

Book Reviews



How to Survive Your PhD: The Insider's Guide to Avoiding Mistakes, Choosing the Right Program, Working with Professors, and Just How a Person Actually Writes a 200-Page Paper

By Jason Karp. 2009. Sourcebooks, Inc. Naperville, IL. 224 pages. \$17.00. ISBN 978-1402226670

With the bleak job market and lackluster economy, many young adults are staying in school to pursue graduate degrees or returning to school after a layoff. To advance your career and get ahead in the competitive job market, the trick is to graduate as quickly as possible so you don't waste more time than necessary out of the job market. This is especially true for people finding themselves out of work and needing to return. How to Survive Your PhD covers many of these tricks, offering a no-nonsense approach to getting in and out of school with your PhD in hand. Here's some tips to complete your PhD quickly and not have to spend seven years getting it: 1) Choose your academic advisor carefully. Your academic advisor can make or break your PhD experience. Make sure you choose one whose research interests match yours, who gets things done quickly and efficiently, who gives you the freedom to thrive, and whose former graduate students completed their PhDs quickly. 2) Know your research interests. The sooner you can isolate exactly what you want to study, the sooner you can begin writing your dissertation. 3) Learn the formula. Dissertation writing, especially in the sciences, is a formula. If you have trouble writing, as many doctoral students do, spend some time reading other dissertations and learn the formula to make your dissertation a breeze. 4) Know what is expected of you. Ask your committee members what they want to see from you, what kinds of things you should know, and how to study. The more information you can get from them, the easier your qualifying exam and dissertation defense will be.

"I truly enjoyed reading this book. Deciding to continue your education and earn an PhD is never easy. Dr. Karp has written a book that answers all the questions and relieves the pressure to the answer "Am I doing the right thing?" It would be an asset to anyone continuing on the journey of higher education.

I look forward to further literature written by Dr. Karp." - Robyn Cohen, Island Park, NY

"This is a great book - I finished this book in only two days. The author breaks down the major parts of doctoral study and uses his own experiences to share what to do in order to be successful as well as what not to do if you want to earn a PhD. This is a timely book for me as I have submitted applications and am hoping to start on my PhD in Fall of 2010." - Ronda Davis, Greensboro, NC

"To be frank, I spent more than half of the book rolling my eyes at various passive-aggressive quips at the author's advisor and fellow students. By the end, this felt more like a book on how to blame other people when your PhD takes much longer than you expected. Which is a pity, because I think this story had good teaching potential. I can't even begin to imagine how frustrating and disheartening it would be to work on my PhD for seven years! The author could have turned that experience into something positive, by giving concrete examples of how he dealt with problems, instead of just complaining about them and then advising to avoiding them in the first place. For example, the author complains multiple times about the frustrations of Human Subjects Committees. We get it. Bureaucracy is tedious and takes a long time.

By far the most helpful parts of this book were the tips on working with your advisor, like only giving them a chapter at a time to read, or highlighting the relevant changes. I also found the chapter on writing your dissertation helpful, especially the tips on how to write a little every day. Although the list of phrases you should use was particularly horrifying. Just because everyone else in science overuses passive voice doesn't mean you should too!" - Anonymous

How to Survive your Doctorate

By Jane Matthiesen and Mario Binder. 2009. Open University Press. Columbus, OH. 208 pages. \$40.00. ISBN 978-0335234448

If you are doing, thinking about doing, or know someone who is doing a doctorate, then this is the survival kit you need. Rather than focusing on the technical side of the doctorate, this book looks at all the

other crucial skills that are part of everyday doctoral life. This candid book provides real insight into what it's like to do a doctorate and offers practical advice on: the application process; sources of financial support; motivational issues; student-supervisor relationships; departmental and university politics; publishing, conferences and networking and career strategies.

Written by recent doctoral graduates, the book also includes real examples and case studies from current doctoral students and recent graduates across a range of disciplines and universities. By demystifying the doctoral process *How to Survive Your Doctorate* prepares you for life as a doctoral student like no other book. See for yourself and be a survivor!

