

AAALgrads

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Meet the 2017 AAAL
Dissertation Award
Winner,
Dr. Shoko Sasayama
(See page 5)



Learn about the grad events at
AAAL 2018 in Chicago on page 4



Get your AAAL
t-shirt, designed
by your fellow
grad student,
Huy Phung!
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Huy V. Phung

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

This spring issue features articles on a variety of topics from a wide spectrum of grad student perspectives. From advice on how to manage parenthood in the midst of writing a dissertation, to an extended metaphor describing the monastic life of a doctoral student, these articles highlight the diversity of grad student life. Cigdem Fidan’s reflection on her journey into motherhood as a doctoral student will resonate with any grad student who is a parent or is about to become a parent for the first time. Rhonda Chung’s creative non-fiction essay compares the life of a PhD student to that of a monk, and brings the reader along on her five-day quest to align herself with monastic life. For Master’s students, or any grad student looking to get more involved professionally, Karoline Kaon’s article serves as an introductory guide to conferencing—a fitting topic for this issue before we congregate in Chicago for the 2018 annual conference of the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL).

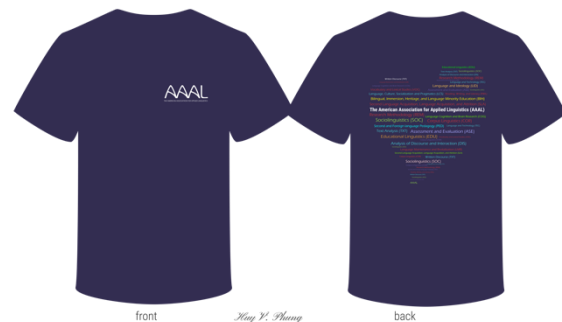
As we conclude our second year of the AAALgrads newsletter, we look forward to experimenting with more stories and genres as we continue developing this newsletter into both a professional resource and creative outlet for grad students to share their expertise and experiences. We anticipate this newsletter to grow in the following year, and invite all of you to consider submitting a proposal for the fall 2018 issue. Look for our call for the fall edition in the next few months. Until then, see you in Chicago in a few weeks!

Jessica and Rae
Co-editors

LETTER FROM THE GSC CO-CHAIR

Happy spring semester! I find that this time of year, with the chilly weather and long winter nights, provides an ideal space for reflection. As I think back across the past few months, I could not be prouder of the work of the 2017-2018 AAAL GSC Steering Committee. We've launched several new initiatives, including a AAAL graduate student [website](#) and a successful [webinar series](#). We've recruited conference planning sub-committees and have begun work on organizing three conference events for the 2018 AAAL conference that are specifically geared towards graduate student needs and interests: (1) a graduate student meet-and-greet, (2) a lunch event on ethical practice in academia, and (3) a dinner event on how to have a successful academic journey. Our wonderful social media committee has recently launched a [blog](#), with posts about the upcoming conference, including a [roommate finder](#) for graduate students looking to save some money by sharing a hotel room. And our fantastic newsletter editors have continued to produce an excellent platform for graduate students to share their expertise and experiences. Needless to say, we've been busy!

This year, I've also had the pleasure of serving as the graduate representative to the AAAL Executive Council. In this role, I have learned a great deal about the hard work that goes into maintaining an organization like AAAL and have had the opportunity to advocate for graduate students on a range of issues. I have been truly impressed with the dedication of the AAAL leadership to addressing the needs and concerns of all members of AAAL—and especially its graduate student members. For instance, Kathi Bailey has launched [Conference Connections](#), an initiative to provide graduate students with more opportunities to connect with senior faculty at the 2018 AAAL conference. We've also discussed ways to increase the number of graduate students receiving conference travel awards and will be helping to grow the award fund through our AAAL t-shirt fundraiser. The t-shirts were designed by graduate student [Huy Phung](#) (University of Hawai'i Manoa) and will be sold at the 2018 conference, with all profits going to support AAAL graduate students. I hope you will consider investing in your fellow grads, and proudly (and stylishly) represent your AAAL affiliation!



As my time as the AAAL GSC co-chair nears its end, I am incredibly grateful for all of the amazing people I've had the opportunity to work with, both within the GSC Steering Committee and the Executive Council. I highly encourage all grads to get involved in the GSC and hope to see you at our three graduate student events at the conference! In the meantime, please stay connected via Twitter ([@AAALgrad](#)), Facebook ([/AAALGrad](#)), and our website ([www.aal-gsc.org](#)).

