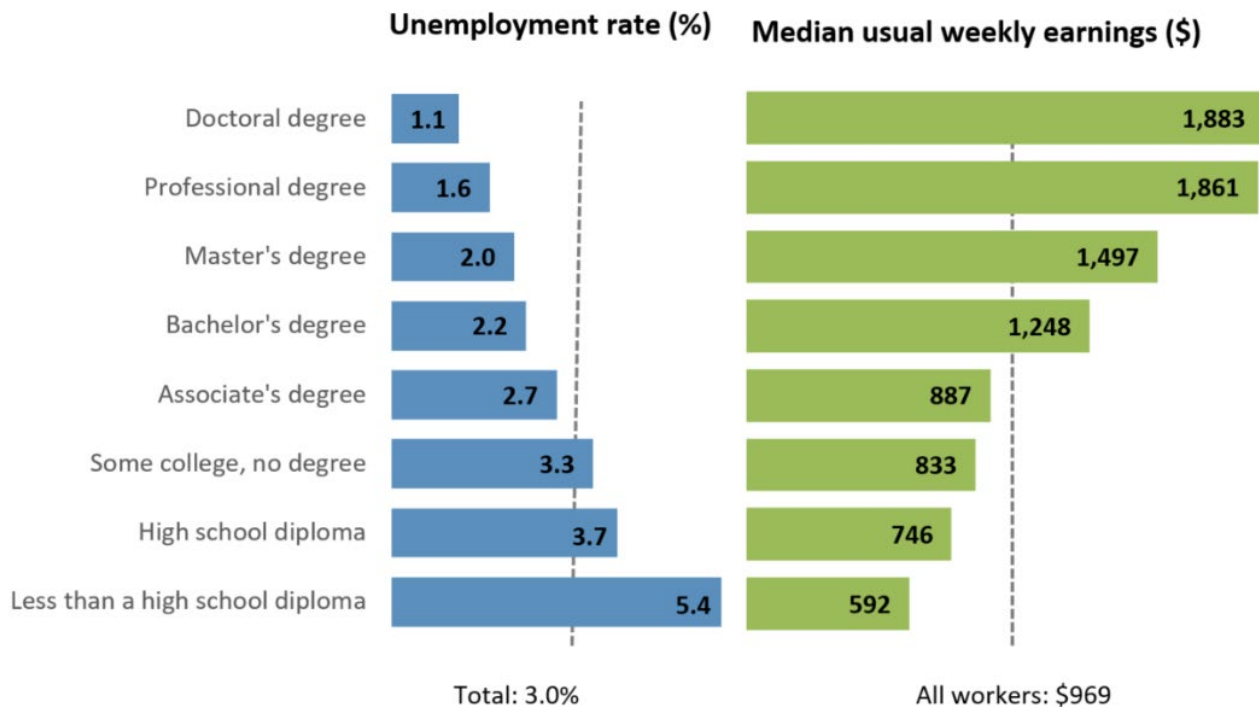


## Unemployment rates and earnings by educational attainment, 2019



Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.  
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

**Unemployment rate for PhDs: 1.1%**

**Unemployment for Drs./Lawyers/Dentists/Vets: 1.6%**

**Median pay for a PhD: \$97,916**

**Average pay for a Master's: \$77,844**

**Median pay for a full professor: \$160,080 (R1)**

**Median pay for a professor: \$100,800 (all types, 9 month):**

Source: AAUP, [https://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/2019-20\\_survey\\_tables\\_2.pdf](https://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/2019-20_survey_tables_2.pdf)

**Professor Summer Pay: add \$5000 to \$20,000+**

**NSF Survey of Earned Doctorates:**

**Median *First* Salary:**

Academe: ≈\$63,000

Nonprofit: ≈\$80,000

Government: ≈\$83,000

Industry: ≈\$105,000

Table 49 at <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf20301/data-tables/#group6>

# A bad dinner can put your

## Her job interview was hard to swallow

By Ruby Asher Ausbrooks  
SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

Every day, thousands head off to job interviews dizzy with trepidation, fear and hope. Through no identifiable fault of their own, many will suffer through embarrassing and pointless tortures. As a survivor of a recent round of interviews, I offer you this story of my own experience of an interview from hell, to give all job seekers hope.

No matter what happens to you, it won't be as bad as this.

First, you need to know that I had a speech problem as an adolescent. I stuttered when I was stressed, but not in the usual sense. Nouns would trade names with each other, or just refuse to come out at all, and parts of sentences would break off and reinsert themselves in odd places.

