basic things to keep in mind.

Starting your search. As in the US, international positions are announced via the listservs and websites. Some countries also maintain postings of position openings at all institutions that can be searched by discipline (e.g., www.jobs.ac.uk/). Position announcements can also be found on the websites of national associations, either those specific to psychology or more general ones (e.g., www.eaesp.org/). Exploring these options before you begin your job search will help you get a sense of available opportunities.

Translating. Communication is essential to securing and fulfilling a position, yet English is so ubiquitous in the US that you might not consider what it would be like to participate in the academy elsewhere. At some institutions, instruction is only conducted in that country's official language; at other institutions, some classes are in English and you may be given a grace period to learn the country's official language; some institutions may never ask you to teach in a language other than English. Even in other English-speaking countries it is important to keep in mind that there are cultural differences in language use and meaning (e.g., lecturer in the UK is equivalent to associate professor in the US). Familiarize yourself with the terms so you can determine the positions for which you are eligible.

Knowing your audience. Spend some time researching how applications are evaluated in the locations you are considering. Just as it is important to tailor your cover letter to the specific institutions, it is also important to find out if international institutions expect additional or different components in an application packet. Much of this information should be available in the job posting, but time spent learning the subtle differences may give you an edge over other foreign applicants. If you are unsure of what is being requested, contact someone for clarification.

Operator, operator. Phone interviews are increasingly common, even for domestic positions. Although many foreign institutions

arrange visits for those on their shortlists, it is likely that they will conduct a phone interview first. Presenting oneself on the phone is different from doing so face-to-face. Do you tend to mumble or speak too softly or quickly? Practicing will alert you to these things and help avoid an embarrassing interview.

Going to the source. Contacting someone who has successfully acquired an academic position outside the US will be extremely helpful. Have graduates of your program obtained positions abroad? Does your mentor have international colleagues? Chances are someone that you know has a connection that you can develop. Network, network, network!

by Nicole Noll

Raffle Winners

The GSC would like to thank everyone that took the time to complete our feedback survey in April. Your opinions and comments are truly an invaluable resource in our strivings to improve the graduate student services. All responses were read personally by Austin Lee Nichols (President) and Helen Lee Lin (Past-President), and we are planning to implement many of the suggestions throughout the next year.

Now please join us in congratulating the winners of the raffle for six SPSP memberships!

Roxanne Aubin - University of Quebec in Montreal (Université du Québec à Montréal)

Mark Brandt - DePaul University

Courtney Gosnell - University of California - Santa Barbara

Leah Hamilton - University of Western Ontario

Shannon Holleran - University of Arizona

Kelley Robinson - University of Manitoba

Non-academic jobs, cont.

back! http://www.apa.org/science/nonacad_careers.html

APS Observer: Agata Gluszek wrote a fantastic article on the decision to leave academia complete with helpful links to help you explore your career options. <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/getArticle.cfm?id=2488>

Life After Graduate School in Psychology: Insider's Advice from New Psychologists. Edited by Robert D Morgan, Tara L Kuther, Corey J Habben.

This is a great book which explores the array of career opportunities for psychologists from academics to business and industry. <http://www.psyppress.com/9781841694108>

Dana Landis from the UCLA Career Centre put together a phenomenal PowerPoint presentation on "Using your PhD in the Non-Academic Job Search." <http://www.postdoc.ucla.edu/files/DanaLandisPPT.pdf>

By Kathleen Fortune

Mentoring Honours Students

While professors are often expected to supervise undergraduate students and you may have some working in your lab, as a graduate student you may have the opportunity to supervise honours students yourself. There are many benefits of supervising an honours student. They are usually eager to get involved in research, and so don't mind doing much of the legwork of data collection. Additionally, these students are constantly exposed to new information in their classes, and might suggest some interesting new ideas for your research. Finally, if you are interested in a faculty position, supervising students, both undergraduate and graduate, will be a large part of your job. Supervising an honours student while in graduate school is a good opportunity to see if this is something you enjoy doing, and also a line to add to your CV. However, there are also some dangers. You may be wary delegating your data collection to someone

else – what if they are not as careful as you, or make mistakes? To avoid this, it is important to properly train the student, and also to monitor them throughout the process. While at first thought having a student work on your project can seem like free labour, supervising students can also be time consuming, as you are responsible for that student, and need to train them and then help them along the way. Here are some useful tips for making it an enjoyable & stress-free experience for both you and the student:

- When choosing students to work with you, check references. If they have worked in another lab in your university, ask the graduate student or professor with whom they previously worked, otherwise try to contact a supervisor from a previous job. Someone might look very good on paper but be difficult to work with or unreliable.

- Allow the student to have a part in designing the project. Even for a project which is completely planned out, allow the student to add a measure that they are interested in. This will make the student feel more responsible and personally involved in the project.

- After training the student, follow-up with them on a regular basis. Let them know that you are always open if they have any questions or need any help.

- Don't take on too many! It may be tempting to think of these students as free labour, but that is not the case, as you are responsible for them.

by Marina Milyavskaya

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The layout was created by Camille Johnson.*

President's Corner

by Austin Lee Nichols

On behalf of the new GSC, I want to express to all our graduate colleagues how excited we are to serve you and that we are committed to making the most out of the next year. As part of this commitment, I want to briefly present our goals and plans for the coming year.

The goals of the current GSC are to

- Inform graduate students of their job options upon graduation
- Establish an inter-institutional channel for student-to-student mentoring
- Implement a key words system for the SPSP conference program to facilitate finding posters and symposia of interest
- Increase networking among graduate students and faculty

- Provide advice on obtaining a variety of jobs.

In our recent survey, we asked you to tell us about the topics you were most interested in. The top five topics of interest were statistical methodology, pursuing and securing funding, job market materials, interviewing for jobs, and alternatives to academia. In addition, students raised concerns regarding SPSP being too busy. Therefore, we plan to provide you with more information and opportunities throughout the year. The current issue of the FORUM is the first step in providing students with this information. Other issues of the FORUM will also cover other topics important to graduate students. We also plan to begin a regular list of funding and

job opportunities. At SPSP, we are planning a preconference with the SPSP Training Committee aimed at providing students with a variety of job options available with a PhD in Social/Personality Psychology and the information necessary to choose between the options and successfully obtain the job of your choice. We are also working on designing a symposium to provide students with information regarding funding opportunities and tips.

In all, we are planning to do many new things this year to provide graduate students with the knowledge and opportunity to make the most out of their graduate school years and beyond. Please feel free to email us at spspgsc@yahoo.com or contact us directly with any comments or suggestions.

Alternatives within Academia

Management: Similar qualifications exist, yet more emphasis is placed on ability to discuss research to non-experts.

Communication: The qualifications are very similar, yet your research should apply to communication.

Application Process

Medical School: The process is less formal, and there tends to be a rolling application process. They typically look at one applicant at a time rather than comparing many at once. Job talks are generally not required, and theory is not as highly valued.

Public Health: Some schools follow a similar process while

others are more like the Medical school process.

Management: The process is essentially identical, with tweaks to materials to apply research and interests to management. However, schools often have people in mind for jobs, so social networks are important. Also, your research talk must appeal to many different people.

Communication: The process is very similar to management. In addition, it is likely you will be asked to teach a class during the interview process.

Life in the Job

Medical School: Life is similar, but salary and resources are likely much better. Tenure may be based

more on funding.

Public Health: Salary is better, but resources are likely limited. More emphasis is placed on service. Funding expectations are similar.

Management: Salary is much higher, yet resources (i.e., lab space) are scarce. Tenure is based more on teaching and research exposure (media attention). Departments are generally run like a business.

Communication: You will likely have to teach more, and tenure is based less on a large number of publications. The department is diverse, and graduate students are often happy (they easily find jobs). Salary and resources may be less.

by Austin Lee Nichols