Conquering the Job Market
RECENT PHDS SHARE ADVICE ON SURVIVING THE UPS AND DOWNS OF THE ACADEMIC SEARCH BY EMMA MUELLER

It is the holy grail of the graduate-school career. The finish line. The proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. It is the tenure-track job. But just how does a candidate make that all-important transition from student to faculty? In uncertain economic times, and amid the continuing challenges of a constrained job market, it is hard enough to find a suitable opening, let alone to beat out the stiff competition for an actual offer.

Enter the postdoc, an opportunity once confined to the sciences, but that has been cropping up as a viable postgraduate pathway in other disciplines. And while you may think of it as the understudy to the star that is the tenure-track job offer, it’s been moving into the spotlight in recent years, and it’s getting good reviews.

As part of its January@GSAS programming, the Office of Career Services (OCS) brought in three recently hired PhDs to share their insights with GSAS students who are pursuing careers in academia, specifically in humanities or social sciences fields. And while each speaker’s story was unique — as is each candidate’s — it was hard to ignore the songs of praise for the postdoc.

Take Peter Kraus, who earned his PhD from MIT in 2011. Coming out of his fifth year of graduate work, Kraus was offered a position as assistant professor of political science at Boston College. It was his dream job, but the timing was less than ideal. Not only was he set to get married that summer, but his defense was also scheduled for September, right when he was due to begin teaching. In a bold move, Kraus asked to defer for a year, a request that BC granted, and he opted instead for a research fellowship at the Crown Center for Middle East Studies at Brandeis University.

While the idea of delaying a tenure-track job for a postdoc may seem counterintuitive, Kraus says that in hindsight, he wouldn’t have done it any other way. “I couldn’t recommend it more highly,” he told the audience at the OCS’s Real Life Stories from the Academic Job Search, held on January 14. “Since I wasn’t going right from defending to teaching, I was able to get a couple of articles in the pipeline, and my manuscript was in decent shape, so that when I started at BC, I could really focus on the teaching.”

Kellie Jackson, who got a PhD from Columbia in 2010, also highly recommends applying for postdocs before the tenure track, a lesson she learned the hard way. Jackson got her start as an adjunct professor at Gonzaga University.

This past fall, Jackson got her start as an adjunct professor at Gonzaga University.

Save the date:
Harvard Horizons Symposium, May 6, 2013, Sanders Theatre
Questions? harvardhorizons@fas.harvard.edu

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Bookmark the GSAS Bulletin’s online news site for features about graduate students and timely information about careers, fellowships, teaching, and deadlines! www.gsas.harvard.edu/news
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HIGHLIGHTS FROM

JANUARY@GSAS

See www.gsas.harvard.edu/january to review the full lineup of offerings.

There were more than 100 programs and activities on offer for graduate students in January, most centering on career planning and skill building. Clockwise from top left, Hope Mayo (left) led a hands-on printing workshop at Houghton Library for students (including PhD student Ren-Yuan Li). PhD student Tom Wooden read from his recent book on rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina; the GSAS Science Policy Group sponsored a mini-course coordinated by Bina Venkataraman; Dudley House hosted activities for children; participants in a fellowships boot camp refined their proposals; and GSAS alumnus Ken Frowen led a workshop on finance during a two-day symposium on business applications for the PhD.

Veritalk

PODCASTING THE LIFE OF THE MIND FROM THE HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

www.gsas.harvard.edu/veritalk

Veritalk is a series of discussions with Harvard graduate students on topics of current intellectual interest — some serious, some not so serious.

Questions? veritalk@gmail.com
The Power to Change

AN MD/PHD STUDENT WORKS TO MOBILIZE LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO IMPROVE HEALTH CARE IN AFRICA

BY NICHOLAS NARDINI

TO THE ENDEAVOR OF IMPROVING health care in the world’s poorest regions, Scott Lee brings two conspicuous assets. The more obvious is the $100,000 grant that the MD/PhD student in Harvard’s Health Policy program won last April from Massachusetts General Hospital, for research into community health in rural Africa and India. Money alone, though, is not as impressive as it once was in global development. Easy enthusiasm about the transformative power of Western largesse is increasingly running up against a recognition of the complexity of intercultural cooperation, and a growing chorus of critics is challenging core assumptions of international philanthropy. In this atmosphere, Lee’s second asset may be the more significant: when he began his global development career ten years ago, it was not with enthusiasm, but with a sense of despair.

At the time, Lee was a Harvard College junior who had just returned from his first trip to Africa. During sophomore year, he had discovered an interest in global health and had begun working with Partners in Health, the nonprofit co-founded by Paul Farmer, MD/PhD ’90, Rockefeller University Professor. Encouraged by Farmer to get field experience, Lee traveled to Ugunja, a village in western Kenya, during what happened to be the nadir of the country’s HIV crisis. He had hoped to discover a way to make a difference, but instead spent most of his time by the bedside of the dying.