Laura
GSC Co-chair

RECENT NEWS & HAPPENINGS

News from Social Media Sub-committee

The GSC social media committee held the first topical webinar on January 21st this year. Over 100 participants joined the webinar to watch Dr. Tim McNamara discuss the issue of fairness and justice related to language testing for immigration and citizenship. If you missed the webinar and are still interested in learning about it, you may access the webinar recording and presenter's slides from www.aaal-gsc.org/language-testing-issues.

In the upcoming month before our annual conference, the GSC Social Media Committee will be sharing tips and information related to our

annual conference in Chicago. If you are still looking for roommates, you may use the Roommate Finder (www.aaal-gsc.org/blog/2018-aaal-conference-roommate-finder). Information about restaurants, transportation, sightseeing and other conference tips have been and will be shared via our GSC blog (www.aaal-gsc.org/blog), so please stay tuned! Most importantly, we are holding a pre-conference webinar to discuss how to navigate the conference program and network during the conference. Renowned scholars, A. Suresh Canagarajah, Paul Kei Matsuda, and Tim McNamara will be our panelists, so you do not want to miss out this one! The webinar will be held on March 11th, from 4:00 to 5:30 PM EST. Join and register via <https://bit.ly/2C7ISUq>.

Graduate Student Meet and Greet Friday, March 23 @ 8 PM

Come meet your fellow grads in a fun, informal space! From 8:00 to 10:00 PM on Friday, March 23rd, the AAAL GSC Steering Committee is hosting a meet-and-greet for all AAAL graduate students in the hotel bar of the Sheraton. We will provide appetizers and create an opportunity for you to meet graduate students in your field at different institutions. We hope to see you there!

Unpacking the AAAL Ethics Guidelines Saturday, March 24 @ 12 PM

You are cordially invited to attend our GSC event! In this workshop, the AAAL Ethics Taskforce will present the newly endorsed [Ethics Guidelines](#) which are intended as a frame of reference to provide guidance for graduate students on ethical conduct, criteria, and practices in three areas: research, teaching, and service. Through this roundtable format, graduate students will engage with each area of the newly endorsed guidelines and the Task Force members who have created them. Lunch will be provided to those who attend!

The Successful Academic Journey Sunday, March 25 @ 6:30 PM

Following up on last year's successful graduate student dinner event, this year, our Q&A session will center around the question, *How can we not only survive but also thrive in our journey as graduate students?* Come join us for dinner and a roundtable discussion on Sunday, March 25th. We will talk about important topics such as publications, grant proposal writing, the job search, and the responsibilities of first-year faculty members. Dinner will be provided!

INTERVIEW WITH THE 2017 AAAL DISSERTATION AWARD RECIPIENT

BY RAYOUNG SONG

Dr. Shoko Sasayama is an assistant professor at the University of Tokyo. She completed her Ph.D. in Linguistics in 2015 from Georgetown University. Her academic interests include: Second Language Acquisition, Language Education, and Educational Assessment. She is the winner of the 2017 AAAL Dissertation Award for her dissertation “Validating the assumed relationship between task design, cognitive complexity, and second language task performance.” I talked to Dr. Sasayama to learn more about her dissertation and her academic journey from a graduate student to a faculty member.

Could you introduce yourself to AAAL grad students?

I am Dr. Shoko Sasayama, and I obtained my Ph.D. degree in Linguistics from Georgetown University in 2015. I currently work as an assistant professor at the University of Tokyo. My academic interests include Task-based language teaching (TBLT), second language testing and assessment, and program evaluation. And on a more personal note, I love running and outdoor activities.

How did you become interested in your area of study? How did you start your journey in academia?

I got interested in SLA and language pedagogy somewhat early in my career. When I was an undergraduate student at Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan, I was

introduced to the ideas of SLA and language pedagogy. I thought that SLA theory could help improve language education, English education in particular, in Japan. So I wanted to learn more about them.

The more I learned about SLA theories, I started to realize that TBLT was what I was looking for. TBLT is an approach to language education that’s motivated by a lot of SLA theories, and it is the kind of approach that emphasizes the use of communication-based activities in the classroom. I thought if we could introduce TBLT into the classroom in Japan, we might be able to help L2 learners of English to become better able to communicate in English, and it also would provide a potentially better way to teach grammar or necessary forms for doing the target tasks. So that’s how I got interested in SLA and TBLT.

