

Welcome to Inspire the Students

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I'd like to thank Zach, Stanley, Felipe and Frenkchris for putting this together.

I'd like to say a few words about academic careers, to inspire you (?)

But first...

1 What's the meaning of life?

A: Kids. Then enjoy yourself. So how do you enjoy yourself?

2 My story

- I'm a fifth year at LUC. It took awhile before I got here.
- Got my BA in Economics @ UCLA at 21 years. Didn't do a masters then (math) but also happy to avoid academic incest. (Think about that before you study masters at Leiden!)
- I worked for a failed start up, then did database programming, then traveled for 5 years. After that, I had a dotcom job for 2 months (fired) before working as a secretary at a math institute. That's where I decided to do a PhD.
- I began at 32 years old and immediately hit walls (math). In my first year, I divorced my wife and worked far too hard (12 hrs per day, 7 days per week). Eventually I found my footing (yay life experience) and graduated in 2008 at 37 years old.
- Then I did postdocs in DC, Berkeley, Wageningen, Simon Fraser and Riyadh. The academic world was not easy.
- Got this job in Aug 2014 (45 years old) and I love it – even if I need to do grading...
- I don't regret any of the choices I've made on the way. They all contributed to my current success and happiness.

3 What do Academics Do?

- It's publish or perish for 90 percent of jobs at top schools. LUC's teaching priority is rare. "Teaching schools" can kill you with overwork. *Most PhDs don't work in the academic world.*
- How do publications work?
 - Recent publication — "Water civilization: The evolution of the Dutch drinking water sector" — with Bene Colenbrander (Class of 2016.5).
 - Bene was the bright guy, I was the wise guy.

- We began in Fall 2015, submitted June 2017 and published in July 2018. The paper went thru 22 revisions, including 2 sets of responses to referees.
 - As of now, the paper has been cited 0 times and downloaded 6 times. Low ROI :(
 - His research into data on water metering led to a new hypothesis. His research into the history falsified my assumption and led us closer to the truth.
- In these days of liars, fake news and disruption from climate change, technology and chauvinist nationalism means that critical thinking is crucial to protecting yourself.
 - For society, academics often play this role – at least when they are making their ideas public. It’s a thankless job with very few material or social rewards, but it’s attractive for some people
 - For the rest (i.e., 95 percent of you), *the effort and process of critical thinking is still extremely valuable!* Richard Feynman: “The first principle is that you must not fool yourself and you are the easiest person to fool.”

4 Bottom Line

My advice on how to enjoy yourself:

Be independent: Get paid. A friend trained as an artist told me she’s now working as a consultant. Yes, she’s compromised, but she can now also afford to buy herself dinner

Keep learning: In classes of 2013 and 2014, 80 percent of students had enrolled in 1 (or more) masters programs. In the classes of 2015 and 2016, the ratio is 65 percent. I attribute this to the improving job market. Learning on the job is also valuable (and you’re getting paid!). Those with job experience – not just intern experience – can also choose a better masters (in terms of matching interests) and get more out of it (in terms of asking more of their professors; I wrote a blog post on this for LinkedIn).

Do what you love: Sometimes it takes effort to get there, but keep asking yourself what you want and work towards those work, personal and social goals.

Embrace change: The world is changing, sometimes in ways that we dislike or that harm us. Plan on change and surprises to reduce your risks.

Priorities: The essentials are friends and family, your health, and *then* your work and financial security

Work smart: Use your networks: The weak network of LUC alumni (600+ strong) and the strong network of the people who kept you going when times were tough.

That’s why we’re here today: to be inspired, but also to appreciate the value that we can bring to each other: friendship, knowledge, connections.

Let’s practice by saying hi to someone you do NOT know.