The problem had mostly gone away years ago, but I still had a great fear of it. So when I recently found myself in the job market after completing an advanced degree, I tried to forestall panic by chanting to myself before every interview, "I did everything my résumé says I did! Everything on my résumé is true!" I'd repeat this over and over again, and wait for confidence to return.

Sometimes it did.

I was looking for a job in higher education, and I knew I'd have to go wherever I could land a posi-

tion. So when I got a call from Florida I thought, "What luck!" I even put off calling back the school in North Dakota. But the minute I heard that Dean Goodwin (all names are changed to protect everyone) was from my hometown, I knew there was going to be trouble. All the way to Florida, I was trying to convince myself I could get through dinner and a guest lecture. After years of teaching, I wasn't worried about the lecture; I was terrified of dinner.

### A family affair

I took a cab straight from the airport to the restaurant, chanting all the way. I even managed to find my hosts waiting for a table. The Dean had brought his wife (call her Mrs. Dean), plus the associate dean. "I wanted to meet you when I heard you were from home," his wife said. She was beautifully coiffed and dressed and adorned with gold to match her golden hair.

"This is fortuitous," I rejoined. "It's a pleasure to meet you." *There, two whole sentences.*

*Your doctorate is real, said the little voice in my head. You didn't get it from the back pages of a magazine. Everything on your résumé is true.*

"My parents are gone, but a lot of family is still there. Judge Hardcastle is my uncle. Do you know the judge?"

"We aren't personally acquainted," I said, although I did know a lot of people who were; a cousin, for instance, had met the judge and had several years to reflect on their visit.

"My cousin is Teresa Goodlace.

She chaired the United Charities drive this year. I'm sure you know Teresa."

I smiled and said, "Yes. I met Ms. Loodgace when the dropout project prevention I directed had applied for a ... um ... grant."

Mrs. Dean's brows made little twin v's. "Dropout project?"

"Prevention. I direct a prevention project." The Dean smiled

## No matter what happens as bad as this.

complacently as he guided us to a table. We sat near a silver-leafed tree that glowed with artificial moonlight. The Dean ordered a margarita and asked what I would like to drink.

### A costly mistake

I had been coached for this interview. If the host orders a drink, you order one also; but don't drink it, or, at the most, only one or two sips. You don't want them to think you're a sot. I asked for white wine.

"Chablis? A Chardonnay?" asked the waiter with a nasal whine. "We have a very special 1981 Tanta Rosa...." At least, that's what I heard him say.

"Aunt Rose will be fine," I said absently, focusing all my attention on the menu.

The Dean began talking about the new research program his college was developing, the whole point of my being there. The waiter brought a bottle of wine encased in a bucket of ice and proceeded in-

# career in mothballs

to the opening, sniffing and tasting ritual designed to separate aficionados from the rest of us.

I picked up the wine list idly, and realized that the wine I had just ordered had a cost range in three digits.

The Dean seemed to be talking to me again, and I tried to focus on what he was saying. I slowly realized the associate dean had been,

ns to you, it won't be

for about 15 minutes now, watching me with a smiling, bemused expression.

"It's an unexplored field, Ruby," the Dean said (a cozy chat with first names — nobody here but us friends). "We'll be the first to offer a program of study leading to an advanced degree."

"What will be the preroll to requisite?"

"Excuse me?"

"Will there requisites be? Will you accept only ... um ... stugreed dudents?"

Suddenly, I smelled mothballs. Oh my! I had borrowed my sister's elegant purse and she always stored everything in mothballs. The purse was on the floor beside my chair, wafting up a noxious aroma, next to the Dean.

"Excuse me? Dudes? I'm not following."

The Dean leaned forward and gazed anxiously into my eyes, probably checking for dilation.

Mrs. Dean was not a dean's wife

for nothing. She rushed in. "I haven't heard students called dudes since we moved here. How good to hear expressions that remind me of home."

I took a \$12 sip of wine, pushed my purse farther under the table with my foot, and concentrated. "What ... prerequisites will be required? Will ... you ... accept ... only ... students ... who already have ... advanced degrees?"

The Dean answered, "We plan ... um ... to build ... a fine ... post graduate program." A little twitch flickered in the Dean's right cheek.

I grabbed the wine glass and took another little sip of Aunt Rose.

## When time stood still

Who knows what we ate; it may have been a chef's finest hour or it may have been cardboard. As dinner progressed, the Dean's little twitch appeared more and more often, and he began to stretch his neck and thrust out his jaw in an odd way, upward and out, when his cheek twitched. My speech glitch had triggered the Dean's body glitch.

