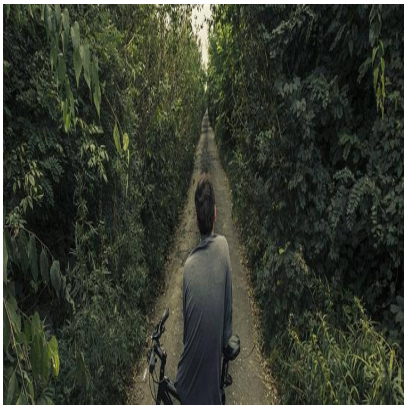


Description

So, you've earned your PhD after years of hard work. Now what? There are many options available depending on your career goals. Of course, you most likely want to have a career that's in your field of study, but whether to pursue an academic career path is the question that you will have to answer for yourself.

Life After Your PhD

In a July 2012 article in Vitae, Rob Hardwick discusses these issues. He states that researchers must have a clear direction, know how to lead and contribute to several ongoing projects, and also become an established and well-known member of the research community." It is also important to remember that it has never been easier to become more high profile in your field. This is due to the internet providing a myriad of pathways to connect with colleagues. Conferences provide great opportunities as well to touch bases with not only colleagues but also potential employers. Take advantage of these forums. Research and other fellowships are additional opportunities to pursue an academic or research career. They can open doors for you very fast!

Finding Fellowships

According to another article, most academic researchers must find funding from outside their home institutions for at least a portion of their work. Each funding source has its own set of objectives. These funding agencies look for applicants who can contribute to or meet those objectives. The first step in finding funding is to search for sources with similar interests. Once you have identified these sources, call each to determine whether your field of study or research proposal fits their criteria. For a funder to be interested in your research, you must present how your work would provide new findings in that particular discipline.

For example, in the US, the NIH funds academic biomedical research. It provides a list of five research criteria that applicants must meet. Other funding institutions also often use these criteria, so you should become familiar with them. The criteria are:

- Significance: able to advance the objectives.
- Approach: methods well designed; appropriate budget.

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- Innovation: proposes a unique and novel approach.
- Investigator: backgrounds of investigators add value.
- Environment: provides satisfactory support/facilities.

Early Fellowships are Key

Keep in mind that a fellowship early in your studies can be a huge selling point when you are at the point of pursuing an academic career. For example, the Research Fellowship in Science and Engineering offers the postdoc researcher an opportunity for independent studies. It provides the person with an opportunity to conduct his or her own research without having to rely on an income from an employer.

There are several fellowships available for those who might be interested in independent research. Early career, intermediate, and senior fellowships are available for postdoc researchers. The U.S. Department of State also offers several fellowship programs. Some require a PhD or equivalent at the time of application. Most programs are in the science and engineering fields; however, there are also fellowships available for foreign affairs and diplomacy. The American Association for the Advancement of Science provides several fellowships in science for research and work experience for both students and graduates.

University Fellowship Programs

Universities should strive to provide fellowships to students for both pre- and postdoc work. Students have a much better chance of securing a position in the academic field when they have a fellowship for their research. It is encouraging that some major universities do provide these opportunities, but all universities should strive to include them.

Yale University provides fellowships and funding for all grade levels. Its online pages offer several search options for locating funding, and provide information on how to begin the process and how to proceed. The University Of Edinburgh also offers several fellowships, and although the information is for postdoc applicants, the advice is valid for those still in school. Stanford University offers approximately 100 fellowships each year to students who are pursuing a doctorate in science or engineering. Princeton University offers fellowships to graduate students “to support them in their full-time course of study without the obligation to teach or perform research.” All of its first-year PhD students receive fellowship funding, which includes tuition and stipends.

Tips for Applying

The University of Edinburgh suggests the following; however, most universities and outside funders subscribe to the points noted here.

- *Find a mentor*: Find an experienced colleague who works at the institution to which you might apply. A mentor can help you develop a proposal for funding.
- *Contact the institution’s research office*: Let the institution know that you plan to apply for a fellowship.
- *Get a peer review*: A peer review of your application can provide you with valuable feedback for

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revising and improving it.
- *Know the fellowship "aim"*: Consider the aims and ensure that you can meet them.

These tips are good advice for applying for fellowships or positions in academics with or without fellowships. According to an article in Discover in 2012, it is difficult to go from postdoc to junior faculty. The article provides good advice for those seeking a long-term academic research career. Keep in mind that major universities care about research, so to that end, the article has some suggestions. Some are obvious, and others not so obvious. When working towards a career position, all suggestions are important to keep in mind so that you don't lose focus on why you are there.

Category

1. Career Corner
2. PhDs & Postdocs

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