

Judy Jones' final year

I am now nearing the completion of my first two years as a postgraduate student. It has been both a rewarding and a frustrating experience, and in the following comments I attempt to summarise my current situation.

Background

Originally I was awarded a CASE studentship which meant that I had an outside body to whom I was responsible as well as academic supervisors. In the event this turned out to be both a good and a bad experience. Firstly it meant that I very quickly began to do fieldwork. As this is, I believe, what I am best at, it proved rewarding and stimulating, but unfortunately my co-operating body appeared to have been hoping for an academic 'rubber stamp' rather than a critical analysis, so after only a year we parted company, and I have been working independently since. I have three supervisors, all of whom shed different perspectives on my work. Sometimes this can be a great advantage, at other times it just seems confusing!

Current state

I am now at the stage where I feel I have an enormous amount of data, both in fieldwork and literature reviews, and I also have the beginnings of a theoretical framework upon which to base the thesis. I have written everything up as I have gone along, and am now at the stage of trying to construct the thesis. Before the Easter of my second year I felt that I should systemically print off everything that I had written during the previous 18 months. This turned out to be nearly 400 pages, which I attempted to put into some coherent order - perhaps even a first draft. One of my supervisors has read this in its entirety, the other two in sections as I have written them. Feedback has been encouraging, but there is still a lot to do.

Immediate problems

Firstly, I feel that I am near to suffering intellectual burnout! Having worked reasonably consistently for the past two years (with the odd period in the doldrums), I now seem to be lacking any clear direction. I already have a thesis length body of work, but it is still not a thesis (it has still not officially been upgraded to Ph.D status). I am trying to incorporate the comments from my supervisors into my re-drafts of each chapter, but as I attempt to do this it sometimes feels that I am just creating a muddle out of what I once felt I understood - will I ever be able to include everything they all suggest? And will it make any sense if I do?

Writing up as I went along has at least meant that I have a substantial piece of work and something to show for two years effort, but it also means that it is difficult to be flexible in the way in which I present it - re-writing is much more difficult than writing! At the moment I find it hard to believe that it will be a Ph.D. However, I am part of a very supportive group of fellow postgrads, and as everyone appears to be feeling the same to a greater or lesser extent, I suppose it just goes with the territory.

I have just over a year left, and in some ways feel that it should be plenty of time to construct a watertight thesis, at other times I feel as though the chances of achieving that would be low even if I spent the rest of my life working on it. I don't feel as though I am making any headway at the moment. I know that I have to reduce the length of my work while increasing the quality, no one can really help much with that process. I find it difficult to define what I would find most encouraging and helpful. While I have no specific problem, the whole thing appears to be enormously problematic, my faith in 'it' and in myself seems to be at an all time low.

Discuss how would you respond to Judy?

On the acetate provided, list the main guidelines you would have for

- 1. Postgraduate research students**
- 2. Supervisors**
- 3 Departments**

to address this kind of problem
