




Having an academic career

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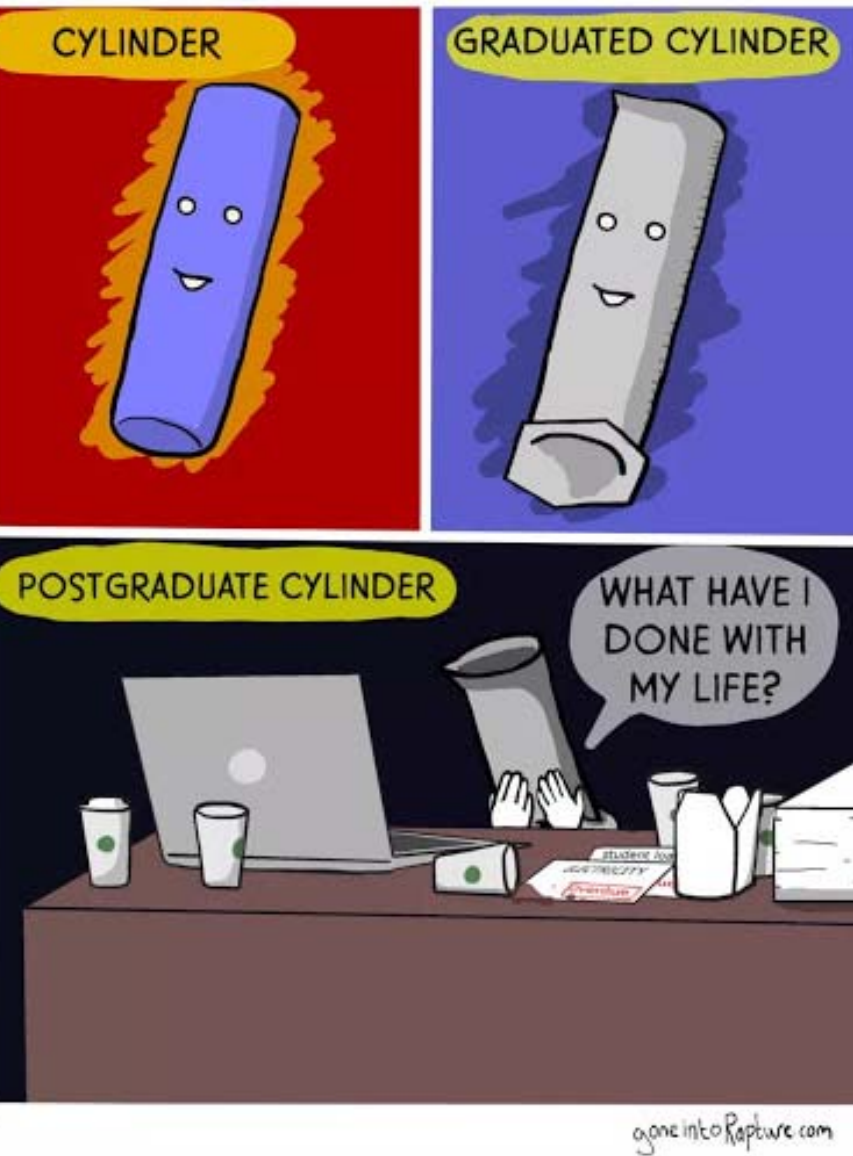


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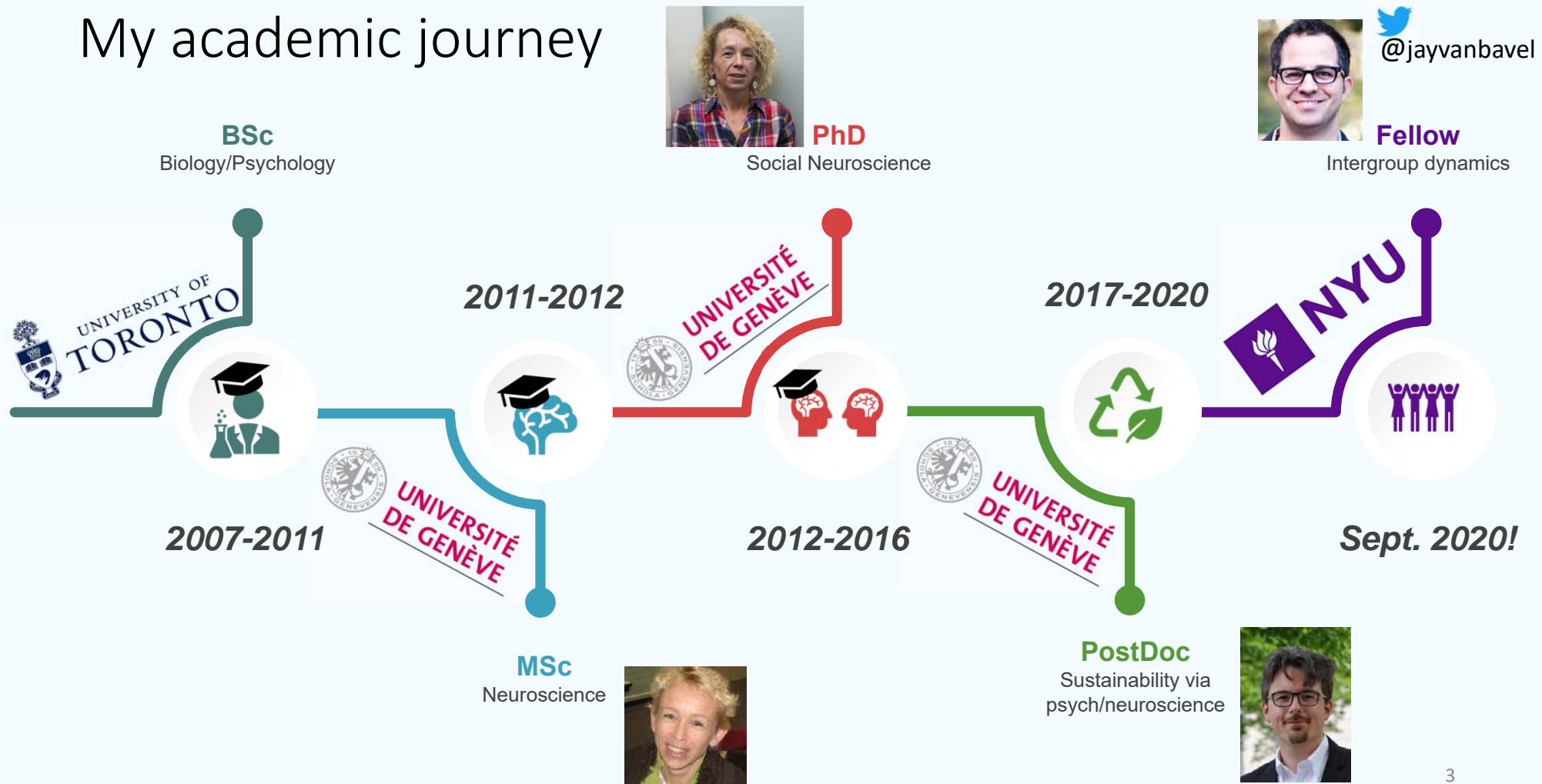
Affective Sciences
SWISS NATIONAL CENTER OF COMPETENCE IN RESEARCH



Outline


- My academic journey so far
- “How did I decide to...”
- The good and the bad of academia
- Some misc. tips and advice

My academic journey



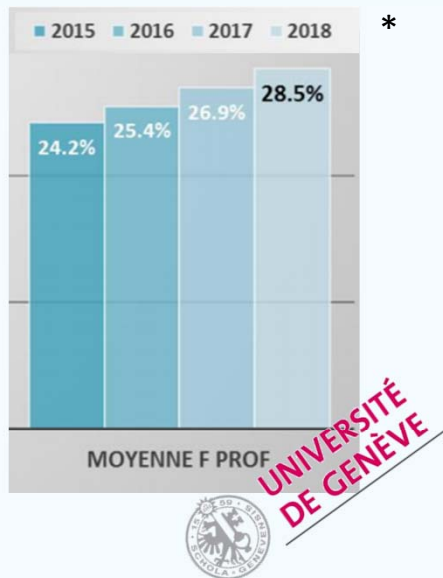


How did I decide...

- to do a master?
 - I loved neuroscience
 - (I also wanted to move to Europe) 
- to do the PhD?
 - I still loved neuroscience
 - I found a project that seemed interesting!
 - I also had no idea what else there was to do...
 - (and Canada is just too cold.)
- to stay in academia?
 - After the PhD:
 - I saw a job posting that looked awesome...
 - The next phase (i.e. going to NYU):
 - I love science (*not academia*) and wanted to continue with my line of study!

Things *not* to love about PhD life/academia...

Equality:



36%

of respondents have sought help for anxiety or depression caused by PhD studies. One-third of them sought help from places other than their institution, and 18% sought help at their institution but didn't feel supported.

©nature

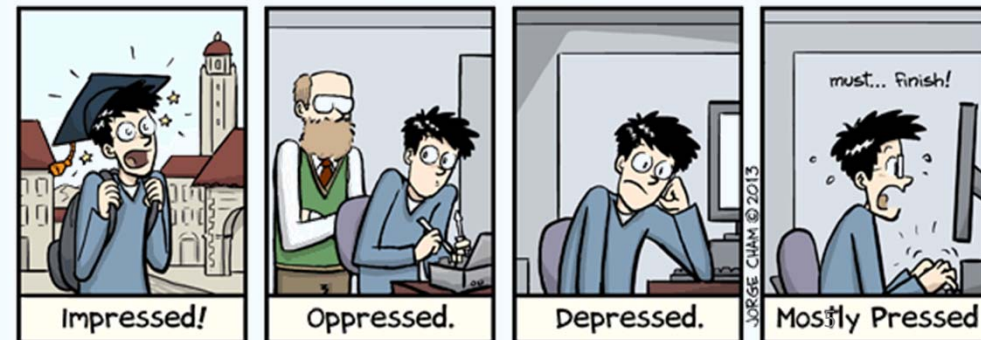
Source: Nature PhD Survey 2019

*This is an adaptation of the figure. Source: <https://www.unige.ch/rectorat/egalite/ancrage/statistiques/>

Other academic grievances:

- Publish or perish culture
- Lack of job security
 - 1 year contracts?!
 - number of tenured positions \neq number of PhDs given out per year!
- What do you do if you don't want to be a professor?
- \$\$\$
- Work life balance

Grad School:



WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM

Some of the good things

- Freedom
 - choose to study what you want/care about
 - to set your own schedule
- Teaching and mentoring
- Conferences and travel
 - scientific exchange
- Potentially change the world



Why should you continue in academia?

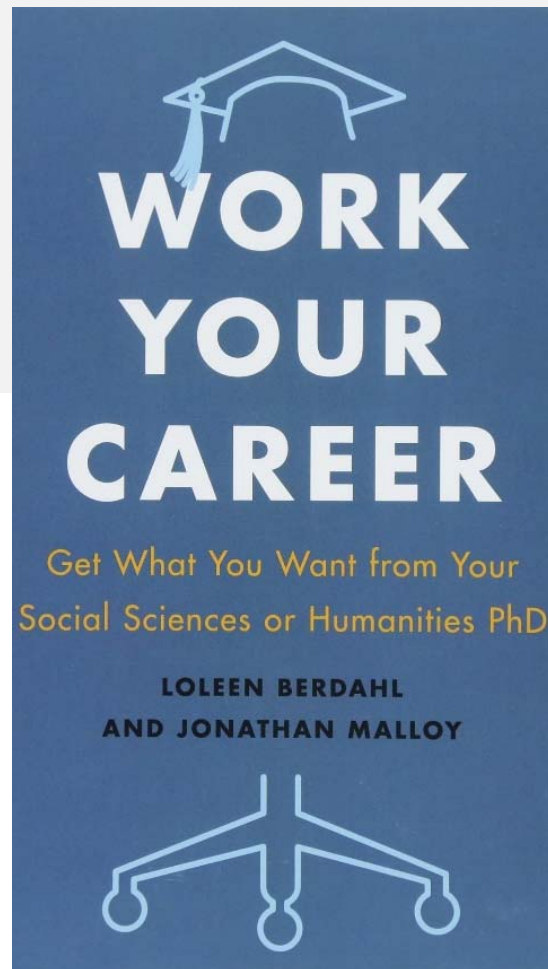
- Academia is hard.
 - (and the system is broken)
- Things are starting to change
 - change is faster the more people push for it!





How to decide to continue in academia

- **DO YOUR RESEARCH**
 - read blogs, magazines, articles, books, etc. about the pros and cons of academia
 - “Letters to young scientists” in Science Magazine
 - follow @jayvanbavel
 - if you don’t know, google.
 - talk to *everyone*
- **Make a career plan**
 - (google that too)
- Get a mentor.



The Definitive ‘what do I ask/look for’ in a PhD Advisor Guide

You’ve been accepted to a PhD program, and have time to ask questions while visiting – what do you look for and have in mind as you start this journey and an exhaustive reference of questions to ask, color coded by who you should pin

You’ll have 30 min – full day with each lab, so focus on the questions relevant to your situation. Some have complex answers, so I’ll be a trusted neutral party about or @ me on twitter (@andrewkuznet). Good luck, I believe in you. :)

Before: Understand potential advisors’ work: read a few, recent, paper abstracts (e.g. prev. 2 yrs for HC) and check out their academic/lab website. Do this even for profs you might not be directly interested in, come in with an open mind and try to learn as much as possible. Never know if you’ll want to add or switch an advisor.

Who do you want to work with?
Your advisor relationship determines quite a bit of your graduate student experience. Pick wisely :)

What do you want to research?
Figure out what topic you’ll be working on, projects, types of approaches, etc.

How does funding work?
Money is (unfortunately) important. Figure out how much it will drive your experience and what to expect.

How likely is what you had in mind?
Although you may have time to sort out the details later, now is the time to check if a specific arrangement is viable.

Who best to ask this question to...
Advisor’s website / publications
Direct Observation
Department
Advisor Directly
Advisor’s current PhD students
Current PhD students in progress
Advisor’s current PhD students
Yourself

1 Advisor Style & Expectations
Does the professor have tenure yet? [engagement level, PhD might get later]
What is the professor’s formal training / background / PhD? [helps context]
What have previous lab members done after getting their PhD? [idea to look into]
What is the lab structure? [how collaborative/included are lab members’ pin]
Does the advisor consider themselves a “hands-on” or “hands-off” advisor?
How does the advisor give feedback on papers/what is their feedback style?
How often does the advisor meet with their students? [1:1 or all together?]
Are there lab meetings? What are other meetings you will see your advisor in?
What does a group/lab meeting look like? [Or other relevant meetings]
How many students are in the group? [Number of undergrad/grad students/PhD]
What progress does the advisor generally expect from a student in the course?
What other expectations does the advisor have for their students: time/local
“When have you given a letter of concern? Why?”
“What do you do when students are struggling?”

2 Research Fit & Projects
How directly applicable will your future technical skills be to the roles you see?
What “research methods” does the lab use? [What “types” of papers / content]
“What are some of the projects that you and your students are currently working on?”
“In general, do you tend to give your students projects or have them select?”
“Do you have particular projects that you see me working on?”
“How much freedom do you think I’d have in selecting my own projects?”
“Are there other students you are interested in working with? If so, what are they doing?”
“Would they have their own line of work or contribute to a bigger project/lab?”

3 Funding / Obligations
Where does their funding primarily come from? [if military / industry-focus]
What are their constraints from their funding source? [Some restrict research work — writing progress reports, traveling, preparing presentations for the integration]
If your advisor made you work on a project is their area that you are least interested in doing that work? [Useful for choosing between advisors]
“If you run out of your primary funding for a student how do you expect the university to handle it? Will you have to cover the student? Do you have a backup plan for the student?”
“What does the quality of the professor look like?”
“Is there a TA requirement?” / “How often would I be expected to TA?”

4 Student-Advisor Fit / Placement

<https://www.cs.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Get-Advisor.pdf>

Tips, Tricks, & “Advice”

- “Statistics of Doom” channel on youtube!
 - Dr. Erin M. Buchanan Missouri State University
 - www.statstools.com
- Tailor your career plan to the position of your dreams
 - e.g. if you want to be a prof in Swiss, look at the SNF’s website “research output list”, and “CV requirements”
- A bit of wisdom passed down:
 - “Do not take anyone’s advise in these matters, including my own.” ~Prof. Sophie Schwartz



Questions?