Did your journey lead to the topic of your dissertation? How did you decide on your dissertation topic?

As I mentioned, I became interested in TBLT quite early in my career and then I got interested in task design in particular. I think that was because when I look back, task design is one of the areas that a lot of SLA researchers were really interested in investigating. Also, I thought task design would have a lot of pedagogical implications. So this combination really attracted me as a potential topic for my research.

Then, for my Master's thesis, I did research on task design and the notion of cognitive task complexity in particular. Here, the basic research question is, what effects on task performance and learning are there if we change task design features to pose more or less cognitive demands? The more I read about that topic and did research on it, the more questions I started to have about the field and its approach to research. So, in the field traditionally, what happened was that researchers would assume if we change task design elements, that will automatically lead to more or less cognitive demands posed by that particular task. For example, if we increase the number of elements involved in a task, the task will automatically be cognitively more complex. And that was sort of the assumption that nobody really tried to empirically verify. But then I thought, is it really the case? Is this so-called complex task actually cognitively complex? So I wanted to see if that was the case and I wanted to see if we can actually verify that empirically. That was the first question that I had, and then the second question was about the relationship between cognitive task complexity and task performance. So there are two competing theories in this area, and they would make different predictions about the relationship between cognitive complexity and task performance. Both theories assume that if we increase cognitive task complexity, that will have a systematic positive or negative effect on task performance. I wanted to see if that is actually the case, if the relationship between these two factors is actually straightforward as argued or a little more complicated than that.

THE MORE I READ ABOUT THAT TOPIC AND DID RESEARCH ON IT, THE MORE QUESTIONS I STARTED TO HAVE ABOUT THE FIELD, ABOUT THE TOPIC AS A WHOLE.

Then, what did you find in your dissertation?

My dissertation was motivated by these two fundamental questions that I mentioned. First, I sought to answer my question of whether a so-called complex task is actually complex or not. This endeavor was quite new in cognitive complexity research, so we didn't really have any appropriate measures in our field, SLA. So I looked for independent measures of cognitive complexity, or cognitive load, in other areas like cognitive psychology. Then, I found a few that we might be able to use in our field, so I adopted those. I ended up investigating four of them: dual task methodology, time estimation, task difficulty questionnaire, and mental effort questionnaire. I used these measures to assess the complexity levels of four picture-based narrative tasks, and I also collected a lot of qualitative retrospective data from the 120 participants' perspectives on sources of complexity within the tasks. What I found was we cannot assume the level of complexity just based on, for example, the number of elements involved in the task. So

originally, the level of complexity of these four tasks was manipulated by design, by changing the number of elements. And the number of elements did have an effect on the level of cognitive task complexity. But it wasn't the only factor; other factors like clarity of storyline, code complexity, and performance-related factors were also found to influence cognitive task complexity, and these were identified by the participants themselves. So that was one of the most interesting findings of my dissertation. As researchers then, we really have to measure the level of complexity rather than assuming it. And now it's becoming a new sort of standard practice in the field.

How did you decide to apply for the AAAL dissertation award?

I was recommended by one of the faculty members at Georgetown University, so that's how I got to know about the dissertation award. But around that time, a portion of my dissertation was published or was about to be published as an article in *The Modern Language Journal*. So I thought there might be enough interest for this kind of work to be considered for the dissertation award by the committee.

What were some of the biggest challenges when you were dissertating? Do you have any advice on how to overcome those challenges?

As you can imagine, writing a dissertation is a really long and time-consuming journey. For me, it took about three years to collect all the data that I needed and about half a year to write up the dissertation. Collecting the data for me was really fun because I could see how L2 learners reacted to and interacted with the four tasks that I asked them to do, and it was fun eliciting their ideas, their reactions to the tasks and just seeing how they do on these tasks.

The writing itself maybe was less fun, and it was kind of a lonely endeavor. I just had so much to write about, and sometimes I felt like I'd never finish writing everything that I wanted to write about. But in times like those, I would think about running long-distance races. When I'm running, I'd tell myself "as long as I keep moving my legs, I will reach the goal at some point." So, when I was writing the dissertation I told myself the same thing: "If I keep writing, I'll finish at some point." So I think that helped me to keep moving.

Many AAAL grad students are international students who might consider going back to their country of origin to pursue their career after their Ph.D. How did you make that decision?