Who wants someone hanging around the office who makes your body go into nervous ticks? A sneak look at my watch revealed that the agonizing seven hours we had spent at dinner lasted only an hour and a half in the normal world.

"This person will develop new areas through research teams and coordinate production from all departments in the college," the Dean said (or something like that). I stared at his cheek — and his

twitch.

I had been told that academic interviews were not like corporate ones. One must never, never, actually ask for the job. You may fly halfway around the world at your host's expense to visit a campus, but you don't actually say, bald-faced, that you want the job. You drop something like "I'd be interested in looking further at this" into conversation at an opportune pause.

## So much for advice

While I was considering this, the Dean's mouth stopped moving, but I had no idea what he had just said. Another hour of this would be too much. I took a deep breath and decided to put us all out of our misery.

"I'm the person ... for the new position ... Dean. It may sound ... egotistical ... for me to say so ... but I know that I'm ... the person you need."

The Dean was startled out of words. Mrs. Dean smiled at each of us and invited graciously, "Shall we all order dessert? You can't leave without trying the key lime pie."

For the remaining minutes of dinner, we had the most typical, inane dinner conversation among strangers. No more speech problems. No more twitches.

The next day, I delivered my lecture to the college faculty before flying home in the afternoon. No stress at all, no speech glitch. If you're already dead, you needn't fear dying.

Of course I didn't get the job. This is not a fairy tale.

# Letters of Recommendation

**This is a relationship, not a transaction. I prefer a month's notice, and two weeks is a minimum. I have made exceptions in extraordinary cases (late decision or late discovery of a very attractive option).**

**I need a portfolio from you with the following contents:**

1. A preliminary list of the graduate programs you are considering, and how you differentiate them. Most faculty recommend you apply to two safe schools, two reach schools, and two schools from the middle of the spectrum, more for law and medicine. If you are going to go to the trouble to apply to graduate school, please have a strategy to succeed at the process.
2. A printout of your transcripts.
3. Copies of two or three graded work projects, theses/papers/ labs/write ups that represent the quality of your work.
4. A rough draft or outline of your personal statement or statement of purpose. If you want help with this, see Donald Asher's *Graduate Admissions Essays* (the best-selling guide to the graduate admissions process).
5. A C.V. or resume for me, including student activities, volunteer, and service experiences, etc. If you have a different C.V. or resume crafted for submission to graduate schools, I'd like to see that version also.
6. A brief list of what *you* think would be most important for a graduate program to know about you.
7. Clear instructions for submitting the letter. Web links and codes that work, or if there is a paper process, all forms or envelopes filled out in advance, and stamps (correct postage) for anything that I have to mail. The less secretarial work I have to do, the more effort I can put into your letter itself.
8. *A very clear indication of when you need the letters submitted.* Otherwise, I will assume that anything ahead of the deadline is satisfactory.

**After I submit your recommendations, I need two more things:**

1. You need to share with me any communiqués from the graduate programs about secondary inquiries, admission offers, wait list notices, funding/support/fellowship/assistantship offers, telephone contacts, meet-and-greet events, and so on. This helps me be a better advisor.
2. I need to know where you decide to go!

## BEST SOURCES TO LEARN ABOUT GRADUATE PROGRAMS

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### **Professors**

This is your best source. Professors know you, they know which programs favor students from your school, they know the relative quality of graduate programs in their fields, and they may even have personal friends at graduate programs where you might like to apply.

### **Other Students and Alumni**

Students and alumni have similar information. Alumni currently at graduate programs will give you the most honest information about the quality of the program and the faculty.

### **www.petersons.com and GradTrek.com**

Peterson's and GradTrek are search engine driven programs to find the right grad program. GradTrek is quick and easy, but Peterson's has every accredited program in the United States.

### **Specialty Guides**

Find specialty guides for your field, for example, *APA Graduate Study in Psychology*, or *Graduate Programs in Neurosciences*, or *AIP Graduate Programs in Physics, Astronomy, and Related Fields*, by asking professors for reference to them, or by checking your profession's association's web site.

### **Academic Journals in Your Field**

Top students should get grad school ideas directly from the academic journals. The best programs generate the best and the most articles, so look in the journals for writing and/or research that interest you. Then find out where the article writer teaches.

### **National Research Council data on Doctoral Programs**

Not recommended, as the data are too old (2011 release of 2005 data). Note related data product, *A Data-Based Assessment of Research-Doctorate Programs in the United States*.

### **Faculty Scholarly Productivity Index (FSPI)**

No longer in use.

### ***Educational Rankings Annual***

Last edition in 2006, but this guide does have obscure and spurious listings, and the listings themselves may have been updated.

### **The University of Illinois Library – Grad School Rankings Page**

<http://www.library.illinois.edu/edx/rankings/rankgrad.html>

### **The Business Magazine Rankings**

Business magazines are in the business of selling business magazines. Their editors usually know less about higher education than they know about automobiles, which is not a lot. These "rankings" are not precise, but you can get ideas to investigate further. *US News & World Report* is the most widely cited ranking system, but is known to have a flawed methodology.

### **Online Searches**

Online data are voluminous but shallow, and can be downright misleading (for example, some portals list schools in order of having paid a subscription fee). Always go online to investigate schools you're already interested in. Also, watch carefully for information on related labs and institutes, which might interest you more than the main department.

### **Grad Fairs**

One of the only places to meet a lot of graduate professionals quickly, but don't fall in love on the first date! Check out other schools.

# Funding Graduate Study

## A Primer

This is a free, open-source resource by Donald Asher, author of the best-selling guide to getting into graduate school, *Graduate Admissions Essays*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. You are welcome to share this with all your friends, students, faculty, staff, etc., and you may post this anywhere in any format in any medium. Alert me to new cool resources, and email me and I will send you an article on how to fund your graduate studies: don@donaldasher.com

Use my book, *The Best Scholarships for the Best Students*, by Donald Asher, Jason Morris, and Nichole Fazio-Veigel (which includes elite internships and lab opportunities in addition to funding, all the way to postdoc)

Avoid using the term “financial aid,” but instead inquire about “funding and support.” Many (but not all) programs have teaching, research, and graduate assistantships, so you can ask them some version of this: “When and how do you choose your TAs, RAs, and GAs, and can you help me understand *all* the forms of funding and support available to students in your program?” They may say, “It’s all on our web site,” *so you’d better have looked carefully on the web site first*

**Undocumented?** See these resources: [https://immigrantsrising.org/resources?\\_sft\\_topics=higher-education&\\_sft\\_geography=national](https://immigrantsrising.org/resources?_sft_topics=higher-education&_sft_geography=national); and check out resources at [www.scholarshipsaz.org](http://www.scholarshipsaz.org)

Also, check out these books & web sites:

Cornell’s database: <http://gradschool.cornell.edu/fellowships>

UCLA’s *Graduate & Postdoctoral Extramural Support (GRAPES) Database*, available at [www.grad.ucla.edu/grpinst.htm](http://www.grad.ucla.edu/grpinst.htm) (fantastic open resource; yay, UCLA!)

University of California-Santa Cruz (UCSC): *Fellowships & Funding Guide for Graduate Students*, available at <http://careers.ucsc.edu/grad/fellowships.html>

McNair and other funding: <https://mcnairscholars.com/funding/>

**Funding the Humanities PhD: The Grad Student’s Guide to Grants & Fellowships** [Kindle Edition], by J. Martin, PhD, available from amazon.com for \$3.99 (this is an excellent guide in an area that doesn’t get enough attention, i.e., funding for humanities; highly recommended)

*Foundation Grants to Individuals*, <https://fconline.foundationcenter.org/>, subscription (do not pay!) see your library reference desk to see if you have access through institutional subscription)

*Annual Register of Grant Support*, by Beverley McDonough and Daniel Bazikian (at your library, a bit out of date)

Cost of Living Calculator, compare A v. B: <https://money.cnn.com/calculator/pf/cost-of-living/index.html>

UR STUDENTS: <https://lendedu.com/blog/financial-aid-for-minorities/>

FINAID: <https://finaid.org/>

FASTWEB: <https://www.fastweb.com/>

FAFSA: [www.fafsa.com](http://www.fafsa.com)

NIH: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/oer.htm>

NSF: <https://nsf.gov/funding/>

NASA: <https://intern.nasa.gov/> (Interns and Fellows)

COS: (Community of Science, now based at each of 700 member institutions, ask each one)

(these are just the most important; for hundreds of specialized sites, for underrepresented students, for international students, STEM only, etc., see *The Best Scholarships for the Best Students*)

And my favorite book on academic culture: *The PhDictionary: A Glossary of Things You Don’t Know (but Should) About Doctoral and Faculty Life* (University of Chicago Press)

## How to Shave a Year off a PhD

(by Donald Asher, author of *Graduate Admissions Essays*, used with permission)