“I came back for junior year traumatized by what I had seen,” Lee remembers. “Suffering there was so ubiquitous that it seemed utterly mundane. I couldn’t recognize that with the notion I had developed that unnecessary suffering is a moral travesty, something we can and should eradicate. Going into that summer, I felt a ton of agency. Coming out, I felt helpless and hopeless.” He even wondered whether basic concepts like justice and suffering weren’t merely Western constructs. “What if for them, when someone died at thirty, that was just a routine matter — prema-
ture only by our Western standards of longevity?”

He decided to ask just that question. He designed a senior thesis on how AIDS sufferers in western Kenya made sense of their illness, and returned to Ugunja to interview villagers about whether they found it unjust that treatment for their illness was scientifically available but not within financial reach. “And the answer I got, time after time, was that ‘Yes, this is unjust, yes, the world shouldn’t be this way, and yes, we can change it. You should change it.’”

“It restored my senses of both responsibility and agency.” Since then, Lee has returned to Ugunja every summer, working with villagers to establish two schools, a microfinance program, an agricultural training program, a computer training center, and a health clinic. Along the way, he co-founded a nonprofit, earned master’s degrees from Cambridge and Princeton, and spent time working for the World Health Organization.

For Lee, what made the difference between despair and determination was an understanding of the power of local communities to create positive change. “I learned very early on the futility of fashioning myself as a hero trying to save the world by myself. The only tenable path is partnership, and the best way that I can contribute toward a better world is by empowering others in their efforts toward the same.”

He remembered this when it came time to plan a dissertation. He began speaking with a friend from college who worked for Dimagi, a Cambridge-based company that develops innovative health care solutions, including mobile phone software for community health workers (CHWs) — locals trained to provide basic primary care in areas where access to doctors is scarce. The recent availability of cheap cell phones has effected something of a renaissance in community health, by allowing workers to quickly access, re-
cord, and transmit information about their patients. Lee appreciated the value of this technology, but also recognized that its full potential lay in its interplay with underly-
ing social factors, such as what motivates health workers to serve their communities. Together with the company’s directors, he began thinking of ways to make the soft-
ware socially meaningful. “What I really like about Dimagi is that even though they believe in technology, they recognize that it’s not a panacea, that there’s a need for a human component behind all of this.”

“The research for which Lee and Dimagi won the MGH grant is specifically designed to study the importance of performance feedback. ‘In most com-

munity health worker programs, CHWs fill out reports, submit them, and never hear back. Have they done a good job? How does their performance compare to other workers?’ Without this informa-
tion, Lee contends, the entire task of health work becomes demotivated. By providing workers with a phone-based ‘dashboard’ containing automatic, dynamic charts and graphics depicting their performance, he hopes to enable health workers to track their impact and progress over time.

For Lee, this work is as much about the developed world as the developing: “Our primary care system in the US is even more broken in terms of the mis-
alignment of incentives, our lack of tools — beyond drugs — to help our patients, our patterns of seeing patients once a year and doing nothing for them in between,” he says. So the question Lee’s work addresses is a universal one: “How to mobilize and motivate communities to take health into their own hands.” Whether you are an African village who knows you should treat your water with chlorine solution, or an American office worker who knows you should eat more nutritious food, Lee says, “We know what we need to do, but it’s hard to do it. Being the healthiest ver-
nus of somewhere is harder than climbing Mount Everest. We all need support to climb that mountain.”

FEBRUARY 2013 | GSAS BULLETIN | 3

Scott Lee, an MD/PhD student in health policy, envisions a new community-based health system. “The answer I got, time after time, was that ‘Yes, this is unjust, yes, the world shouldn’t be this way, and yes, we can change it. You should change it.’”
HARVARD GRADUATE WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING PRESENTS

A fireside chat with Susan Hockfield

Tuesday, February 26
5 p.m, reception to follow
Free, Geological Lecture Hall, 24 Oxford Street, Cambridge

As the former (and first female) president of MIT, Susan Hockfield oversaw the launch of edX, intensified institutional efforts for new and emerging energy technologies, and emphasized MIT’s continued focus on diversity. Professor Hockfield is excited to answer your questions during this discussion; please submit and vote for questions at http://bit.ly/hgwise.

Co-sponsored by GSAS, the Harvard Integrated Life Sciences program, and the Graduate Student Council.

Contact hgwise@gmail.com

in harmony: the norma jean calderwood collection of islamic art
January 31–June 1, 2013

Largely unpublished and little known, the Calderwood Collection includes important objects from the Persian cultural sphere, such as luxury glazed ceramics of the early Islamic era, illustrated manuscripts of medieval epic poems, and lacquerware of the early modern era.

