

So...You Wanna Go to Graduate School? - Hornbeck, David (1989)

Class - 08 February 2010

Hornbeck's 1989 article is a gut-check for students considering the pursuit of a graduate degree in geography, it suggests a process for selecting potential graduate schools, applying to the selected schools, and accepting admission from the top choice school, and dissects the unknowns and the expectations of faculty in graduate school. The Geography 696 class discussion essentially revolved around acknowledging the validity of the article, lamenting on the usefulness the article would have been as an undergraduate, and describing characteristics of successful teaching.

The first section of *So... You Wanna Go to Graduate School?* is a weed-out piece, intended to portray the harsh reality that is graduate school. Intelligence and creativity are not always directly related to a student's success in graduate school. Some professors give value to students who "tow-the-line" as opposed to thinking outside of the box: and this is up to their sole discretion. Graduate school is very time consuming and the financial gains from earning an advanced degree are not always proportional to the time invested. Most programs teach students to research, not teach. Prospective graduate students should assess whether they have the talent to teach: teaching is an art form and the ability to be an effective teacher is not possessed by everyone. Also, in the world of academia, not everyone is created equal. The atmosphere and workings of graduate programs are steeped in a "quasi-aristocratic" tradition which is projected to continue throughout the lifespan of academia.

The second section of Hornbeck's article provides step by step instruction on selecting a graduate school. Assessing and selecting the right graduate school to attend can be one of the

most important decisions. Hornbeck lays out a process for finding programs well suited for specific interests and accepting admission to the program offering the right combination of financial aid and personal ranking.

The third section provides a rundown of what to expect in graduate school. Important differences exist between graduate courses and undergraduate courses. Students are expected to be more independent, responsible, and produce higher quality work. Hornbeck identifies writing as the most important skill, but I would expand this to communication in general. Seminars generally provide a setting for improving oral communication skills and developing concepts. Hornbeck also describes seminars which should be avoided: primarily led by professors which are disorganized, disengaged, and not interested in fostering fledgling geographers. Students bear a large responsibility for the success of a seminar, as well. Student engagement and preparedness are key in seminars. Hornbeck's final words of wisdom are not to make a habit of complaining because this can quickly become character.

The Geography 696 class discussion commenced with how CSULB was selected for attendance. The school website, faculty members, and the program focus/specialty were the main factors for school selection. Many students were in favor of incorporating an optional teaching component to the master's program, which would provide classroom experience and oral communication/presentation instruction (students guest lecturing in undergraduate classes is one idea for drafting a teaching framework). Additionally, Dr. Hornbeck provided his opinions on effective classroom instruction. This included the following: not using notes; walk around the room; be very personable and approachable; and creating a relaxed environment. The one rule he enforced in his classroom was that students were not allowed to talk to their neighbor, because this takes away from the neighbor's education. He developed these methods through watching

other professors and writing down what he did not like about their teaching and classroom environment. In discussing good and bad seminars, everyone seemed to reaffirm the accuracy of Hornbeck's article. Even after reading *So... You Wanna Go to Graduate School?* everyone remained committed to earning a master's degree in geography.

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