As I mentioned, the very reason why I got interested in SLA and language education was because I thought SLA theories could

WHEN I'M RUNNING, I'D TELL MYSELF "AS LONG AS I KEEP MOVING MY LEGS, I WILL REACH THE GOAL AT SOME POINT." WRITING A DISSERTATION, I WOULD TELL MYSELF THE SAME THING: "IF I KEEP WRITING, I'LL FINISH AT SOME POINT."

help improve English education in Japan. So I always wanted to go back to Japan and find ways to contribute to the improvement of language education there. So for me, it just made sense to go back to Japan.

Then did you do anything to prepare for your return and connect yourself to the Japanese academic community?

Actually, the data collection for my dissertation was mostly done in Japan. My colleagues in Japan were kind enough to let me collect data at their universities, so I went back home every summer for data collection for about three years. While collecting data, I had a chance to interact with the students and to remember what it was like to teach English in Japan. I also talked to my colleagues a lot during my multiple stays in Japan, so I think all those connections helped.

Do you have any advice for graduate students who are seeking a career in academia? What were some key experiences you had that prepared you for your current role?

I would say that the most important thing is to widen your expertise. For me, I've been mainly talking about TBLT in this interview, but having a set of other experiences and publications related to other areas, like second language testing and program evaluation, really helped me get the job, and for the kind of duties that I have been pursuing as an assistant professor. This breadth of expertise has allowed me to offer workshops to my colleagues on a variety of topics beyond TBLT, and to collaborate with others with a range of academic interests. So

I think it's really important to be an expert in a variety of areas.

To that end, as a graduate student, I feel it's really important to take a wide range of courses and to work with a lot of different research topics. And if there are any opportunities, it's important to get involved in projects in your department because that will really help you broaden your horizons.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO WIDEN YOUR EXPERTISE.

I think that is a different frame of mind because when you're writing your dissertation, you are really zeroing in on one topic. So how did you manage that balance?

That's a good question. It took about six years to finish my Ph.D., so earlier in my Ph.D. years, I was more involved in a variety of projects and topics especially through taking a range of courses. I think toward the very end of my Ph.D., I was more focused on my dissertation topic. I think in the U.S., there are lots of courses to take advantage of. So I think in a way it's hard, but in my case, it really helped me get interested in a range of areas.

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Rayoung Song is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her dissertation explores language ideologies in an online English learning community. She is a co-editor of the AAALgrads newsletter and the incoming co-chair of the AAAL GSC Steering Committee.

First-Time Parenting as a Ph.D. Student

How to balance your identities and responsibilities as a grad student

BY CIGDEM FIDAN (UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER)

The process of pursuing a graduate degree may not always go as expected because various opportunities and pitfalls may come out in the process. Managing such situations may require certain personal and educational adaptations or organization skills, especially when you have different responsibilities. For example, pursuing a Ph.D. degree often requires the skill to use a certain period of time to examine a topic, do research, analyze data, write a dissertation, present in a conference or publish in a journal. To achieve these targets, as a Ph.D. student, you need to be planning to meet deadlines, and be realistic about your own responsibilities. Everything sounds clear and manageable. Yet, your plans for pursuing a Ph.D. degree may not always go smoothly, especially when you become a parent right in the middle of your Ph.D. education. The first thing you need to do in such a situation is, do not panic!

Parenthood is not an obstacle to continuing your Ph.D. education and there are always ways

to succeed in both parenting and studying. The golden rule is to be aware of the identities you hold as a graduate student and a parent.

This awareness is important, especially when you find out what responsibilities each identity requires of you. I became a mother while getting ready for my comprehensive exam. I experienced the stress of getting ready for a comprehensive examination to complete my Ph.D. degree on schedule. On the other hand, I also experienced a unique moment in my life with my baby boy in my arms. Now, I am not only an international graduate student, but also a mother who has no extended family in the United States to depend on for help with childcare. At first, I was worried that I would not be able to manage a Ph.D. program and parenthood at the same time. However, I noticed that my responsibilities as a Ph.D. student and a mother require setting realistic goals, organization, a healthy life, networking to get support, and recognition of my own accomplishments.