Learn more: harvardartmuseums.org/calderwood


Happiness: What Your Mother Didn’t Tell You

A free lecture by Daniel Gilbert, professor of psychology and bestselling author of Stumbling on Happiness

Wednesday, February 20
The Geological Lecture Hall
(24 Oxford St., Cambridge)
6 p.m.

Most of us think we know what would make us happy and that our only problem is getting it. But research in psychology, economics, and neuroscience shows that people are not very good at predicting what will make them happy, how happy it will make them, and how long that happiness will last.

Is the problem that we can’t really imagine what our futures will hold? Is the problem that society lies to us about the true sources of human happiness? Yes, and yes again, says Dan Gilbert. He’ll explain why, when it comes to finding happiness, we can’t always trust our imaginations—or our mothers.

Daniel Gilbert has won numerous awards for his research and teaching, including the American Psychological Association’s Distinguished Scientific Award for an Early Career Contribution to Psychology. In 2008 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His 2007 book, Stumbling on Happiness, spent 6 months on the New York Times bestseller list, has been translated into 30 languages, and was awarded the Royal Society’s General Book Prize for best science book of the year. In 2010, he hosted and co-wrote the award-winning NOVA television series This Emotional Life, which was seen by more than 10 million viewers.

Harvard Art Museums

In Harmony: The Norma Jean Calderwood Collection of Islamic Art

January 31–June 1, 2013

Largely unpublished and little known, the Calderwood Collection includes important objects from the Persian cultural sphere, such as luxury glazed ceramics of the early Islamic era, illustrated manuscripts of medieval epic poems, and lacquerware of the early modern era.

Learn more: harvardartmuseums.org/calderwood

Don’t Miss!

Fabulous Fellows FEBRUARY FILM FESTIVAL

Relax and join some friends at Dudley’s annual awards season spectacular! Films selected by Dudley staff and fellows and shown on the big-screen TV in the Graduate Student Lounge.

FOR A FULL LINEUP OF CURRENT DUDLEY EVENTS, GO TO WWW.GSAS.HARVARD.EDU/DUDLEYTHISMONTH

Defiance (2008). A compelling World War II drama based on the true story of four Jewish brothers who escape into the Belarussian forests in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe, where they take on the responsibility of protecting more than a thousand Polish Jews. Starring Daniel Craig, Liev Schreiber, and Jamie Bell. Friday, February 1, 6:30 p.m. (Beth Smoot)

Groundhog Day (1993). Bill Murray’s life becomes stuck one Groundhog Day, and it’s a joy to see if or how he gets out of it. Saturday, February 2, 7 p.m. (Beth Smoot)

The Lives of Others (2006). In 1980s Berlin, a Stasi officer finds that the more he listens, the more he cares. A powerful film about betrayal and its consequences. Tuesday, February 5, 7 p.m. (Donal Cahill)

Everything is Illuminated (2005). Based on the book by Jonathan Safran Foer, this film — at turns darkly comic and dramatic — tells the story of an eccentric Jewish man who embarks on an adventure in search of the story behind his grandfather’s tragic past in a remote Ukrainian village. Thursday, February 7, 8 p.m. (Anna Leshinskaya)

Can’t Miss Double Feature: Troll 2 (1990) / Best Worst Movie (2009). There are no trolls in Troll 2. Troll 2 isn’t even a legitimate sequel to Troll 1; it’s an amateur attempt at exploiting a franchise by a delusional Italian director who hired mostly non-actor locals for his “masterpiece.” The result is a magnificent train-wreck that has gained a reputation as the best bad movie of all time. Bad enough to inspire an award-winning documentary entitled, “Best Worst Movie.” Troll 2–themed drinks and snacks provided. Friday, February 8, 6 p.m. (Jeff Chenette)

Kate and Leopold (2001). Treat yourself to a pre-Valentine’s Day romance starring Hugh Jackman as a 19th-century nobleman suddenly transported to 21st-century Manhattan, where he falls in love with Meg Ryan. Wednesday, February 13, 6:30 p.m. (Susan Zawalich)

Black Narcissus (1947). A classic of British cinema from director Michael Powell. A group of nuns is given a “House of Women” to use as a convent in the Himalayas. Gradually their discipline is undermined by the eroticism and exoticism of the surroundings. Friday, February 15, 6:30 p.m. (Susan Zawalich)

Memento (2000). Intriguing story of an amnesiac trying desperately to remember what happened to him. Tuesday, February 19, 7 p.m. (Gregory Malecha)

