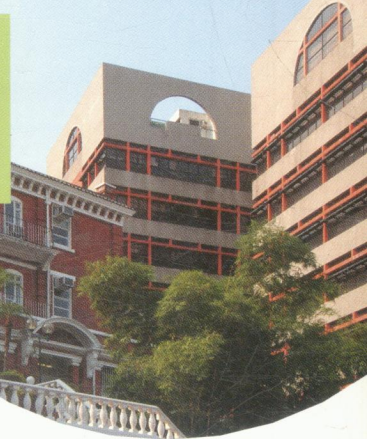


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Career Workshop for MPhil and PhD Students 2005

In the University of Hong Kong, you are trained to be good research students to write high-quality theses. However, even with a good research degree, the degree itself does not guarantee a job in nowadays' very competitive market. It is very important to start preparing for your future career as early as possible, be it within or outside the academia.

The Graduate School had organized a career workshop "Using Your Research Degree to Enter Your Dream Career" for MPhil and PhD students on 13 April 2005 (Wed). More than 110 students had registered and attended the workshop. This year, we had Prof. John Burns, our Associate Dean, who is also the Chair Professor in the Department of Politics & Public Administration and a member of the University's Committee for the Selection of Senior Teachers, to talk to us about how to prepare for academic jobs.



Prof. Burns obtained his first academic job in the University of Michigan through his PhD supervisor many years ago. According to Prof. Burns, he did not even have to prepare a CV for that job! However, the market since then has been becoming more and more competitive. Now Prof. Burns has lots of experience in hiring senior teachers as well as recruiting fresh PhD graduates, and he offered students very practical advice in looking for academic jobs in such a market. In planning for an academic career, Prof. Burns particularly emphasized the importance of producing as many high-quality publications as possible. However, it would be better to publish only 1 paper in an outstanding journal rather than to publish several papers in not-so-good journals. In short, "quality is the key".

Prof. Burns also advised students to consider a variety of possibilities on the market. They may apply for teaching positions and research positions in different locations and different types of institutions. Moreover, students should pay attention to the academic calendar in different education systems.

When preparing a CV, there is no secret – the CV must be clear and concise. Prof. Burns advised students to include in their CV very short abstracts of their dissertations in 3 or 4 sentences written in an easy-to-understand manner since the readers may be from different fields. Similarly, if there is a job talk, students should avoid using those very narrow jargons and make the talk accessible to the audience.

The second part of the workshop was on non-academic jobs. We had invited Ms. Louisa Li, Director of the Careers Education and Placement Centre, to give us advice on how to find non-academic jobs.

Ms. Li said the best way to find a job is through networking and students should develop a clear image of what they are good at. Also, an interview is a business meeting between 2 potential business partners. It is important to ask questions in order to know the job better instead of simply "waiting for the employer to do you a favor".

To answer the question whether a research degree is a stepping-stone or an obstacle to one's dream career, Ms. Li commented that it depends on the effect of the research degree on the individual's overall competency. It is a fact that research degrees alone do not automatically open a door to the job market. What is also important is one's relevant knowledge and achievements in the job field.

For students who would like to apply for jobs that are in different fields from that of their research, Ms. Li encouraged them to read more about the jobs. The high-paying hot jobs these days are in management banking and investment banking. These jobs are open to both undergraduates and postgraduates but postgraduates are stronger in several aspects, such as being more mature and having better analytical abilities. Yet, they must also know what the jobs are about. Surely they can obtain such knowledge if they have the ability to write a research thesis! Ms. Li also shared with us some real-life examples of people finding their dream career in fields which were different from their study fields, and these stories were truly inspiring.

If you would like to download the PowerPoint presentation files by Prof. Burns and Ms. Li, please go to this website: <http://www.hku.hk/gradsch/news/career.htm>.



Prof. John Burns (left) and Ms. Louisa Li (middle) offered valuable advice on searching both academic and non-academic jobs to our research postgraduate students.

Using your Research Degree to Enter your Dream Career

This article is an attempt to answer some practical career and job search questions periodically raised by research postgraduates. Hopefully it will spearhead concerted efforts to place Rpgs into their desired careers.

What do fresh Rpgs do after graduation?

Firstly, let us take a look at the occupations that fresh Rpgs pursue after graduation. As the following table shows, around 33% of M. Phil., and 57% of Ph. D. graduates become researchers, mainly in educational institutions. These figures are likely to increase when undergraduate curricula are extended from three to four years.

Graduate Employment Statistics
Job nature of 2004 Rpgs

	M. Phil.		Ph. D.	
	No.	%	No.	%
Research <i>(Educational Institutions)</i>	33	(30.8%)	28	(46.6%)
Research <i>(Commerce and Industry)</i>	1	(0.9%)	2	(3.3%)
Research <i>(Other Sectors)</i>	1	(0.9%)	4	(6.6%)
Other Occupations	72	(67.3%)	26	(43.3%)
Total no. of respondents	107	100%	60	100%

Advice to students looking for a career in academia

If you are interested in working in a university you should take care to publish in reputable journals, network at conferences and professional meetings and ask supervisors for job leads and / or referrals to employers. At this juncture, let me add that most Rpgs found research positions through faculty offices or academic staff. You may also approach university departments for opportunities, but give yourself enough lead time. Making the approach 12 months before you finish your thesis is not considered too early.

