

Life in the academia: Thirty-five years of fun and games (and hard work)

Mahmut Parlar
DeGroote School of Business

May 1, 2014 (Research Day @ DeGroote)

Contents

1	My background	2
2	Your life as a Ph.D. student (4–5 years)	3
3	Job interview	5
4	Your life as an assistant professor (5–6 years)	6
5	Grants, software, focussing	10
6	Teaching	13
7	Service	14
8	Proper behaviour	15

1 My background

- Started university in 1969 (45 years ago!)
- B.Sc. in 1973.
- M.Sc. in 1975.
- Ph.D. in 1979 (35 years ago!)
- Still having fun and working 6 days a week. (I always take a day off each week.)
- Best profession in the world! They pay us for doing things that we love doing!
- “Do what you love, love what you do!”

2 Your life as a Ph.D. student (4–5 years)

- Ph.D. work is an investment in your future.
 - “Short term pain, for long term gain.”
 - Low income and hard work now; higher income (and prestige) and even harder work later.
- Best Ph.D. thesis is a completed thesis. Focus on what you are doing.
- Disclaimer: I don't mean to override what your supervisor tells you about research. But here is what I do:
 - Be organized.
 - * Set goals, deadlines for what you are doing.

- * Go to bed with a plan for tomorrow.
 - * Write periodic (weekly?) summaries of what you have achieved. Submit them to your supervisor (if he/she is interested). ★<Handout>
- Don't expect your supervisor to provide you with all the ideas. You generate them.
 - When you write papers (or, your thesis), don't forget the following:
 - * Is your work original?
 - * Is it interesting?
 - * Is the math correct?
 - * Is it well-written?
 - * In summary, write *citable* papers.
 - If English is not your mother tongue (and even if it is), read, read and read (not just academic work but also novels, magazines and newspapers)

- Go to the library and look at books. YES, there are such buildings we call libraries!

- Try to submit and publish at least one paper before graduation.

- Discuss your work/thesis with your friends.

- Prepare your c.v. for the job interviews.

3 Job interview

- Dress well.

- Prepare your slides carefully.

- At most five (5) bullets per page.
- Keep each bullet short.
- Limit the # of pages to about 30-35.
 - * If you have N pages, and if each page takes about two (2) minutes, then you need $2N$ minutes!
- Don't be offended if someone in the audience becomes aggressive.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, be honest about it. Don't try to fudge your answers.

4 Your life as an assistant professor (5–6 years)

- Publish or perish.

- After graduation, find an academic mentor in your department who can help you.

- Generating research ideas.
 - First of all, finish and submit all the original work from your thesis.

 - Look around. (“Elevator positioning,” “Free shipping” papers.) ★<Handout>

 - Sometimes you get research ideas from other papers. Go to the library.

 - Discussions with your colleagues.

- Always target FT45 journal quality in your work, but let’s face it: Not all of our papers are FT45 quality. ★<Handout>
 - So, don’t submit all of your papers to FT45 journals. Why?

- If you are doing joint work, try to contribute your share ($1/n$).
- Choose an attractive (and informative) title.
 - Grab the reader's (referee's) attention with the first sentence in the first paragraph.
 - Spell check, including the references.
 - Organize the paper well.
- Alphabetical ordering of names is safest assuming all co-authors will contribute roughly equally to the work. But,
 - If Dr. Aardwark doesn't contribute much and always rides on your coat-tails, don't write papers with him in the future.
 - In the long run, everyone's contribution should be roughly equal.

- Responses to referees.
 - Make their life easy!
 - Write each question asked by the referees, and answer them, providing page numbers and even line numbers. Thank them for their helpful comments, etc. ★<Handout>
- Plagiarism: Can't copy and paste other people's sentences/paragraphs
- Can't submit your paper simultaneously to two or more journals.
- Your third year as an assistant professor: Contract renewal.
- Your fifth or sixth year: Promotion and Tenure.
 - If denied, you have to leave.

5 Grants, software, focussing

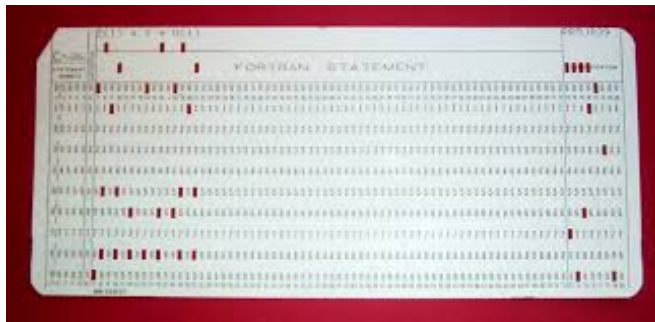
- Apply for a **grant**, e.g., NSERC/SSHRC, as soon as possible. You can't function in the academia without research grants.

- For MS students:
 - Very helpful to be an expert in a good mathematical software: Maple?

 - Use \LaTeX for typesetting (e.g., *Scientific Word*), NOT Microsoft Word!

 - We have so much computing power now. Use it wisely.

 - How did we manage in the old days?
 - * Mainframe. Fortran IV (Punch cards). Typewriters (IBM Selectric). Finally; IBM-PC.



```
Current date is Tue 1-01-1980
Enter new date:
Current time is  8:00:09.99
Enter new time:

The IBM Personal Computer DOS
Version 2.10 (C)Copyright IBM Corp 1981, 1982, 1983

A>chkdsk

179712 bytes total disk space
 22528 bytes in 3 hidden files
128512 bytes in 23 user files
 28672 bytes available on disk

131072 bytes total memory
106384 bytes free

a>_
```

- You need physical exercise for a clear mind. “*Just do it!*”
 - Jogging is best, if your knees are OK.
- Focusing on work:
 - Turn off your smart (!) phone while working!
 - Turn off your e-mail program while working!
 - Face the wall.

6 Teaching

- Prepare well.
- Speak slowly.
- Write things on the board/screen, and do it clearly.
- Volunteer to teach new courses.
- Respect your students. They are adults.
- Lower yourself to the level of students. They don't know what you know.
- Be organized.

- When you start supervising Ph.D. students, ask them to give you periodic reports on what they have done, what they have learned, whether or not they came up with new ideas. (Mentioned above.)

7 Service

- Refereeing.
 - Submit report within three months (max).
 - Summarize paper's findings. Is the paper, (i) original, (ii) interesting? (iii) Is the math correct, and (iv) is it well-written? If the answer to any one of these is NO, you may *recommend* rejection.
 - General critique. Specific points, typos, etc.

- I referee at least $2\times$ the number of papers I have published. Why?
- Try to serve on some committees.
- Volunteer to do things.

8 Proper behaviour

- Google's motto: "Don't be evil!"
- Golden Rule:
 - Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, Hz. Mohammed, etc.
"Treat others as you would like others to treat you." (Be good)

- Jewish version (Hillel, 100 BCE): "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow men." (Don't be evil)

- Be kind to your colleagues.
 - You can criticize someone's idea/proposal, but don't turn it into a personal attack.

- Keep your door open when a student visits your office.

- Always have a positive attitude: "Glass is half full."

- Enjoy the fun and games, and the hard work.

- Read this book:

