

# “What They Didn’t Teach You In Graduate School”

ACM SIGMOD 2010 DataBase MEntoring Workshop  
“Excelling in Graduate School” Session

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# The Education of Brandeis H. Marshall

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- ❖ University of Rochester, Bachelor's, Computer Science, 2000.
- ❖ Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Master's, Computer Science, 2003.
- ❖ Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, PhD, Computer Science, 2007.
- ❖ Purdue University, Postdoctoral Associate, 2007 - 2008.
- ❖ Purdue University, Assistant Professor, 2008 - present.
- ❖ The (Mis) Education
  - ❖ Married since September 2006.
  - ❖ Knit, travel, cook, bake, home renovations, So You Think You Can Dance & Glee fan, Cleveland Cavs supporter. (Go Lakers?)

# The Disclaimer

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- ❖ The following tips come from
  - ❖ Title: What they didn't teach you in graduate school: 199 Helpful Hints for Success in Your Academic Career
  - ❖ Authors: Paul Gray and David E. Drew
  - ❖ ISBN-10: 1-57922-264-1
- ❖ Note: If you don't have this book, get it. If you have this book, read it. If you have already read it, read it again!

# The Tip: #2

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- ❖ Most academic fields are dominated by fewer than 100 powerful people. These people know one another and determine the course of the field. Early in your career you should get to know as many of them as possible. More to the point, they should know who you are. You want them to see you as a bright young person at the forefront of your field. Although this tactic is important, be aware of the dangers associated with it. You should not begin the process until after you have mastered the literature (particularly the papers they wrote!) and developed some ideas of your own. If they get to know you and conclude you have no ideas, you're finished!

# The Tip: #5

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- \* Make sure you have a mentor early in your career. The old apprentice system still exists. Try to find mentors who were successful with others, who will support you, and who believe that furthering your career helps their own career. Such a mentor is preferable to the internationally famous Nobel Prize winner who exploit you.

# The Tip: #13

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- ❖ Be aware that the key danger point in any doctoral program is the one where you leave highly structured coursework (Phase 1) and enter the unstructured world of the qualification examination and the dissertation (Phase 2). Here are two strategies to help you navigate Phase 2:
  - ❖ Stay in touch with your professors, especially your adviser. One of us insists that students come in for a meeting each week, even if nothing happened. Just the fear of not being able to report anything stimulates the mind.
  - ❖ Meet regularly, ideally every week, for lunch or dinner or afternoon coffee, with two or three fellow graduate students who are also struggling with Phase 2. Compare notes and progress.

# The Tip: #15

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- ❖ Avoid Watson's Syndrome. Named by R.J. Gelles, this syndrome is a euphemism for procrastination. It involved doing every thing possible to avoid completing work. It differs from writer's block in that the sufferer substitutes real work that distracts from doing what is necessary for completing the dissertation or for advancing toward an academic career. The work may be outside or inside the university. Examples given by Gelles include:
  - ❖ remodeling a house
  - ❖ never ending literature review
  - ❖ data analysis
  - ❖ perfectionism that doesn't let you submit until you think it is perfect

# The Tip: #36

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- ❖ Real Pay. Don't assume that the only relevant dollar number associated with an offer is the total salary. It isn't. What you most need to know is how much money you can spend, how much the spending money can buy, and the quality of life associated with the offer. Here are some considerations:
- ❖ Cost of housing.
- ❖ Cost of living, other than housing.
- ❖ Quality of schools for your children.
- ❖ Local tax structure for sales, state income and real estate taxes.
- ❖ Availability of work for your spouse in the community.



# The Contact Information

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