What about research opportunities outside academia?

The number of Rpgs employed as researchers outside academia is very very small indeed. Does it mean there is no market for researchers in the wider community? Or is it a question of marketing Rpgs to employers? I have yet to find the answer to the question.

In the meantime, students could help themselves by approaching employers on their own. When you present yourself to employers, do not merely outline what you have done, but propose, in specific terms, which part of the employer's activities you could take part in. Suggest also, how you might help the employer take advantage of opportunities, solve problems and/ or save cost. Take care to back up your proposal with hard evidence. In your application explain why you are interested in the organisation, the industry and the occupation. Tell the employer what initiative you will take to develop yourself in that occupation and develop a career in that industry.

This is quite a substantial message to get across. One way to make it easier to digest is to organise it into three documents: a short cover letter, a one-page résumé and a supplementary sheet.

What about 'other occupations'?

Rpgs who are not employed as researchers are found in a wide range of occupations, which number a total of 47 different job types and 38 industries. For a full list, see <http://www.hku.hk/cepc/survey/ges/>.

Newspapers and the internet are the two primary sources of vacancies for those positions.

How to improve employability?

Most employers make hiring decisions on the extent to which the candidates know the subject. They also assess applicants on their exposure, i.e. how widely exposed they are and how significant their achievements are. From this information, employers deduce the quality and relevance of the candidates' occupational and transferable skills, their attitude and personality. Applicants' likely performance in actual situations on the job and their world view are also considered by employers making hiring decisions.

To improve your employability, you should use your research degree experience to enhance your attractiveness to employers according to how they assess you during the hiring process.

The importance of relevance

Whether your interest is in academia or the wider community, you must know enough about the field before you consider applying for a job in that area. While you are not expected to have as much knowledge about it as someone in the field, you are expected to be an informed lay person. So, do attend career talks, recruitment talks, do your research, talk to people in the field and best of all, try it out as a summer job, internship or even, voluntary work.

A word of advice

Do consider the following procedure as a way to prepare yourself for the job market.

Vision – develop an image about what you would like to become in 30 years' time, or what you would like to spend your life on.

Role models – read widely, particularly biographies, observe people around you, find role models to learn from and emulate.

Relevant whole person development – analyse the career and personal development history of your role models; draw a personal development plan for yourself to ensure that you become a rounded person.

Portfolio of relevant achievements – keep records and evidence of your achievements.

Clear message of what you are good at and have to offer – be clear about your strengths; polish them through helping other people; and build your brand with them.

Social and professional networks – make friends, contribute to your communities, let them know that you are available, and ask for job leads; opportunities are likely to come knocking at your door.

Application writing – learn how to present yourself in writing in an effective manner.

Assessment Centre procedures – be familiar with selection procedures that some major employers use such as reasoning tests, occupational personality questionnaire, in-tray exercises, group exercises, group discussions, presentations etc.

Interview skills – learn how to persuade employers to hire you through conversing with them.

Informed career choice – develop a rational basis for choosing between employers and job offers.

Career development strategy and milestones – go back to your vision, map a strategy and milestones to guide you to your career goal.

Mentor – find a senior person to bounce off ideas with, invite the mentor to give you critical feedback and help you implement your career strategy and reach your milestones.

What you must not do

What you must not do is use your research degree to escape, or delay, job hunting. And, without taking any steps to improve your employability, expect to find a good job on the strength of a higher degree alone.

Last but not least

Have fun and enjoy your job search.

Louisa Li

Director

*Careers Education and
Placement Centre, HKU*

Research Supervision Seminar: Principles of Effective Postgraduate Research Supervision

Dr. Richard James from the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne, visited HKU and delivered a



seminar on research supervision on 22 February 2005 in P602, Graduate House. With his kind permission, the booklet 'Eleven Practices of Effective Postgraduate Supervisors', written by him and Dr. Gabrielle Baldwin of the University of Melbourne, is downloadable from the Graduate School website at [http://www.](http://www.hku.hk/gradsch/gsch_info/main_useful.htm#2)

[hku.hk/gradsch/gsch_info/main_useful.htm#2](http://www.hku.hk/gradsch/gsch_info/main_useful.htm#2). It offers useful advice to both new and experienced supervisors.

Thousands More HKU Theses Online!

