



THE GSCHRONICLES

The Official Newsletter of the NIH Graduate Student Community



April 2016



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Upcoming Events

May 8th: Mother's Day
30th: Memorial Day

June 19th: Father's Day
20th: First day of Summer!



Announcements

(Press Ctrl + click on the title to get more information)

[Industry: The Organization of Business](#)

Building 35 Room 620, Apr 26, 2016
11:00 pm - 12:30 am

This workshop will help you be more prepared and savvy during your interviews for industry positions by having a better comprehension of the terms and organizational structures used in business environments.

[Tips for Mentoring a Summer Intern and Leading a Summer Journal Club](#)

Building 35 Room 640, May 02, 2016
1:30 pm - 3:00 pm

This workshop will provide guidance in selecting the right articles, guiding a discussion, and mentoring students on discussing scientific topics. Logistics of running a journal club will also be a topic.

[9th Annual NIH Career Symposium](#)

Natcher Conference Center, Building 45, May 06, 2016 8:30 am - 4:00 pm

The NIH Career Symposium highlights the diversity of career choices available to *your* generation of biomedical researchers.

[Speaking Up: How to Ask for What You Need in the Lab and in Life](#)

Building 10, FAES Classroom 1&2, May 10, 2016 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

This session will help you to explore strategies for communicating your needs in a variety of situations. Learn how to be more assertive, to speak up for yourself, and how to decide when to speak up and when not to.

Management Boot Camp May 2016

May 26, 2016 8:00 am - 5:00 pm AND
May 27 8 am to 5 pm (2-day workshop)

The OITE has developed an intense course to give advanced postdocs and fellows an overview of common management concepts that are not often taught in a lab environment. The topics covered will be applicable to all sectors (academics, industry, non-profits, government, etc.). Prerequisite: Attendance of Workplace Dynamics I-IV.

Planning for Career Satisfaction and Success

Building 1, Wilson Hall, Jun 27, 2016
1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Understand how your personal interests, skills, and values contribute to your future career success.

Job Search Strategies

Building 35, Room 620/630, Aug 02,
2016 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

This session examines the job search as a process that integrates those four key activities to launch an effective job search.

Please **send your publications, awards and graduation, and birthday announcements** to GSChronicles@od.nih.gov for recognition.



Student

Spotlight: Julia

Slocomb

Julia Slocomb
JHU, 3rd year

I belong to the small (but proud!) group of grad students that joined a Baltimore NIH lab. I am in the Neuronal Circuits and Behavior Unit, where I basically play with lasers and brains all day. Our lab studies the neuronal circuits that drive natural behaviors (i.e. feeding, drinking, mating, etc). Ok, now that we have that covered, in order to understand why I do this work you'll need to know how I got here. My path to this area of research was far from traditional.

I graduated college with a B.S. in Biology and had intended to do clinical neuroscience research for a year before applying to medical school in order to become a pediatric neurologist. I was 100% sure about my career path when I started what was supposed to be a year-long research position. However, as I worked in the clinic with neurologists, I gradually realized that I

was asking a lot of questions about the scientific basis for all of the diseases and conditions we were researching. In the blink of an eye, one year turned into five years, and my questions had only grown. I realized during that time that I wanted to pursue a PhD. I joined the Aponte lab at NIDA because we try to answer the very questions I was asking in the clinic. Ultimately I want to help bring research from bench to bedside, by managing the transition of basic research discoveries into clinical research trials.



Featured

Interview:

Dr. Geoff Vargish, Ph.D.



As graduate students, we all know the end is in sight when you begin planning for the big defense that signifies the end of our graduate career. It happens but we rarely get an in-depth look into the process... well, because to know it you have to live it. So before each of us gets to that stage, we did the next best thing – we interviewed one of our very own, Geoff Vargish. Geoff recently defended his dissertation successfully, and we asked him a couple of questions on the dissertation writing process and his defense. Enjoy the pearls of wisdom!

1) Please state your name, GPP program and the recency of your dissertation defense.

Geoffrey Vargish, Brown GPP, March 11th.

2) How would you describe your graduate school experience?

Overall, I had an excellent graduate school experience. There were certainly obstacles along the way but I feel that I was able gain valuable technical expertise and grow as a scientist.

3) What was the time line for defending your dissertation? That is, when did you realize you were ready to defend? Was it a conversation you brought up to your mentor or did it happen organically?

I began to feel that I was ready to defend about 9 months before my actual defense. I felt as though I had enough data probably earlier than that but I wanted to get my first paper submitted before I

started the process of getting my thesis together. The decision came about somewhat organically, although my mentor initiated the conversation.

4) How was the process of writing? In the process of general well-being, how did you take care of yourself during this process?

The process went fairly smooth. I didn't really begin to feel stressed or overwhelmed until the last week or so, when the deadline seemed to be approaching quicker than I anticipated. I focused throughout the process on setting manageable goals/tasks for each day and each week, which I think helped minimize stress while also imparting a sense of accomplishment as I managed to complete each goal/task. There are certainly days when I just didn't feel like writing. However, on those days I tried to focus on other tasks, such as making figures or formatting. That way I was still making progress despite taking a break from the actual writing portion. I also think it's important to make time for extracurricular activities. I found that going to the gym, or even something as simple as making dinner, helped make the process more manageable and allowed me to take my mind off of my thesis, if only for a short time.