1. Set goals!

You will have different responsibilities as a parent doing a Ph.D. However, setting short-term and long-term goals may help with managing these responsibilities. By achieving each short-term goal, you will feel more encouraged to keep working for your long-term goals. For example, in the first two months of having my baby, I knew that I needed more time with my baby because I needed to adapt to my new identity as a mother. That is why I set manageable short-term goals for my Ph.D., such as reading at least one article and writing at least half an hour in a day related to my research topic. These short-term goals helped me to stay involved in my Ph.D. progress, and I had enough time to meet the needs of my baby. Thus, achieving each short-term goal encouraged me more to reach my long-term goal, which I achieved by passing my comprehensive examination successfully.

The golden rule is to be aware of the identities you hold as a graduate student and a parent.

2. Be organized!

Taking care of a baby is not an easy job. While dealing with your baby's needs, you may forget some important duties that you have to do for your Ph.D. Likewise, while delving deep into your Ph.D. studies, you may forget important dates like your baby's doctor appointments, or activities which may contribute to your baby's social, language and cognitive development like baby play and story time. That is why

recording daily plans on a calendar may help you to be more planned. For example, I have started recording my daily plans on a calendar in my phone and setting alarms for each plan. Before starting my day, I check my calendar. The alarms for each plan remind me of the daily things that I need to do each day for my baby and my Ph.D.

Moreover, in the process of getting a Ph.D., you need to meet different deadlines to be able to complete your dissertation in time. Keeping a calendar on a phone for these important dates may not be enough. Thus, you may need to set deadlines for Ph.D. tasks in a different notebook, on a board in your home office, or even on your fridge in the kitchen. Making your deadlines visible in a place where you can see it every day may be helpful to remind yourself of the responsibilities you have to complete. For example, I set my deadlines for my dissertation writing process, conference abstract submissions, and grant applications on my fridge. Therefore, whenever I go in my kitchen, I see these deadlines and arrange my daily plans accordingly.

3. Take care of your personal well-being!

Spending time for your baby's care and your Ph.D. responsibilities may sometimes be overburdening. You may not even find time to comb your hair or you may miss breakfast, lunch or dinner. However, your personal well-being is important for you to manage your duties. That is why you may want to prepare simple meals and keep them refrigerated beforehand so that you do not need to spend too much time preparing food or missing a meal during the day. You can keep healthy snacks like dried fruits or veggies and nuts to give you energy. Drinking water is also important so you may want to put water bottles in different corners in your home so that you can drink water when you see them. Finally,

exercising at least five minutes a day and sleeping enough (Sleeping enough as a parent? This may sound unrealistic, but you can enjoy sleeping when your baby sleeps, and Ph.D. tasks can wait!) would boost your energy and improve your mental and physical health.

4. Look for networking to get support!

You may feel overloaded while taking care of a baby as a Ph.D. student, both of which need time and energy investment. Naturally, you may sometimes feel tired, worried, or lost while struggling to balance two different identities and responsibilities. However, do not forget that there are always people to help and support you. You may ask for support from your partner, friends, daycare or even from your own university, many of which have services for personal and academic support for students and staff. Also, regular participation in academic or social groups may help you keep motivated as a Ph.D. student and a parent. For example, every month, I participate in a doctoral students' support group where I can share my own progress and plans in my Ph.D. education. Sharing my own ideas with other Ph.D. students helps me to be realistic about my own development as a Ph.D. student. Similarly, I find support through the recommendations of other Ph.D. students in the group. As a parent, my baby and I participate weekly in story and playtime at different local libraries. Regular participation in such events contributes to my baby's sociolinguistic and cognitive development, and helps me socialize as well as find support from other parents. If there are not such opportunities where you live, you can still get online support through social media, or by following personal blogs of parents doing Ph.D. degrees.

5. Recognize your accomplishments and enjoy the process of doing a Ph.D. as a parent!

You are doing great! Transitioning between Ph.D. and parenting is a process in which you learn and develop as a person with multiple identities. Balancing these identities may not always be easy because you may sometimes have to choose one over the other. For example, you may have to sacrifice spending time with your child to attend conferences, professional or social networking communities. On the other hand, you may miss a meeting as you may need to spend time with your baby who was sick all through the night. In such situations, let both roles be intertwined, and manage this process with simple solutions adapted to your needs. Some solutions may not always work and there may be times when you feel lost or tired. However, you can always find support to be able to balance your identities and responsibilities. Awareness of your needs as a realistic, organized and healthy person may help you enjoy the process of pursuing a Ph.D. degree as a parent. However, you should not expect to be perfect. Be kind to yourself, and look forward to the day when your baby realizes how successful his/her mom was when she achieved a Ph.D. Happy parenting as a Ph.D. student!

—
Cigdem Fidan is a Ph.D. candidate in Teaching and Curriculum (TESOL) at The University of Rochester. Currently, she is working on her dissertation about foreign language education policies and practices for Deaf students. Her research interests include translanguaging, multilingual education, Deaf education, linguistic minorities, foreign language education policies and linguistic human rights.

MASTER'S DEGREE... MORE THAN JUST CLASSES

How to maximize opportunities as a Master's student

BY KAROLINE KAON
(SUNY BINGHAMTON)

I want to congratulate those who were formerly salaried workers and have decided to take a leap of faith to further their education. I, too, left my salaried job to continue my education in a master's program. Since there weren't any assistantships and no job on the horizon, I pledged to take advantage of all the opportunities that present themselves. M.A. students get a bad reputation compared to Ph.D. students. Doctoral students are active on and off campus, in research and in their specified field but masters students are not as engaged. M.A. students need to get more involved in their program. Some ways to get involved are attending conferences, volunteering, joining a committee or writing for a newsletter. Being an active graduate student will help your prospects post-graduation.

Taking these steps to participate off campus will enable you to build valuable relationships and friendships. It can be scary going back into the world after being in academia for two years without a guaranteed job.

To ease that transition, I want to challenge you to participate in your field and engage with people outside of your institution. Most M.A. students are looking to get their credentials to move on to the next big thing. Let us imagine that you do all of your coursework, get a 4.0 and graduate on time but you never once participated in any professional development. In graduate school, you need to look beyond graduation. You will have the opportunity to

collaborate with your professors on research projects. Most universities have a graduate school organization, career development center and committees to get involved with. Graduate school organizations and career development centers are funded by your tuition, so please make use of those tuition dollars! Conference committees are always recruiting hardworking volunteers. Within these organizations are established individuals who are always looking to assist active M.A. students. These cannot guarantee a tenure-track position, but meeting new people will expand your network that may lead to job opportunities. The odds are

**IN GRADUATE SCHOOL,
YOU NEED TO LOOK
BEYOND GRADUATION.**

against your favor if you are not actively engaging with others in your discipline.

What better way to get involved, than to attend a conference!

I am sure you have heard the term, but what is a conference? It is an event held annually to bring together people from all over the world to discuss hot topics within their field, whether it is linguistics, education or humanities. A conference has guest speakers, information sessions and networking events. The whole

gamut of academics has attended at least one conference in their career.

Warning: not all conferences are created equal. There are small localized conferences and then there are larger conferences. The size of the conference dictates the perks.

Larger conferences will include a wider audience, which gives you the chance to meet people from various fields. There are individuals presenting on topics that might pique your interest. An example of a larger conference is the American

Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) conference. Large conferences attract leading scholars in the field, and there is a chance to meet scholars you have read in your program. The more people, the larger the facilities and the higher the cost for this type of conference. Moreover, there are many concurrent sessions that might interest you. However, multiple sessions occurring at the same time means you must be strategic about which ones to attend. Larger conferences usually range from three to five days, which makes it tough to attend if you have a full-time job or assistantship.

Conversely, smaller conferences are targeted and specific, which limits the number of individuals but also opens doors to develop deeper connections with those in attendance. The fees associated with a local conference are also dramatically lower compared to the cost of a large one. An example of a small conference is the New York State Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (NYS TESOL) conference that is state specific and held annually. This conference hosts sessions specific to teachers and scholars in the New York area. The intimate environment at a small conference can lead to doing research with scholars locally.

ATTENDING
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Regardless of the size of the conference, networking and meeting people with similar research interests is important. Meeting people at smaller conferences also gives you the chance to run into familiar faces at larger conferences.

Local conferences occur frequently throughout the year, and if the funds are available, I'd recommend attending more than one if possible.

Although attending a conference is a great way to get involved, logistically, the associated costs can deter some students. However, you can defray some of these costs by volunteering at the conference. Registration fees for students who volunteer are significantly lower or even completely waived. Volunteering is a way to not only reduce your costs, but also get more involved with the organizing committee. Meeting organizers of a conference is a great way to gain skills to prepare you to host a conference. If you loved the conference, try to bring the conference to your school. Attending conferences also opens doors to networking opportunities with people who are in your field; it is also a refreshing way to expose yourself to new things going on in the field.

REGARDLESS OF YOUR **F**UTURE PLANS, **I**NVOLVEMENT OUTSIDE OF **Y**OUR INSTITUTION IS **I**MPORTANT FOR YOUR **P**ROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

Networking is a big part of all conferences. It is challenging to meet other people during sessions but the breakfast, lunch and coffee hour are “social” events targeted to help you mingle with other people. My best advice is for you to prepare yourself before attending these sessions. I am an introvert and most of the people at academic conferences are just as introverted as you and I. To overcome the fear of talking to others, prepare and practice! (Extroverts, I recommend you practice too!) I recommend creating a thirty-second elevator pitch, which resembles a brief introduction to start a conversation. Every campus has a career center with professional staff who can help you polish your elevator pitch for the conference. In addition to the social events, the poster presentation session is another great way to speak directly to a scholar about his/her research.

Going to a conference is not just about attending, it is a test of your ability to maximize your time. Review the booklet before attending the sessions and prepare yourself to engage and also speak with presenters after the sessions.

For some students, the reduced costs are still too overwhelming and can break the budget. Some students might also work a full- or part-time job to support their education, which limits traveling for conferences. There are other ways to get involved in your field, like joining an organization such as the AAAL graduate student council (GSC) steering committee. The GSC steering committee provides professional development opportunities such as webinars, which keeps the costs low and keeps you at home. There is no need to rent a car or pay for a hotel. Graduate student organizations expose students to what is going on in the field.

MEETING PEOPLE IN YOUR FIELD, AND VOLUNTEERING WITH THEM DEMONSTRATES YOUR COMMITMENT TO YOUR FIELD. THE MOST IMPORTANT PART IS STAYING IN TOUCH WITH THE PEOPLE YOU MEET.

In addition, they can also lead to other opportunities such as writing for the newsletter.

Regardless of your future plans, involvement outside of your institution is important for your professional development. Whether you attend or volunteer at a conference, it is essential to participate in events outside of your

academics. One thing to keep in mind is that many departments and graduate student organizations on campus allocate funds for conference expenses in their budget. Be proactive with your department regarding your interest and sometimes, they can cover some or even all of the costs. Being an engaged M.A. student will positively contribute to your understanding of what is going in the field and open doors to learn about other people's research interests. These relationships might even manifest into prospective employers.

The core of this article is premised on getting your head out of your textbooks because participating within your discipline can lead to opportunities; the relationships gained from being

involved will help along the way. When I went back to my alma mater for my M.A., I met with one of my advisors from a scholarship I had received. A conversation about my situation and what I had done since graduating led to a position in her office. Meeting people in your field, and volunteering with them demonstrates your commitment

to your field. The most important part is staying in touch with the people you meet. Maintaining contact with professors and professionals in the field will keep you in their mind, thereby maximizing your time invested in and out of the classroom.

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LIVIN' LA VIDA MONASTICA

BY RHONDA CHUNG
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Long before savoury cheeses and aromatic chocolates, monasteries produced another fine product: academia.

Leonard Cohen, infamous Montreal poet and singer, dedicated five years of his life to monastic studies before becoming ordained as a Rinzai Zen Buddhist monk. In a 2011 interview, he quipped that his master, whom he staunchly revered, had but one role, to be “...an enemy to one’s laziness, but a friend to one’s effort”—as any doctoral supervisor ought to be, n’est-ce pas?

If we truly are nothing more than monks (with way radder haircuts), are we, as graduate students, measuring up to our friar-esque forefathers? Before we can wax philosophic about our previous incarnation, we must first yield to our history.

Universities emerged in the early Middle Ages of Western Europe, where monks were tasked with learning the trivium: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. The completion of these prerequisites led them straight into the core courses of the quadrivium: arithmetic, astronomy, geometry and music theory. Together, these seven courses became the foundation of the seven liberal arts of monastic education—these brothers knew how to par-tay!

Not only did these abbeys transform into ivory towers, they also gave many applied linguists their daily bread: standard language.

According to Bernard Spolsky, the constant translation of texts, begged the questions: How does one ensure that cultural wisdom is perfectly pickled and preserved throughout the ages? How best can one safeguard meaning in a language? And they found the answer: you standardize the hell out of it!

Successful translations were scribed in a language that was impervious to absorbing neologisms or unusual grammatical structures, as these might cause unwanted permutations in meaning. The more standard the language, the harder it would be to obscure meaning—in other words, it keeps itself pure from the distractions of natural languages. It’s no wonder then, as Spolsky points out, that the lexicographic work of monks became the backbone of our modern-day dictionaries.