The HKU Libraries has requested and received permission from thousands of past HKU graduates to digitize and provide global web access to their theses. Many of these alumni have also written to express their gratitude. Some have called this a truly great initiative! Their reasons for doing so are as varied as their theses. However one idea common to all of them is that in this Google age and Yahoo culture, when a work is not on the web, it does not exist. Rather than languish unread in the Libraries' Special Collections, they would like to see their theses read, and the ideas therein live again, rather than indolently sleep away the next eternity.

Of course the Libraries face the formidable task of digitizing printed copies of theses, whose spine cannot be broken for the scanning. This is a painstaking task. It becomes ironic considering that since the late 1980s, all theses have been done on word processors, and printed from computer files. Some few of our past graduates kept their computer files, and have given them to us for reformatting. When we receive these, we quickly process and mount online. The majority however must be scanned, turning page by tedious page.

If you are a current HKU post-graduate expecting to create a thesis, we urge you now to prepare also for an electronic version of your thesis. Let your research inspire others! Make your thesis work for you even after graduation. Scholars, publishers, and employers can all find an online HKU thesis through Google, Yahoo, and other search engines. Instructions for creating an HKU e-thesis are at <http://etd.lib.hku.hk>.

If you are an alumni of HKU and have deposited a printed thesis in the Libraries, could you please consider giving us instructions to place your thesis online for global access, either by, 1) sending us the computer files, or, 2) writing to tell us to use your printed thesis. If so, please contact David Palmer, Systems Librarian: dtpalmer@hkucc.hku.hk.

Student Awards

BEST PRESENTATION AWARD

Congratulations to Ms. Brenda Yip, PhD student in the Department of Real Estate & Construction, on winning the "Best Presentation Award" in an international conference in Las Vegas, USA.

"Job Burnout within the Hong Kong Construction Industry" written by Brenda Yip

Job Burnout is today an increasingly significant factor in Hong Kong. Recent economic conditions have tended to heighten competition, particularly in the construction industry which is always somewhere near the top of the list when it comes to exposure to stress!

Faculty of Architecture has carried out many leading studies in the area of organisational and human cultural issues in construction industry and they are now building on this work. Brenda's particular research deals with Job Burnout Syndrome (JBS). The research aims to identify contributors and moderators of burnout, how and to what extent it might impact on performances of both construction professionals and organisations in Hong Kong.



Prof. Lap-Chee Tsui, Vice-Chancellor (right), presented a Certificate of Commendation to Ms. Brenda Yip.

In February 2005, Brenda Yip attended an international conference organised by the International Council for Research and Innovation in Building and Construction in Las Vegas, USA. Sixty-six papers were presented at the conference, Brenda's paper "Job Burnout within the Hong Kong Construction Industry" was among them.

"Attending the conference was a very special experience for me, getting together and sharing ideas with so many people involved in similar field of work in universities and other academic institutions all over the world." Brenda said, "The conference seemed to stimulate creative thinking and highlight alternative perspectives." Adding to the excitement, Brenda was honored to receive the "Best Presentation Award" which led to a Certificate of Commendation from our Vice-Chancellor, Professor Lap-Chee Tsui.

Of course it's always flattering to receive recognition for one's work but the real down to earth facts are JBS is a growing problem for industry and a bi-product of today's high-pressure lifestyle. It has the potential of affecting all of us in one way or another. Industry is now spending more time and money studying the effects of this new and significant phenomenon. It is to ensure that their organisations take action to prevent or minimize the effects of JBS which otherwise might result in their becoming less competitive due to their employees exposing to stress and resulting burnout. Nowhere is this more significant than in the high stake business of large scale construction developments, here in Hong Kong.

SWIRE SCHOLARSHIPS 2004-2005

Swire Scholarships are offered to local full-time research postgraduate students every year. Holders of the Scholarships are expected to:

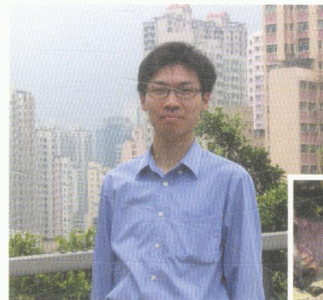
- live in the Robert Black College;
- devote their full-time study in the University; and
- participate in the academic and other activities of the College.

Congratulations to the following four Swire Scholars in 2004-2005. The Scholar is required to contribute only a tiny amount of the rent and the balance is paid by the scholarship and subsidized by the College.

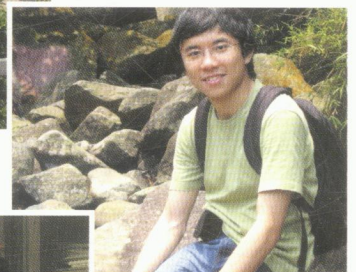


Ms. Chan Hiu Dan PhD, Department of Linguistics

Mr. Yip Bon Ham (right), MPhil, Department of Pathology, and his supervisor, Prof. G. Srivastava.



Mr. Lau Tak Bun, Denvid MPhil, Department of Civil Engineering



Mr. Yeung Kai Ho PhD, Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering

