

## Advice

April 20, 2015

### The Completion Agenda, Part 1

**Graduate students should remember that the dissertation is the beginning of their research, not the endpoint**



Mark Shaver for The Chronicle

By David D. Perlmutter

**G**raduate school, the job market, the tenure track, and every other stage in an academic career are so fraught with challenge that you cannot afford to dawdle too long on foolish ventures or waste time holding out for perfection when "pretty darn good" will do. The first supreme hurdle — the one that scares off many potential academics and cripples the progress of others — is, of course, the dissertation. What counts as a dissertation and how long you should take to complete it vary across disciplines, institutions, and committees. But that you must complete it — and that others must approve it before you can move on — is essential.

## Advice

June 3, 2015

### The Completion Agenda, Part 2: The Best Defense

It probably won't be harrowing, but you need to be prepared in case it is



[Neil H. / Creative Commons](#)

By David D. Perlmutter

**E**arly in my career, I sat on a doctoral committee in a field outside my discipline for the first time. I recall being startled at the dissertation defense when professors in the young man's department began delivering scorching assessments of his theory, method, cases, and conclusions. As the incendiaries kept flying I grew concerned about his health. He whitened, started sweating visibly, and several times laid his forehead on the table. When it came my turn to speak, I froze and ended up sputtering, "Well, you have answered all my questions!" and fell silent.

But then something incredible happened: The candidate was asked to leave the room, and the committee briskly and unanimously voted in favor of passing his dissertation with minimal revisions. He was ushered back in to the accompaniment of back slaps, clapping, and exclamations of "Welcome, Doctor!"

## Advice

July 6, 2015

### The Completion Agenda, Part 3: Revising Your Dissertation

**You've successfully defended — but you're not done yet**



[Dean Terry / Creative Commons](#)

By David D. Perlmutter

If you had to pick a cliché that best describes completing a dissertation, "it ain't over till it's over" would work well. So far in this series we have discussed [finishing a submittable draft](#) and [successfully defending](#) the dissertation. But as every doctoral candidate knows, no matter how well the defense goes you are very likely not quite free and clear yet. In my case, while I waited outside the meeting room, my committee discussed my dissertation for either 10 minutes or two hours; I honestly can't recall through the fog of tension and time. I do remember encountering a friend in the hallway to whom I described my situation. She asked, "What's the best possible outcome?" I had no doubt: "Ideally, they pass me without asking for any revisions." She arched an eyebrow and asked in Spock-like tones: "Has that happened with any dissertation defense, ever?"

## Advice

August 12, 2015

### The Completion Agenda, Part 4: Finishing and the Job Hunt

**How are you using your dissertation to move your career forward?**



[Jeremy Wilburn / Creative Commons](#)

By David D. Perlmutter

One of the sadder conversations I have had in my 15 years of writing about academic careers is, unfortunately, a common one. It usually happens when I'm at a workshop or a conference and people approach me who are enduring a rocky patch in graduate school, on the job hunt, or on the tenure track. At some point I will ask them, "How are you using your dissertation to move your career forward?"

And the answer is usually either, "I'm so burned out I don't want to think about it anymore" or "What do you mean?"

Here's what I mean: A dissertation should be a thoughtful intellectual contribution to knowledge in your discipline. But it must also be a tool for you to succeed in your career, first in finding a tenure-track job (or postdoc position) and second on the tenure track — assuming those are your goals.