5) Did you have a favorite go-to spot to write your dissertation?

My go-to spot was really anywhere but lab. I did a lot of writing at home but also went to the library and, occasionally, a coffee shop to write.

6) What did you find was the most difficult thing about preparing for your defense, and what was the easiest/most fun part of it?

I think the most difficult part was just the uncertainty around the private examination with my committee. It's nearly impossible to predict what they will ask. Ultimately, I think it's important to be confident in the work you've done (while also acknowledging its limitations) and to provide thoughtful answers, drawing on your understanding of the literature.

The most fun aspect of the defense was the actual talk. It's almost a victory lap of sorts. It's truly enjoyable to reflect on all that you've accomplished and have an opportunity to present your work in its entirety.

7) Ph.D. programs have different traditions set up for the dissertation defense, how is it done in your program? Is it a public talk or private talk? Are friends and family allowed? Did you defend at the NIH or at your University campus? Etc

I defended at my university. My defense consisted of a public talk followed by a private examination. Friends and family were allowed at the talk but the

examination was just my thesis committee and me.

- 8) The private defense sounds quite intimidating. How did you feel about it? Did you have any words of wisdom from your PI or other mentors that encouraged you doing into it?**
- While my defense wasn't entirely private, the examination portion was private. Going into the examination, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect but was more curious to hear what my committee thought about my thesis than intimidated. I didn't get any words of wisdom per se, although my mentor did tell my committee to "not let him off easy."

- 9) Would you have done things differently if you were to begin preparing for your defense again?**

I may have started writing a week or two earlier than I did but I'm a procrastinator so having a deadline in the foreseeable future helped me to some extent.

- 10) What words of wisdom would you give to students who are preparing to defend in the next few months?** Make sure to enjoy the day of your actual defense. At that point, you've done everything you possibly can so take it all in and enjoy the experience.

- 11) If you would like to, please share the next phase of your career with us.**

I'll be doing a postdoc. I'm currently in the process of interviewing with different labs.

Comics

How to Write Your Thesis in Ten Minutes a Day

It's that simple!



Step 1. Spend ten minutes each day for the first X number of years filled with anxiety, stress and doubt about whether you'll ever finish your thesis, what you're doing with your life, and whether you made the right decision to come to grad school.

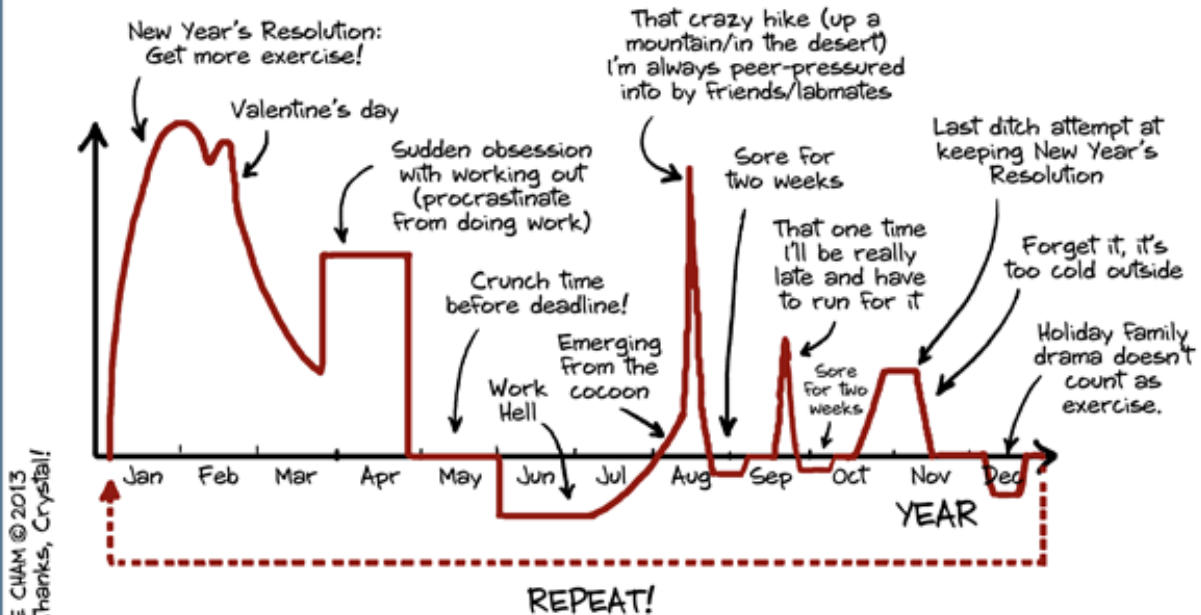


Step 2. On your last year, sleep for ten minutes a day and spend the rest of the time writing your thesis.

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AMOUNT OF EXERCISE I GET OVER THE YEAR:



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Thanks, Crystal!

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