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# GRADBritain

A MAGAZINE FOR AND BY POSTGRADUATE  
RESEARCHERS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM



## Whatever next?

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Welcome back! Assuming we continue for many years to come, here is a question that every subsequent editor is going to be able to wheel out around this time of year: "Are you submitting soon?"

There was once a time, back when hobbits roamed the earth, when you could start and finish a PhD at any time of year. Several centuries later, universities figured out that actually it was quite convenient to have their postgraduate researchers (PGRs) start at roughly the same time, and so we're seeing a move towards the undergraduate semesters of people starting and finishing around September/October time. That's not universally true, and in fact many international students arrive and submit around February/March, but it's true for a large proportion.

So, you've got only weeks to go, your eyes are bloodshot, you have a problematic relationship with caffeine, and through the grimy lab/library window you can see everyone else frolicking in the sunshine enjoying themselves. What to do? Well, remove the espresso IV, put your feet up, and gaze upon this issue's feast of articles written just for you.

Just to prove it's not all cheap gags about supervisors we've got a couple of articles tackling some serious issues; UCU's proposed boycott of Israeli universities, ethical issues surrounding animal testing, and whether it's possible to do a PhD whilst pregnant. We've even got a pretty serious instalment of Dr Flo who sounds like she's about to open a can of whup-fairy on an inappropriate colleague in the workplace!

Remember to keep those articles coming, we had another strong batch this issue, so much so that we've made the magazine a few pages longer. We've also bumped up the font size a bit to ease your monitor-strained eyes.

Finally, a confession. I was planning to put a completely unsolvable Sudoku on the back page. In the end I decided I didn't want several thousand PGR's cursing my name and throwing heavy / sharp things at me... Not yet anyway...



Excel can be your best friend or your worst enemy. A whole host of tips, plus a messageboard full of formula-writing ninjas can be found at MrExcel.com: [www.mrexcel.com/board2/](http://www.mrexcel.com/board2/)

## How many trees for a PhD?

- Sophie Fuggle (King's) on the environmental cost of research

Writing a PhD requires a hell of a lot of paper. In producing an endless stream of drafts, notes, handouts, and photocopies on the way to a neatly bound 300-page thesis, could we redress the balance a little bit in favour of the trees?

While the average university might produce less waste (although perhaps more hot air) relative to other similar sized organisations, other industries seem to be making more effort to reduce their waste and emissions. Companies such as law firms and insurance agents, traditionally associated with the consumption of excessive amounts of paper, have long since been making the move towards "paperless offices".

Sadly the paperless university seems a long way off; while an airline can successfully convince its passengers all they need to fly is an online booking, a paperless university offering "e-learning" still sounds to some people suspiciously like those internet scams offering non-accredited degrees for \$29.95. Nevertheless, there is now such a vast array of electronic tools available for organising and editing one's work that the need for printing and reprinting draft after draft of thesis chapters can be largely eliminated. However, the message put across by the university remains ambiguous. Whilst there are endless courses on how to use bibliographic software, create your

own online forums, and do really cool stuff in Microsoft Word (all without pressing Ctrl-P once), there seems to be an impression that one can never have enough handwritten, printed and photocopied notes. The same applies to teaching methods. I recently attended a course on academic teaching practice where the point was made repeatedly about how important it was to distribute handouts, not least in the event of legal action from underachieving students. Has it really come to this? Given the high level of computer literacy/dependancy of the current generation of undergraduates wouldn't it be more effective to put the handouts up on FaceBook?

One could argue that paper still has its advantages. It is always helpful to have a draft copy of your most recent work to hand in the event your PC crashes or you accidentally press 'delete' when you meant 'save', and some find it easier to edit and spot mistakes on a hard copy. Many of us remain at the mercy of our supervisor's preferences with regards to the format in which we submit our work. But maybe it is time we stop making excuses for ourselves and learn how to back up our work properly and insist our supervisors use "track changes" for corrections.

Finally, remember that whilst a broken computer is a plausible excuse for not producing any work, a broken pen is not...

## Top Ten:

### Desperate ways to make more time for your PhD



1. Take your tea/coffee black to avoid searching for / buying milk: 10 min/week
  2. Learn to touchtype: 3 hrs/week
  3. Switch breakfast from tea & toast to yoghurt and fruit juice: 50 min/week
  4. Walk at 5mph instead of 3mph: 2 hrs/week
  5. Disable email notifications from Facebook: 1hr / week
  6. Get a smartphone and get your email on the train: 1hr / week
  7. If you've got long hair, cut it short to reduce drying time: 1 hr/week
  8. Swap bathroom literature for your reference list: 45 min/week
  9. Buy some more RAM for your computer: 30 min/week
  10. Do all your shopping online: 1hr 30 min/week
- Total savings: 10hrs 45min! That's at least 600 words a week...

# Animal Experimentation: The rational debate

- Benjamin Hunt (Leicester) argues it's time that science stood its ground

As PGRs, many of us will use live animals or animal tissues in our research. With the ongoing threat posed by animal rights extremists, the decision to undertake such work now has wide-ranging implications for the individual and society as a whole. As academics, what can we do to be part of the solution?

As a testament to the democratic society in which we live, there has always been open opposition to procedures that involve animals. The more rational side of the opposition consists of animal welfare groups who work closely with scientific organisations. Legitimate anti-vivisectionist and animal rights groups campaign through peaceful demonstration, debate, leafletting and lobbying.

In addition to these groups is a relatively small "hardcore" of activists whose actions have dominated the media spotlight. Their chosen tactics of harassment, violence and intimidation have achieved little in the name of animal welfare and ironically may have acted to overshadow and divert attention away from the sensible debate. Extremist activity focusses on targeting individuals who work for organisations engaged in animal research and the companies which supply them. Animal breeding farms have been regularly targeted, leading to the closure of five farms in the last decade. This has only increased the strain as demand for laboratory animals remains largely unchanged.

In July 2004, amidst high levels of extremist activity (including the on-going campaign against Huntingdon Life Sciences and contractors building Oxford's new biomedical research centre), the government outlined its strategy to tackle animal rights extremism. Since then we have seen the introduction of new laws, the amendment of existing ones and the establishment of a 'crack team' of police specifically involved in tackling extremist behaviour.



However, it would be unreasonable to expect this war to be won on one front alone, so perhaps there is also a battle to be waged through the media for the support of the public? A survey conducted by MORI found that 90% of the public "accept the need for animal research provided that certain conditions are met". Many of those conditions raised by participants of this survey are in fact already included within UK legislation, suggesting that public non-support of animal research may be rooted in ignorance, not disapproval.

Opinions could be swayed if only more information on the current legal framework was routinely available to the public. As a result of the Freedom of Information Act, summaries of research projects involving the use of animals are published on the Home Office website. Although a step in the right direction, it is unlikely that the general public will actively seek out such information on government office websites. Indeed, opinions have always been, and will continue to be formed with the information to hand, be it a tabloid newspaper or a leaflet handed out on the high street.

Our job must be to fuel the rational debate concerning animal research; providing accurate information whilst emphasising the legal and ethical framework within which we work. We must show that it is possible to conditionally support animal research, in a debate that has recently become highly polarised. In particular we should consider the involvement of newly established organisations [Pro-Test](#) and [Patients' Voice](#). These organisations were independently formed by members of the public and both advocate the humane use of animals in medical research. These groups form the basis of a community for countering the anti-vivisectionist movement and are very much in the public eye. We must now take advantage of this new media coverage to better inform the public of the benefits of animal research.

## Dear Dr Flo...

I am a PhD student in a biomedical field and I have a very difficult problem to deal with. Recently in the lab a new clinician has started making overt sexual advances towards me – mainly verbal but with some physical gestures. I initially laughed them off and told him to concentrate on his work, but he became quite aggressive and started to suggest that, as I needed his help, I was not in a position to refuse him. He is physically a lot bigger and stronger than me and I am now so scared of what he might do that I am just avoiding him and not getting much work done. Please help me!

A Nony Mouse

### Dear Mouse,

I am really pleased that you have had the courage to talk to someone about this; just talking about it can cause embarrassment and feelings of shame (which are not warranted). Sadly even today there are still some people who don't know how to operate within the modern work environment and could do with a whack from my magic wand!

Definitions of what constitutes sexual harassment can be found on the [Equal Opportunities Commission](#) website and include: “unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature” with “the purpose of, or having the effect of, violating your dignity, or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for you”. There are a number of options open to you now:

1. pursue formal action
2. pursue informal action
3. ignore it and hope that it goes away

You certainly have the right to take formal action against this individual and their conduct. This would involve informing your supervisor, who should guide you through the process of making a formal complaint in your institution. You might also talk to your HR department. You should also contact the postgraduate student representative in the Students' Union, or a Women's Officer.

A formal complaint will be investigated by the institution and may result in the person being formally reprimanded or possibly dismissed or moved to another post. If you feel that it is being “swept under the carpet” you may need to be prepared to stand your ground and demand that it is dealt with properly and in the way in which you are entitled to have it addressed.

Secondly, you can ask your supervisor to deal with the situation informally – to talk to the person concerned and ask that they apologise to you and modify their future behaviour. The problem with this approach is that you are not recording it officially on their record. If they behave like this again in the future to someone else, there will not be any record of their past actions which might add gravitas to a future complaint.

In addition, whilst they may feel that they have “got away with it”, they are unlikely to appreciate being ticked off, even informally, and may try to intimidate you further through other actions.

With both of these options you will add considerable gravitas to your complaint if you keep a diary/log of all of the incidents. You need to record the date, time, location and exactly what happened and was said on both sides. You should also tell other people you can trust what is going on. They may be able to act as witnesses (if appropriate), and will also keep an eye out for any further unwanted overtures towards you and anyone else. In addition, you may find that there are other people who have been on the receiving end of advances from this person, and again your complaint will have more gravitas if there are others in the same position.

Your third option is not an option in my opinion. Finally, you may wish to consider things that you can do for your self-esteem such as seeking out some assertiveness training or taking up a martial art or attending self-defence classes.

Good luck!

Dr Flo



# Life at the Top... by Professor Geoffrey Thickett

There are 24 hours in the day... and then there's the night

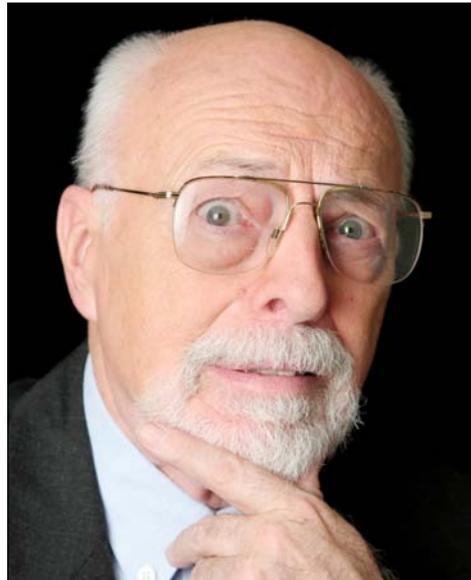
I am in a bit of a dilemma. Not only is the cleaner aware that I've been sleeping in my office, now she is blackmailing me over it! The old witch wakes me up in the morning, winks at me when we pass in the corridor, and left a note under the door this morning. 'I know you living here. I will not tell, but holiday would be nice. Buy me a ticket for Portchigal and the Dean duzznt need to no anything.'

The (lack of) grammar made me flinch, but all things considered, I'd rather pay the cleaner to keep quiet than have to give up my late nights of study and comfortable couch. I like to sleep surrounded by my books, they keep me company.

This morning I had a visit from a student I must confess I'd completely forgotten about. He is called Nigel Baines, but prefers to be known as Tree. I nearly jumped when I first met him. He's a 6 foot 5, thin lad with green and orange dreadlocks and some alarming piercings and tattoos. But ever so nicely spoken when he forgets to put on his silly London accent (he actually went to Eton).

'Hello sir, er, sorry, I mean how you doin' you old codger? Innit!', he said this morning as he rattled through the door in a pair of truly ridiculous zippered boots and a rainbow-coloured knitted something. 'I wanted to let you know why I haven't been to any seminars this term'. It turned out that he too has been sleeping somewhere he

shouldn't. 'Tree' has been living in a commune of squatters that according to the papers had taken over a rather lovely-looking stately home. Of course we would rather our students didn't get arrested and then plastered across the front pages of the newspapers. Nigel argued that because his PhD is about 'Prisons and Prisoners in the Twentieth Century novel' he could write up his experiences as a chapter for his thesis. He handed me a pile of notebooks written 'in captivity' which



he promises will be the basis for some proper work. I have my doubts though, does the inter-library loans scheme extend to prison libraries?

Nigel passed another student in the corridor as he left. Mavis Bunion spat at him, while he said 'good morning' and offered to help her with the bags hanging from the zimmer. They made an unconventional couple at the office door. 'GOOD MORNING PROFESSOR!' she

says. 'Good morning Mavis, so, I assume your hearing aid is broken again?' I say as politely as I can. 'Have you got some work to show me?'

One would think that the older students might have respect for punctuality, and a more deeply ingrained work ethic. Unfortunately Mavis hands in just as little work as my younger students. 'I'M AFRAID NOT, MY CAT WAS SICK ON IT'. Now, this really is the silliest excuse I've heard in several years. But keen to prove her point Mavis produced a smelly damp roll of paper from her bag. 'DREADFULLY SORRY, POOR OLD THING CHOKED ON A MOUSE'. The vile package reeked of feline vomit and as Mavis writes all of her work in longhand this means that I'll either have to read it once it's dried out, or make her write the work again.

Sometimes my students are so very trying that I pretend I'm not in the office. I have covered the office door in posters so they can't check by looking through the glass. Once I have some Chopin playing through my headphones and a glass of whiskey I can even drown out Mavis and her hollering.

Prof. Geoffrey Thickett  
Head of Department  
Bookback College

(with help from Kiri Bloom)

# The subtle art of networking

- Ian Kidd (Durham) faces up to his fear of business cards

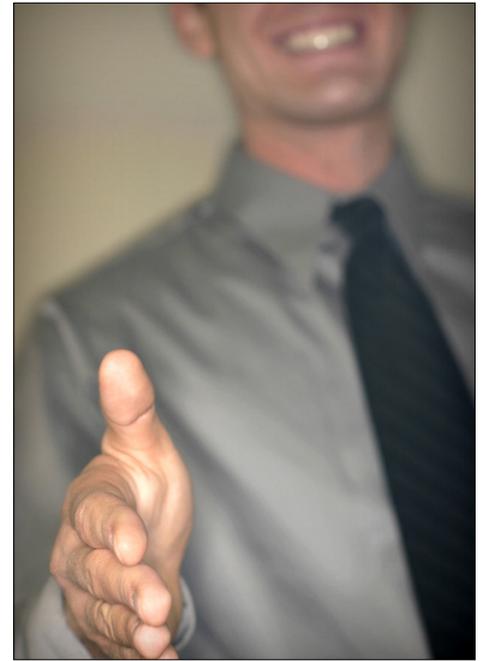
As a first year PGR, one thing that's constantly been drilled into us is that when attending conferences it's not enough just to listen attentively to the papers, ask a few insightful questions and come away with a warm healthy academic glow. Oh no – these days, there's a whole other side to conferences, and it goes by the distressingly formal title of “networking.” Of course I'd heard lecturers joking that “the real philosophy only starts to happen in the pub”, and that buying people pints and getting them to confess their real opinions about developmental theories of mind was much easier if they were standing at the bar rather than in front of a podium – in vino veritas, and all that.

But networking in this sense seemed terribly unprofessional: “buy them a drink, get their defences down, and then see what they *really* think about it!” And whenever I tried to “network” at conferences, I was invariably very bad at it. It seemed so artificial to just walk up to someone and casually inquire as to their current research interests. And the aggression of some of the more skillful networkers was discouraging. I once met a young philosopher who, in the course of about two minutes, asked me a careful series of methodical questions, scoping out my research interests and assessing my possible future relevance to his own research before making his excuses and darting off to his next conquest.

When he was through with his subtle interrogation, I'd been weighed and measured and judged to be of no academic or professional use to him. That put me off networking for a while; once bitten, twice shy.

But then, at the last conference I went to, things were different. The first session loudly expounded the importance of networking, but with the qualifier that it should be a fun affair. Networking is, as the speaker put it, “just chatting with like-minded scholars”. It wasn't the cold and evaluative instrumental affair that I'd experienced – that was bad networking. Good networking is simply meeting people with common interests, chatting over a cup of coffee, exchanging ideas and arguments and email addresses. It's fun. In a sense, you do your best networking when you're not even conscious of it. You're not “networking”, you're having a spirited debate about the inconsistencies in John Rawl's Theory of Justice.

So don't be put off by the perception of networking as “whoring yourself to your peers” and don't imagine that you're a salesman on the spot, with just two minutes to sell your academic product. You're just exchanging ideas, finding out about other people's ideas and offering them your own. It's actually counterproductive when people take networking too seriously; you risk coming across as an aggressively careerist predator.



Finally, remember networking, like all social interactions, is governed by a certain etiquette: so listen politely, be interested in other people and their work, without the rabid insistence upon ‘getting something out of it’. OK, so you might not meet any possible future collaborators, but you'll still learn something and have fun in the process. So long as you make the effort to chat to people, you'll get something out of it.

Networking isn't a gladiatorial struggle for supremacy in the cut throat world of academia. It's just an exchange of ideas. Don't go in there with guns blazing and don't try to ram your research down everyone's throat. Relax, and don't force yourself upon people. Invite interest in your work rather than demand it. And networking doesn't stop when the conference concludes; it continues at future conferences and via email correspondence. Academia is a long road, so you should at least try to ensure you'll have pleasant company!

# Academia is a bridge for peace; don't burn it

- Sharon Geva (Cambridge) on the UCU boycott of Israeli academics

On arrival at Cambridge I was alone, a foreigner in a new city. Most of you know how it feels: the first few days; you walk around town by yourself, eating your lunch alone, but then comes the moment you know you made a friend. We both went to school in Jerusalem, we have common academic interests, and we both love our mint tea sweet, very sweet. How much simpler could it be? But there is also something that distances us one from the other. It is our national identities that are as far as the earth and the sky. My friend is a Palestinian Muslim and I am an Israeli Jew.

You will probably be surprised to hear that my friend is actually the first Palestinian I have ever really talked to. But in the Middle-Eastern reality, Israelis and Palestinians do not have a chance to get to know people from 'the other side', to hear each other's thoughts, concerns and distresses, and above all, do not have a chance to find out how similar we actually are. Opportunities for such meetings rarely occur in the reality of 'the conflict'.

As a multinational university, the role of the University of Cambridge is not only to award us degrees and make us all good researchers, but also to help us get to know the 'other' - the one we may never meet otherwise. Here, we receive the opportunity to rethink our stereotypes, conventions, and even the history as it was written in our textbooks. This opportunity is a treasure.

This, I believe, is one of the main roles of academia in general, and Britain is in a good position to fulfill this role. But are we actually succeeding in doing so? The University and College Union (UCU) is the largest trade union and professional association for academics and academic-related staff working in higher education in the UK.



During its last meeting UCU passed a motion calling for the promotion of an academic boycott on Israeli academia because of 40 years of Israeli occupation, which involved the denial of academic and other human rights for Palestinians.

I believe that academic life is about building bridges, not destroying them; opening minds, not closing them. Boycotts in this sphere are, therefore, a betrayal of these values and are therefore detrimental to the building of an academic community. As a scientist, I also believe that science and knowledge should be universal, transcending boundaries of politics and nationalism. A collective boycott of academics from any one country is against the spirit of science.

I do not dismiss or condone the tragedy that has taken place in Israel and Palestine over the last forty years of war and occupation, for which many Israeli governments hold responsibility. However, I also believe that a boycott on Israeli academics will be counterproductive. Instead of cutting off ties, the academic community should *promote cooperation* between Israeli and Palestinian academics.

Furthermore, academics need to take a clear stance against violence and demand the protection of human rights *all over the world*. By doing so, the academic community can offer the urgently needed voice of reason and a place where each individual's humanity will be recognised, despite differences of ethnicity or ideology. Such an opportunity was indeed given to me here in Cambridge. Left alone, each side will further disconnect from the other, causing the cycle of violence and revenge to continue.

Prof. Sari Nusseibeh, President of the Palestinian Al-Quds University, agrees. He bravely opposed the boycott, stating that: "An international academic boycott of Israel, on pro-Palestinian grounds, is self-defeating: It would only succeed in weakening that strategically important bridge through which the state of war between Israelis and Palestinians could be ended... Instead of burning that bridge, the international academy should do everything within its power to strengthen it."

## Why not work for:



- Nicholas Creswell, University Programmes Manager

Can a PhD thesis really have a major impact on the world? An inspiring story is that of Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin, who conducted the research that led to Google's foundation during the course of their PhD. As an international business employing thousands of people, Google is quite unusual in that many aspects of our company's culture is similar to that of academic institutions. For instance, our Software Engineers have something called "20% Time". This means that they spend a fifth of their time (to be allocated as they please) to working on projects of their choosing. Many of these projects have made it into fully-fledged products, such as GMail, Orkut, and AdSense.

Google recruits Computer Science PhD's who enjoy developing a hypothesis as much as they enjoy coding it up; given the company's flat, non-hierarchical environment, all Engineers are expected to code out their own designs. We look favourably on candidates who appreciate both low-level coding and over-arching design architecture. For that reason, we're particularly interested in PhD's who can demonstrate they have not only developed interesting theories, but have also applied them in real-world scenarios such as applied research,

open source projects, internships and voluntary work. Our flat work environment also means that we need our Engineers to be self-directed and self-motivated, which corresponds well with the self-disciplined approach needed for successful completion of PhD research. Projects at Google are somewhat fluid and tend to move fast: they often break new ground and can suddenly change direction according to discoveries that happen along the way, meaning we require Engineers who can adapt, and who are confident in expressing their opinions on such changes.

Another way to demonstrate a respected opinion is to be well-cited in interesting and relevant publications, something that can readily be identified through our own Google Scholar! Similarly, authoring books and papers on programming and related areas also helps. Above all, however, we look for people who are not just talented, but also passionate about what they do. Given the commitment PhD students make to their research, this is a trait we often find in them, and ultimately that is why Google is so committed to recruiting them.

To find out more about jobs with Google, please visit: [www.google.com/jobs/students](http://www.google.com/jobs/students)

## What is?



If you've ever spoken with PhD students from other countries you'll know that there is huge variation; for instance, the UK is exceptional in that students can enrol without a master's degree. In 1999 a number of European education ministers convened in Bologna to begin the creation of a "European higher education area" which would bring standards throughout Europe into line by 2010.

So far so dull. But what's really interesting is that the Bologna process will make it much easier to move between institutions during a PhD; so you could start in the UK, study in France for 6 months, then Denmark for 12 months, then return to the UK. The process also covers other "professional" doctorates such as the MD.

There are some risks though; master's programmes on the continent are usually 2 years, meaning that UK master's programmes might not be recognised for entry on to European doctoral programmes.

Read the Council of Europe's guide at <http://snipr.com/1nczr> or read UK GRAD's policy section at [www.grad.ac.uk/policy](http://www.grad.ac.uk/policy)



## To sprog or not to sprog?

- Jane Sugars (UK GRAD) on the only project scarier than a thesis

the next step was to assess my ovulation pattern using expensive wee-on-it hormone tester sticks. I had hardly learnt to use the things before realising I was already pregnant. After spending 3 month's stipend indulging the natural urge to buy every available pregnancy magazine (and realising that the editors just make stuff up as they do for all mags (<cough> ed.)), I spent the next few months feeling, and possibly looking, increasingly daft. Some people bloom, I'm told. I found that pregnant women should prepare to be treated as: a.) ignorant, b.) as if they have nothing better to do apart from be pregnant, c.) a round piece of meat.

Next step, tell your supervisor. Mine was very composed and duly congratulated me, although the vibes gave away a certain anxiousness about my commitment level. He was actually very supportive, and for my part I worked harder than ever while still fit enough. You should expect to get out of breath in the last couple of months. There is a reason, of course, it's that you have put on 2 stones in weight - 3 if you craved all the pies - plus your heart is now pumping 1.5 times the normal volume of blood.

I won't regale you with the story of the nativity of my first-born, I'll just say don't waste any ink on a birthing plan and just say yes to drugs. What followed was a blur of obsessive behaviour, prams, breast pumps, mastitis (isn't that just cows?), cabbage leaves (don't ask) –

and not a single thought to spare for the PhD for 4 months at least.

Don't expect to be able to work until the last minute, nor during your maternity leave. This only applies to women from the planet Krypton. Budding fathers? A couple of weeks' paternity leave sounds useful but you will be nipping back to work to sleep at your desk! You might need to look into an (unpaid) extension too. Children can put a big strain on your relationship, especially when pressures may already exist due to the PhD. You will have underestimated the time needed to devote to your new family member as well as the financial strain.

All that said, having a baby really concentrates the mind as far as your PhD is concerned. Your bump is an ever-present reminder of a very real deadline, and working times when you return will be restricted, necessitating an organised approach! Importantly, starting a family puts your PhD firmly into perspective. The best part of course is that children of your own really are lovely and on average, over a given period, even more rewarding than other good things (which you won't have) like new shoes or nights out at the pub. As for me, I did live to see another day and attended my PhD graduation heavily pregnant with my 2nd child. Remember, it will never be a 'good time' to start a family!

Imagine how inconvenient it would be only a year into your PhD to find yourself harbouring jealous feelings towards parents of babies... So here's the dilemma: give in to nature or to good sense? Ever a slave to my training (having spent 9 years in research before the doctorate), I took a scientific approach and conducted a survey of parents.

Despite my quantitative training, the clincher for me was a woman I'd met just once – a former inmate of my lab who had managed to produce a child during her PhD and live to see another day. In my broody state of mind this was all the confirmation I needed, although thinking back she wasn't exactly a picture of elegant serenity, and of course the sample size was rather small. If undertaking a similar survey, you should be prepared to find that 95% of parents will under-represent the time, money and emotional strength required for parenting, and will lie outright about the birth. Decision made (and husband duly consulted),

# Braving the academic assault course

- Rebecca Hyde Parker (UEA) braves undergrads and surly staff to send us a report from the library



"1, 2, 3, go!" - I make a dash for the entrance to the library. The timing is just right and the revolving door swallows me up. Seconds of feeling like I'm trapped in a giant washing machine before the door regurgitates me into the foyer, then tranquillity envelops me. The effect is miraculous. After entering the place, stressed and deadline-burdened, we metamorphose into slower-moving and less desperate looking individuals. Maybe it's the smell that drugs us - that slightly musty-dusty scent of learning that permeates the building.

One of the best things about being a library card-wielding postgraduate is the sense of power that it brings; the book I want to borrow is mine, *all mine*, not for four weeks, not even until the end of a semester, but until the *end of the academic year!* And once I have secured it, woe betide anybody who puts a 'request' in for my precious...

Suddenly my calm deserts me. Foolishly I have decided to approach the Short-Term Loan section in search of an elusive article that I have been advised to read. Unfortunately the university has perfected the knack of employing the fiercest staff they can find to man these particular internal barracks of the library. Now the militia that guard the temple of short-term manna - they hold real power. "Ahem."  
"Yes?"  
"Errrr, is the journal back yet that I asked for yesterday?" I quaver.

The lady in Short-Term Loan patrols up and down behind her desk a bit more. She looks at me sternly. 'No, it isn't!' she barks.  
"Thank you very much for your help" I whisper and scuttle away, empty-handed, up to the sanctuary of the Second Floor.

In the lofty heights of the 'Literature and Language' classifications, my sense of peace rejoins me. Floating over to the translation section however, I size up some potential competition. Loitering by the shelves, s/he is of indeterminate sex and is wearing a hoodie. I feel no desire to hug this one, but do feel my pulse quicken. Of the 300 books on display here, I know, just know, that Hoodie is going to beat me to the one book without which my very important and world-changing research will grind to a halt! Feverishly, we both start to scan the shelves. I spot the book!

I sense that Hoodie has spotted it too! In slow motion we both reach for the prize perched innocently on the top shelf. I make a last ditch desperate lunge for it and - it's mine! Hoodie looks at me strangely, picks off the book next to the newly-formed gap and shuffles off listening to its ipod.

I'm nearly there. There's only one final hurdle to overcome: the self-service machine. I still don't trust a book-issuing facility that looks like it should be dispensing crisps. Without as much as the click-thump of a rubber stamp, the machine checks out my book for me. Isn't technology amazing? My wonderment is short-lived though as I face the alarm-rigged exit. For once the alarm doesn't go off! "1, 2, 3, go!" I dive into the chasm of the revolving door. It spits me back out onto the hustle and bustle of the campus - back to business.

## Stuff wot' undergradz say

From psychology essays:

"This vaccine can cause cubism in children"

"It is a well known fact that children become adults"

"Depression is when a loved one is dead, manic depression is when a loved one and your dog dies"

"Each year in Switzerland the world's leading experts congregate at Davos for a single porpoise"

# Planning tools - Organising a conference

- Serena Trowbridge (UCE) with a few points to consider at the outset!

## Academic

- What is the theme? Look at recent/forthcoming conferences to avoid a clash
- Write your call for papers; set clear guidelines, and remember to set a word-count.
- Choose keynote speakers in the area who could attract more delegates to attend
- Is there a journal that might be interested in publishing the papers, or does your university offer a working-papers series?
- Choose chairs for panels – the organisers, people from your department, and others you would like to include.
- Ensure delegates know if you are planning to publish the proceedings as a book or an article so they have papers ready – give a deadline and be prepared to chase people!

