

Collected Musings

Kelly Anne Brown, Jacob Heim, and UC PhD Alumni



What did the PhD mean to you?



“When I started the PhD it meant two things—the prospect of years of study and learning, activities I loved deeply, as well as of achieving a widely recognized and highly respected intellectual status—and when I completed it I realized that holding a doctorate is an incredibly powerful and versatile key for opening doors to relationships and opportunities, both personal and professional.”

Advice for Departments

Impact

- ❑ Help graduate students think about their projects, and their coursework too, in terms of its relevance to serving a greater good. What is the broader moral or ethical relevance of the work we're doing?
- ❑ Focus on how the work happening at the university reaches (can reach/does reach) broader social domains.
- ❑ Assess, and teach how to assess, the value of what we're doing. Evaluation should be a critical component of PhD programs.
- ❑ Facilitate opportunities for interdisciplinary work.

Transferable Skills

Critical thinking

Research skills

Adeptness at using technology

Presentation skills (especially public speaking)

What did the PhD mean to you?



“I never wanted to have a 9-5 job so this was my strategy to avoid that.”

Advice for Departments

Writing & Publication

- ❑ Encourage and teach collaborative writing
- ❑ Encourage graduate students to publish in a variety of fields, on a variety of issues, and all over the place (not just at conferences or on university campuses).
- ❑ Bring graduate students into publications. Single-author pieces are so antiquated.
- ❑ Think creatively about publishing outcomes generally

Transferable Skills

Ability to reflect on alterity—a useful skill that the humanities in particular develops. It's a kind of “mobility” that allows us not to “other the other.” So important in business situations.

- ❑ Difference is something that we are particularly well trained to access, and to convey/represent with metaphor
- ❑ Ability to see an issue from several different perspectives
- ❑ Humanities PhDs have a “wider and deeper perspective” that allows PhDs to think comparatively, and deeply, about culture, language, history, and economics.

What did the PhD mean to you?



“Despite the significant weight the dissertation holds on the academic job market, I look back on my doctoral training more holistically as a time when I hit my professional stride and tipping point: overall, my research, teaching, and service experiences have helped me to embrace career agility, translate my intellectual strengths to a new industry, and prioritize my work-life needs and boundaries.”

Advice for Departments

Teaching

- ❑ Discussion and understanding of why we teach what we teach
- ❑ Provide a certificate of teaching as part of the program—one PhD who is employed (making well over 6 figures just 2 years out from her PhD) is currently doing a certificate in adult learning to make her more competitive for future jobs at the University.
- ❑ Opportunities to practice teaching the things that they hope to get a job teaching, not just generic teaching experience (like composition, intro courses, etc.).
- ❑ Feedback & mentorship on their teaching—from faculty or someone similarly

Transferable Skills

The lack of support in graduate school allows one to manage complicated situations, quickly:

- ❑ Jumping into something you don't know and figuring it out
- ❑ Grow in an accelerated way, fail fast and recover quickly
- ❑ Managing class & race blindspots among faculty and within departments/university
- ❑ Confidence with higher administration/people in positions of authority

What did the PhD mean to you?



“My PhD experience can be synthesized as...embodying the professionalization of intellectual and academic inquiry.”

Advice for Departments

Networking

- ❑ How can departments contribute to a social network that would actually be helpful to PhDs not pursuing traditional college-level teaching positions?
- ❑ Mixed feelings about their department sending current students to them with questions about non-academic careers.
 - Is there a better (more respectful, more mutually beneficial) way to facilitate networking between current graduate students and alumni?

Transferable Skills

Ability to storyline better than any MBA

Ability to detach and observe (can you guess the discipline?)

What did the PhD mean to you?



“The opportunity to be confronted with every form of insecurity and self-doubt while simultaneously gaining a level of self-awareness and cultural capital that empowered me to transcend my socioeconomic origins.”

Advice for Departments

Department Engagement

- ❑ Website tracking initiatives are a minimum, & they should acknowledge all alumni positions.
 - How the department showcases alumni sends a strong message to current grad students about what career futures they will, and will not, be supported in pursuing.

- ❑ Faculty can be more supportive of ALL their graduates.
 - This includes acknowledging that they may have other identities besides graduate student, including teacher, parent, worker, spouse, etc.

- ❑ Think creatively about and provide opportunities for applied skills.

- ❑ Faculty be more willing to take chances on things that might help their students.
 - Does this require looking at how faculty incentives are structured?

Anti-Transferable Skills

Anti-skills are those traits or habits that we pick up in graduate school, and might even be taught to think of as skills, but that ultimately hamper success in the workplace. Might inhibit or even cancel out some transferable skills unless they are adequately managed:

- ❑ **Trained to think of writing as a solitary task; tendency to de-value collaborative writing**
- ❑ **Single-author papers rated higher in academic value system, but that model doesn't make sense in the broader workforce**
- ❑ **Disconnect of value system; evaluated based on what you produce alone instead of what you produce with others**
- ❑ **Assess potential project ideas on the basis of authority/approval/trendiness rather than impact**

What did the PhD mean to you?



“Looking back on an experience that felt largely unintentional, I think of the PhD as a ‘thing’ that forced me to ask tough questions—especially about myself, about what matters to me (intellectually and otherwise)— which I am still in the process of answering. ”

Anti-Transferable Skills

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- ❑ **Ego-Trained to think of oneself as The Expert**
- ❑ **Rewarded for finding flaws, rather than emphasizing strengths, in the work of others**
- ❑ **Structural cynicism**

What did the PhD mean to you?



“I learned how to think, and I forgot how to feel.”

What did the PhD mean to you?



“I’m grateful that the PhD experience taught me the rigor of the humanities and, perhaps most importantly, that there are many lives of the mind.”

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LOOKS LIKE**

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