"I read this book after having done my PhD, and with every page I turned, I wished I had read this before (or that it had been written before). It is written to be read (what a difference to academic texts), empathically and passionately, and nails all the issues on the head. This is a real survival guide. It totally deserves the title. I especially enjoyed the parts where various students tell their stories. This emphasizes that many of the authors' points are not simply horror scenarios. These things happen, happen every day, and doctoral students throughout the country (or even world) battle with them, but go through them and become stronger for it. The book strikes a perfect balance between brutal honesty and confidence building advice. I will recommend it to any of my friends who are toying with the idea of doing a PhD. There is only one point on which I slightly disagree with the authors: I think it is useful to get involved in academic politics, at least to some extent. Yes it can be a challenging and threatening experience when you're in the middle of it, but it is a great preparation for organizational politics that come later in life." - Regina Eckert

*"The fact that Matthiesen and Binder do not mince matters makes *How to Survive Your Doctorate* so different. By incorporating their own experiences and those of their fellow doctorates the authors paint an authentic picture of what it means to be a PhD student in an academic as well as private setting. Whereas many of the current PhD guidebooks in the bookstores focus on the technical aspects, this book does not neglect the social components and difficulties of an everyday life as a PhD. Thus, the two authors know how to answer also the "unasked" questions everyone bears in their minds while struggling and truly bring up things "others don't tell you."*

Written in a fluent and refreshing manner the honesty and charm of the book make it easy to extract the main arguments. Little cartoons at the beginning of each chapter, for instance, playfully introduce the

*reader to the contents of the following. In sum *How to Survive Your Doctorate* aims at two things. First, for strugglers, it is a preparation guide which points at the virtues and difficulties of a life as PhD and, thus, eases the choice whether or not to go down this path. Second, for PhDs in the making it constitutes an useful road map - a backup for "surviving" the lean times every PhD entails."* – Anonymous

Eating Planet: Nutrition Today – a Challenge for Mankind and for the Planet

Editor Luigi Rubinelli. 2012. Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition in collaboration with WorldWatch Institute, Edizioni Ambiente, Milan, Italy. 307 pages. \$4.00 (Kindle edition). ISBN 9788866270294.

Do we really need another book on global food challenges and potential solutions? This relevant question is easy to answer after reading *Eating Planet 2012*. Although most of the data has been reported elsewhere, this new book published by the Barilla Center and WorldWatch Institute brings together fact and evaluation in a highly accessible format, supported by useful illustrations and current data on nutrition and food in today's globalized economy. Most importantly, it provides practical and specific recommendations on how to solve current dilemmas in the food arena.

Eating Planet: Nutrition Today, a Challenge for Mankind and the Planet eloquently quantifies the problems of under- and over-nutrition that plague societies, both in the industrialized and the developing world. Four main sections address issues of equity, *Food for All*; rational economic development, *Food for Sustainable Growth*; human nutrition, *Food for Health*; and contributions to society, *Food for Culture*. Infused throughout are notions of ecology, connectedness, and systems thinking about our human role as members of a complex world community. Proposed solutions are framed within the context of three current paradoxes: 1) higher level of overconsumption and obesity than undernutrition across the globe; 2) three billion head of livestock that produce over 50% of all greenhouse gas emissions; and 3) competition for agricultural production between food and biofuels. All three have impacts on the environment and agriculture and on the availability of food, and each is strongly influenced by policy decisions.

The challenges of food equity and 925 million undernourished people are related to poverty and unequal distribution of wealth, among and within nations. Growing demand for animal protein by those who can afford it and misallocation of grains to fuel

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production both lead to higher prices for essential food commodities. There is currently adequate food produced on a global scale, but available nutrients are reduced by 30% losses between time of crop harvest and what is discarded from the supermarket as well as the dinner table. Reducing these losses is one of the most cost-effective solutions to inadequate nutrition.

Although it is essential to pursue research and development to increase food production, such advances need to be accomplished in an economic and political framework that will improve availability of food to those most in need. Both the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the U.N. Brundtland report *Our Common Future* (1988) correctly identify access to food as a basic human right, but the international community has yet to effectively address this need.

Rational economic growth, considered by some an oxymoron, has become ever more complex in a globalized economy where the system appears to maximize profits for multinational corporations while ignoring nutritional needs of people. The Green Revolution provided short-term gains in countries primarily in Asia, successes quickly tempered by urgent long-term needs for sustained access by poor people to adequate food. Vulnerability of food production to climate extremes further complicates the sustainability of food supplies, and recent spikes in global commodity prices and low levels of strategic grain reserves reflect the instability of the global food system – each of these realities impacts the poor disproportionately. The recent IAASTD report from the U.N. points to redesign of the food system and new emphasis on agroecology as potential logical solutions. Promotion of local food systems and close cooperation between farmers and consumers provide some immediate solutions to the equity challenge.

A healthier overall food system, not just increased production, is seen as the key to long-term improved nutrition for everyone. Research emphasis on higher yields of calories was appropriate when lack of food energy was the compelling need, but we now understand much more about food quality and the need for nutritious food as key to solving the problem of hunger. Challenges differ among countries. From the child without enough rice in Asia, where over 60% of undernourished people reside, to the obese teenager in North America, whose diet rich in sugars and fats contributes to an emerging epidemic of diabetes and heart disease due to overconsumption of food, there is a critical obligation to focus on food quality and nutrition. Solutions for the former include more diverse diets and access to adequate food supply, and for the latter a reduced array of attractive fast foods,

less animal protein in the diet, and increased reliance on fruits and vegetables.

Globalization of economies has led to reduced diversity of foods in the human diet, as many people are attracted to the western model, and this results in erosion of the food culture as well. It is difficult to generate concern about the ecology of food as a central element of each culture if there is urgent need to find the next meal. But growing appreciation of how diverse indigenous farming systems and strong local economies can be improved by creative uses of modern technologies will open new avenues for site-specific development based on local resources and cultures. Foods and local consumption habits are important criteria for design of biodiverse farming systems, an essential and central element in promoting local economies, and a device for linking people to their immediate environment. Viewing farming as a human activity system that links culture, ecology and natural resource use to produce essential food and adequate nutrition increases the focus on food and culture in many decisions related to development. Such solutions are in stark contrast to the industrial, large-scale, highly-mechanized, one-size-fits-all paradigm.

Eating Planet provides a compendium of challenges and solutions that is unique in its breadth of focus, its organization around key themes, and its integration of production, economic, nutrition, and cultural elements of the system. Current and expanding problems are many, and the book does not minimize their importance. Yet coupled with challenges are highly positive practical examples that project improved nutrition and equitable access to food in the future. It is these potential solutions that contribute to the strength and value in the book.

Well written and accessible to the general public, the book features statements by noted personalities including Mario Monti, current Prime Minister of Italy; Raj Patel, outspoken advocate for food and environment; Carlo Petrini, founder of Slow Food; and Vandana Shiva, proponent of biodiversity and farmers' rights. Similar to other books published by organizations, this is a team effort with minimal attribution to specific authors. It is a useful and encouraging statement on positive directions for future development of food systems, and could be a valuable overview for undergraduate courses in agroecology, anthropology, food economics, nutrition, and sustainable development.

Submitted by:
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Saving Higher Education: The Integrated, Competency-Based Three-Year Bachelor's Degree Program

**By Martin J. Bradley, Robert H. Seidman and
Steven R. Painchaud. 2011. Jossey-Bass. San
Francisco, CA. 240 pages. \$40.00. ISBN: 978-
0-470-88819-3**

Colleges and universities are under pressure from the government, students, and parents to make higher education more efficient and cost-effective. Based on Southern New Hampshire University's highly successful competency-based three-year bachelor's degree program—the longest running in the country—this book provides a blueprint for creating, sustaining, and growing such a program at an institution of any type and size. The book offers a proven model that not only cuts student costs by 25%, but significantly reduces program delivery costs. The 120-credit six-semester competency-based integrated curriculum approach focuses on student learning as opposed to “seat-time,” and research shows above average academic student success.

“At last a book that answers one of higher education's most burning questions: How do we provide America a cheaper, faster undergraduate experience without cheating on the old family recipe and compromising standards? At a time when challenges of college value, quality, and mission are high on the public agenda and an unprecedented number of institutions are exploring three-year degree programs, we are provided a road map that maintains academic integrity by focusing on learning outcomes

rather than process inputs. Bravo and about time. This book will add value and inform the thinking of all stakeholders, even the most skeptical of faculty. A three-year baccalaureate aligns the academy with the needs and aspirations of the future. While enhancing effectiveness, it affords students what they want and need while meeting the national agenda for socially and economically productive citizens.” - Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, president emeritus and University Professor of Public Service, George Washington University

“This book provides a powerful model of how to redesign a university in the interests of student learning. The authors' proposed curriculum model addresses many of the fundamental dysfunctions of higher education—the fragmentation, incoherence, and unfocused activity that produces the dispiriting results of our enormous investment. They offer an evidence-based framework for reshaping our institutions to serve the goals we all wish to achieve while beginning to address the pervasive financial challenges that undermine our efforts. This book provides a vivid and stimulating analysis of how to think about and execute constructive change. Anyone concerned about the future of higher education should read it and learn from it.” - John Tagg, professor emeritus, Palomar College, and author, The Learning Paradigm College

“This book offers one thoughtful approach to a high-quality education at a significantly lower cost. If educators respond, students will win.”- Margaret L. Drugovich, president, Hartwick College

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