Je ne suis pas là pour être aimé (Not Here to Be Loved) (2005). A charming French love story about a lonely middle-aged man who enrolls in a dance class, meets a special someone, and then complications and romance follow. Friday, February 22, 7 p.m. (Tom Wisniewski)

Dudley House Your Graduate Student Center since 1991
Lehman Hall, Harvard Yard ◆ www.dudley.harvard.edu ◆ 617-495-2255
HOUSE MASTERS James M. Hogle and Doreen M. Hogle ◆ HOUSE ADMINISTRATOR Susan Zawalich
Announcing
THE RAPE AGGRESSION DEFENSE (RAD) PROGRAM

THE HARVARD UNIVERSITY POLICE DEPARTMENT IS OFFERING A
SELF-DEFENSE COURSE OPEN TO ALL FEMALE HARVARD AFFILIATES.

Classes are on Thursdays, February 7–28, from 6-10 pm.
Dudley House

The Rape Aggression Defense (RAD) Program, taught by HUPD officers, empowers female students, faculty, and staff to combat various types of assaults by providing them with realistic self-defense tactics and techniques. This empowerment is taught through four basic principles: education, dependency on self, making one’s own decisions, and realization of one’s own power.

The course begins with awareness, prevention, risk reduction, and risk avoidance, while progressing to the basics of hands-on defense training.

Space is limited; RSVP to dudleypublicservice@gmail.com

Share Your Time,
We’ll Share Pizza!

GSAS alumni donated more than $1 million last year — funding that underwrites graduate research workshops, provides fellowships, seeds new initiatives, and supports the development of graduate students beyond the classroom (career development, travel grants, and the English Language Program, to name a few).

To honor that support, and to encourage future generosity, the Graduate School Fund is holding an acknowledgement event at Dudley House.

We offer free pizza to students who are willing to write thank-you notes to alumni donors of graduate student aid.

Thursday, February 7, noon–2 p.m.
Dudley House Common Room

Stationery and thank you scripts will be provided! If you can’t make it this time, drop a note to gsaa@fas.harvard.edu to express interest in future events.

Graduate School Fund
University, where she quickly moved up the totem pole and was entered into the running for a tenure-track job, a position, she was told, that was created with her in mind. Yet while she loved her students and revelled in the teaching experience, Jackson felt overextended. With a 4:4 teaching load, “I got burnt out very quickly,” she said. “I realised, I’m not getting any writing done, I’m not getting any research done. All I’m doing is teaching,” a startling realization in a publish-or-perish world. So she withdrew from the search at Gonzaga and accepted a position as a Harvard College Fellow in African and African American Studies. It’s a transitional role that will ultimately make her “much more alluring for other job opportunities,” she says.

Still, it’s important to remember that on the quest for tenure there is no single, clearly defined model for success. Sometimes, in fact, your timing is perfect, your preparation is solid, and the stars align. This was the case for GSAS alum Margaret Healy-Varley, who earned her PhD from Harvard in 2011 and is now an assistant professor of English at Providence College. She went straight from bachelor’s to PhD to professor, an impressive feat that has become less and less common among recent grads looking for work. Nevertheless, her story proves it’s possible, and she’s never been happier. “I love my job,” she says. “It’s a blast.”

If you can get a tenure-track position straight after earning your PhD, and feel that you’re sufficiently prepared for the role, then go for it, but do it for the right reasons, the panelists agreed. As you develop your research and think about your future, the most important question you can ask yourself is not how you can get the job, but who you want to be when you get it. Write, teach, attend conferences, meet with peers, listen to great lecturers, and immerse yourself into the community before you get the job, so that when you do, you’ll have the knowledge and confidence to succeed.
Get Out!
EXPLORATIONS AND ADVENTURES ON AND OFF CAMPUS

Take the Team Fitness Challenge
Rise up from your winter hibernation and rally some pals to compete in Harvard Rec’s team fitness challenge! If you log enough workout minutes, you’ll win a prize (beyond good health and a summer-ready form).

Surviving Graduate School: The Contest

Welcome to the Bulletin’s new monthly contest!
In each print edition, we’ll ask readers to share a grad-school trick of the trade — a survival skill you’ve picked up during your Harvard years — a breakthrough you’ve discovered (or a hack you’ve built) to make the burdens of grad school just a little less heavy.

We’ll pick the most creative, useful, and best answer(s) from among the responses. We’ll print the winner(s) in the next edition, and we’ll send a GSAS totebag in return.

(Note: The number of winners will depend on the quality and quantity of the submissions, but it will be capped at 5 per month.)

This Month’s Contest:
Is There an App for That?

Tell us what apps you’ve discovered that most help you work or live as a grad student? Why/how?

E-mail your answer to bulletin@fas.harvard.edu.

The contest is open only to students at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. When submitting, include your full name and your department/program. We allow only one submission per person per contest.