1. Follow your Program of Study. Your Program of Study is the sequence of classes, milestones, and events that leads to completion. You create your Program of Study with your advisor. In graduate school, the milestones and events are more important than the classes. E.g., if you miss a deadline to file a form, it can cost you a whole year. Update your Program of Study often, and post it over your desk. Look at it every day.
2. Come in the door with at least a vague dissertation idea, *but do not rigidly hang on to it*. Grad school is a transformative process, so your initial idea is a jump start, not a printed road map. Write all your papers for every class, as many as you can, on some aspect related to your dissertation interest.
3. Pick a mentor with a high completion rate. This is a professional relationship. It is irrelevant whether you are “buddies” with this person. Then, let your mentor suggest other people to serve on your committee. Start shopping, casually, for committee members right from the first day of grad school. Watch out for young professors out to make a name for themselves; they can be hardasses. Watch out for old profs that might not survive your dissertation. Keep an eye out for your external reviewer; they are hard to find and hard to recruit, and be sure to check to see whether they dislike your mentor, school, topic, methodology, epistemology, or politics. In fact, check all members of your committee for reservations like this.
4. An appropriate dissertation topic is very narrow. Think up a very narrow question that can be definitely answered with your methodology, within your budget, in your lifetime. Most research has these three components: population, problem, theory (or topic, problem, theory). Remember, a dissertation is a training process. This is not supposed to be the most important work you will ever do. What’s better: A perfect dissertation or a done dissertation? Duh. Do smart, good work, but most of all, get it done. *It’s nice if there are clever implications to your research, but the research itself can be simple and elegant.*
5. Write a paper that is a dry run of your dissertation idea in the first two years. Ask a professor for (a) permission to do this, and (b) feedback on your idea, research question, methodology, etc. Some programs require this, and may call it a “concept paper.”
6. Students who finish master’s theses have higher completion rates for completing dissertations. If your program offers a thesis as a master’s

option, take it. It may slow you down for a bit at the time, but when you get to the dissertation you'll go faster. A master's thesis like this should be a one-semester project. One question, one method, one answer. Don't go overboard; don't make this project bigger than it needs to be.

7. Do your own research before you get to the proposal stage. This sounds obvious, but a lot of students don't do this. They work on other people's projects, and don't get their feet wet as the director of a project. Design, conduct, report, including IRB if needed (see next).
8. Go through the IRB (Institutional Review Board for protection of human subjects) process before you get to your dissertation project. Same reasons. IRB is like learning a new language, and you want to get through unscathed and with minimum delays. (A smart student *expects* IRB delays, by the way.) There are similar research review processes for people who work with animals or dangerous materials.
9. Take an independent study and use it to do the entire literature review for your proposal *before* you submit your proposal. (Some proposals require lit review and methodology chapters anyway, but you'll have the whole lit review done rather than a prelim version.) You'll probably have to rewrite your proposal (this is normal; don't get mad, just comply), but if you're prudent you'll be able to salvage almost all of your lit review even if you have to refine your question or methods.
10. Write your proposal before you take your comps. Most places you cannot submit the proposal before passing comps, but this allows you to drop the proposal the day you receive notice of passing comprehensive exams. This, alone, saves as much as six months.
11. Stay on campus! If you stay on campus through your research and writing stages, you have a much higher chance of finishing in a timely manner, and you'll have access to your committee, campus resources, etc. It may be tempting to go get "a real job" and do your dissertation while you work, but that's a much higher risk factor for completing. You *don't* want to live a long life as an ABD.
12. Keep your eyes on the prize! Have a life plan that requires the PhD. to be behind you. If you lust for that future, you will finish the PhD. If grad school is more attractive to you than that vision, or if you don't have that vision, you're at greater risk of not finishing.

*These tips could shave a year, or more, off your process.*



# What You Can Say...

- ◆ Concerning my GRE score: I believe that my score does not reveal my true potential as an academic performer because (a) I did not grow up speaking English at home, and some of the non-scientific references in the test were confusing to me, (b) my academic career has featured extensive laboratory experience, which this test is clearly not designed to measure, and (c) I have perhaps too deliberative a thinking style, while it seems to me the test works better if one is quick and even somewhat careless when unsure of an answer.

## Continued...

- ◆ I feel that my GPA in the sciences, my strong recommendations, and my McNair research project (see writing sample) are better indicators of the kind of work I will be doing in graduate school. Thank you for your consideration.

Give them solid reasons to believe in you!