**THE MONASTIC
LIFE, THEREFORE,
IS BOTH OUR
ACADEMIC ALPHA
AND OUR
LINGUISTIC OMEGA.**

Whether one is a true believer or a total agnostic, one cannot deny that the cloistered life of a graduate student is in keeping with the monastic tradition. After all, is not the writing of grant applications nothing more than an exercise in begging for alms?

For five days, I attempted to better align both my body and mind in accordance with certain values of the monastic order, as it exists from the east to the west. I employed the practice of highly regimented activities, devotion to the craft, and vows of silence. What follows are my reflections on that process to see how monk I really was.

your voice from the din, to silence your reactions to the world. As aspiring linguists, our jobs would cease to exist in that moment... well, maybe just the phoneticians.

DAY 2

Woke up late. Why? Because I went in late. The perma-midnight of winter often makes it difficult to judge time accurately. Today I was in two long meetings with just enough time in between to squeeze in reading a few pages of a required text. There was no real peaceful

IF DEVOTION TO THE ROUTINE IS PARAMOUNT FOR MONKS, AND THE LIFE OF A DOCTORAL STUDENT IS ANYTHING BUT, WHO AM I KIDDING HERE? TIME DOES NOT BELONG TO ME.

DAY 1

Getting up early is terrible. It's like Goth music: you wake up in the same darkness that you fell asleep in.

However, watching the sun stretch its golden body across the horizon like translucent taffy while its rich golden tones ricochet off the snow banks? Not half bad.

I spend all day in the same burgundy cotton onesie (my version of the saffron robes) reading, taking notes, jotting down ideas, and talking to no one.

And what a thing it is to take a vow of silence: to commit yourself to not communicating with another human being, to purposely take away

solitude or calm, silent moments. I imagine this day to be the emotional equivalent of cleaning the brine off a cheese wheel.

DAY 3

If I cannot keep sacrosanct the vespers because of nightly Netflix, then what am I doing?

I have made a terrible mistake. I cannot live a monk's life. Impromptu meetings, new project deadlines, abstract submission extensions—all of these things that are part and parcel of academia make it difficult to live a scheduled life. If devotion to the routine is paramount for monks, and the life of a doctoral student is anything but, who am I kidding here? Time does not belong to me.

DAY 4

Well, of course, time doesn't belong to you, ding dong—it belongs to the discipline! It's not about honouring a schedule, it's about honouring the ritual of practice. Dedicate yourself to the virtuous ritual of “doing all those things you're supposed to do”. If I can't keep a monk's schedule, I can at least imitate the devotion to one's self, space, and discipline:

- * I drank more water;
- * I got up from my desk and stretched;
- * I read a page of the novel on my nightstand.

There probably exists a psychological theory explaining why I felt so proud doing things I should have been doing all along. In fact, there is probably a graphic representation of my endorphins high-fiving my low cortisone levels. Of course, it might just be the case that being good to one's body and mind, actually makes you feel good. I mean, how good are you supposed to feel if you find yourself snacking on Doritos at 9 PM, you dig?

DAY 5

After thinking so much about silence, ritual, and devotion, I am starting to realize that I have never had one thing take centre-stage so much in my life before. Sure, I've had hobbies and niche interests, but nothing has prepared me to be this consumed by a singular pursuit. If I want to honour myself in the process, then devotion to ritual cannot just be reserved for the discipline of academia, it must apply to all aspects of my life. In particular to the family that I love and who sustains me. I have to dedicate myself fully to the time I spend with them and not let my mind wander over to the

articles I haven't yet read or the abstract I haven't quite begun. I have to dedicate myself to my own path.

In Tibetan Buddhism, this is known as *hinayana*, ‘the narrow path’, and dedicating oneself wholeheartedly to the path—or one's vocation—allows one to navigate through life's chaos because, as Chögyam Trungpa writes, “...the mind crav[es] all sorts of entertainment constantly, [and] the only way to deal with it is to channel it into a disciplined path without sidetracks.”

Whether chanting in choral harmonies in tunics or singing solo in a conference room, the essentials all still appear to be there. The institutions might have changed their look and population over time, but the zeitgeist certainly remains: dedication to the path; crouched positions over (moderately) ancient texts; and fervour for the unknown.

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