## Financial

- Is there departmental money available, and how much? Do you intend to apply for money from a funding body? If so, what are the deadlines, requirements and procedures?
- Based on your costs, decide what your delegate rate will be. It's best to check what similar conferences are charging.
- Check whether your keynote speakers expect payment or just travelling expenses.

## Financial cont...

- Ensure suppliers know who to bill.
- Make arrangements for payment of delegate fees; for example: Should payment be sent to you or Finance? What acknowledgement will you make for payment? Can delegates be invoiced? What payment methods can you accept?
- Will there be prizes? Concessions for students?

## Logistics

- Saturdays avoid other commitments but people may not want to lose their weekend!
- Choose a venue. This is difficult as you don't know numbers, but guess, based on other conferences, and pick somewhere that's flexible!
- Make arrangements for coffees and audio-visual equipment.
- Arrange lunch. Many venues have caterers that you have to use so check prices – if you can't afford it, it's ok to point people in the direction of cafes.
- Produce delegate attendance form, and put it on the conference website. It also helps to have a map/directions.
- Make a spreadsheet to log attendees, payment, contact details, and special food needs.

## Marketing

- Design your flyer and call for papers. It mustn't be longer than an A4 page, and an illustration might be appropriate – reproduction rights on images from galleries are reasonably priced or you might try an online stock photo gallery.
- Take flyers with you when you attend other conferences.
- Where are you going to market it? e.g. Universities, societies, personal network, journals, e-lists/conference alerts
- Set up conference web-pages; check with IT at your university and make sure it stays up to date!

## Finally...

- It's not paranoid to keep checking that the venue has your booking details right and that the catering numbers are confirmed; the delegates will be much more upset if they don't get coffee than if their paper doesn't get cited!
- Enlist as much help as you can, generally other post-grads in your department will help out with registering attendees etc, particularly if you waive their fee.
- Make sure you get the credit owed you for all this hard work! Give an opening talk yourself, chair a session, or edit a book of the proceedings.



## The final word...

Liza Filby -  
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Alas, another academic year has come to an end! It's strange how as academics we live and operate by the academic year; our 'new year's resolutions' to spend more time in the lab/library have to be made in September rather than the more conventional January.

I shall be spending this summer travelling around the country visiting archives and conducting interviews - basically doing all the ground work upon which my thesis will be based! I'll be spending 14 nights in Manchester, a week in Liverpool and a couple of days in Winchester, York and Durham. Organising this nationwide tour has been like mobilising a mass political campaign.

In the last few months I have mostly been writing letters, answering emails, locating archives, securing research funding and (perhaps the greatest challenge) working out the cheapest fare on Virgin Trains. It is quite frightening to realise the extent to which my thesis will be a reflection of my administrative skills as much as my intellectual capabilities.

In truth, the PhD is a solid exercise in project management and PGRs need to be organised. Although I'm not yet a slave to the 'Crackberry', I could not live without my electronic diary. Yes, I have even planned how I shall spend the extra day of 29th February 2008! Fortunately, organisational skills are another one of those lovely "transferable skills" that all sorts of employers love to hear about. With administration increasingly being part of an academic's responsibilities, experience in organising conferences, networks and workshops also looks good on the CV of a career researcher.

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Well, now that you've made it all the way through 12 whole pages of GRADBritain, what did you think? Was there an article that you thought was particularly inspiring or downright terrible? For the next issue of GRADBritain we'd like to introduce a "Letters to the Editor" section. You can send your views to the usual address below, making sure your email is clearly marked as a letter.

We are also carrying out a survey of our readership to find out what you think of the magazine more generally. Do you want more articles? How did you hear about us?

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Your input will help us improve GRADBritain so thank you!



Set aside a special treat for yourself for when you submit; many people feel they're at a bit of a loose end for a few days afterwards. So think about booking a holiday, organising an event with friends, or even buying that oh-so-addictive videogame console you've had your eye on....

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## The end bit...

GRADBritain is seeking contributions from postgraduate researchers, postdocs, and those with an interest in the development of early career researchers. We pay £50 for articles we use.

See our author guidelines at [www.grad.ac.uk/gradbritain/](http://www.grad.ac.uk/gradbritain/)  
Please also send in jokes, tips, and any juicy quotes from undergraduates. Issue 3 will be published at the end of October.

Deadline for submissions is Friday, September 14th. Please be sure you adhere to our author guidelines, then send submissions to: [gradbritain@grad.ac.uk](mailto:gradbritain@grad.ac.uk)

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