



August 10, 2020

Welcome – thank you for joining us today! The meeting slides and recording will be posted online. You can change your name for anonymity. You can type questions/comments in the Q&A and we will do our best to address them. For general discussion, please use the chat (select “All panelists and attendees”).

What I wish I had known about doing a PhD



Julie Lee
(Neuroscience,
UCL)



Melanie Silverman
(Clinical psychology,
Fordham U.)



Jonny Coutinho
(Neuroscience,
Queen's U.)



Emily Diaz
(Biomedical science,
UCSD)

**Thank you for the excellent
suggestions for discussion!**

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While PhD students share many common experiences, every individual's journey is unique. Gaining insights from a number of different people can help paint a more complete picture of PhD life.

Choosing and applying to PhD programs

- Why pursue a PhD?
- Deciding “which research interest to pursue” and “criteria to use to decide where to apply”
 - Figuring out “the best ways to be a competitive applicant”
- Navigating the application process
 - “How can we stand out from a large pool of applicants?”
- Preparing for interviews and “what the program faculty (and your potential advisor in that program) are looking for during interviews”
- Finding “the right fit for you” and your “best fit advisor”

A couple resources on these topics:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/art-selecting-graduate-program>

<https://www.princetonreview.com/grad-school-advice/choosing-a-school>

A day in the life of a PhD student

- Finding your footing in your program/lab
 - “How to come up with a thesis project” and staying on track to graduate
- Gaining the skills you need to complete your PhD
 - Practical skills (e.g. stats, Python, R, presenting), academic writing – “Is lacking these skills in advance a major hindrance or will students be able to get the hang of it?”
- Building a support system
 - “Did you feel other PhD students in your same program/lab were supportive or competitive?”
- Networking and making connections

A couple resources on these topics:

<https://phdlife.warwick.ac.uk/2018/08/29/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-phd-student-part-1/>

<https://biotech.ucdavis.edu/news/day-life-phd-student-biomedical-sciences>

Life beyond the lab

- Maintaining work/life balance
 - “marriage/family/having babies”
- Realizing broader impacts of your work and balancing “academic pursuits with tangible change”
- “The Financial Aspects of a PhD”
 - Are you making enough money to get by? Do you/could you work another job part-time?
- Planning for the future
 - “Other than academia/teaching, what other career routes can researchers take/which ones are common?”

A couple resources on these topics:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/nj7654-375a>

<https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2017/05/yes-you-can-have-life-outside-lab>

Biggest challenges as a PhD student

- Dealing with failure and impostor syndrome
 - “How do you overcome failures especially when the experiments that you put a lot of effort into fail?”
- Overcoming interpersonal issues, tensions, biases
- Experiencing “burnout” and staying motivated
 - “How do you keep yourself motivated in terms of having instability in many aspects of a PhD pursuit”
- Where to go for help?

A couple resources on these topics:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03459-7>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2019/10/09/first-generation-phd-student-describes-her-struggles-opinion>

Tips to succeed in a PhD program

- Preparing your future self for success
- Establishing “good study habits or habits in general to help achieve academic success”
- “Tips for separating your self worth from your grades and academic achievements”
 - Taking care of your mental and physical health

A couple resources on these topics:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/caveman-politics/201509/6-insider-tips-new-phd-students>

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07332-x>

A couple more resources

“All About PhD Applications” by Lucy Lai

<https://lucyblogs.wordpress.com/2018/08/02/all-about-phd-applications/>

“Things I wish I’d known from Day 1 of my PhD” compiled by Ya’el Courtney

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Tndw5xkcMLBQYrx62DDusQbSScKqx0qK/view>

Application materials from NYU Psychology students

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1eZ1CMG-bZQIPtB6OkduFy0Qq2-uS-mjH>