Description

An Uncertain Future!

Science majors who persisted through to doctoral research are finding that their prospects upon graduation aren't any better than their peers who studied for business and humanities degrees. In their endless pursuit of higher per-credit-hour fees at the doctoral level, universities are now producing more graduates than there are places to employ them. A recent article in the *Economist* estimated that there are 6 graduates for every open academic position.

Cheap Labor

After taking on unpaid or minimum wage internships to gain experience during their doctoral studies, many graduates are presented with the harsh realization that their first job after receiving their new PhDs may be a position that looks remarkably similar to the internship. Junior researchers are at the lowest rank on the ladder, and are treated as such, gaining the chance to do the most work on a research project with the least amount of credit received at the end. Paying your dues is a de facto obligation, but the exact term of that indentured servitude can be hard to determine. In an environment where research experience is measured in decades and forced retirement is unheard of, upward mobility can be hard to imagine if your Senior Researcher is only in his or her forties.

High Barriers to Entry

When all of your fellow graduates hold PhD's, achieving some level of differentiation can be difficult. Unless you were able to participate in a groundbreaking research project during your studies, or managed to win a place on the second phase of a study that started when you were still a doctoral student, getting assigned to a new research team can be challenging. To get a job, you need experience, and to get experience, you need a job.

A Better Approach

Graduating with a doctoral degree should never be equated to being pushed from the nest, but that's how many junior researchers feel, and this may have longer-term consequences for academic research as a whole. The skills and success of these new graduates are reflective of the institutions that produced them, and if no care is taken to nurture their success in the short-term, there'll be no point in calling them for alumni donations down the road when the endowment funds get a little low. For example, affirmative action may be asking too much, but ensuring placements for new junior researchers on all research teams would be a good start. In addition, ensure that proactive mentoring and career advice is available early enough for those junior researchers to have a plan in place before graduation.

There's no suggestion here that graduate researchers shouldn't be expected to make their own choices based on their own personal priorities, but if they are to stand a chance of building their own

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unique career paths in a world of academic research that gets more competitive every day, the institutions that took their fees have an obligation to help them navigate those shark-infested waters until they learn to swim on their own.

Category

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Date Created
2016/03/01
Author
daveishan

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