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OVERCOMING OBSTACLES
FALL 2013 WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

For more information on how EPOCHS can benefit you, visit: www.fullerton.edu/graduate/EPOCHS
Research Week: An Inside Look

On the week of March 18-22, 2013, Cal State Fullerton successfully launched its own inaugural Research Week. Research Week is a celebration of the ongoing faculty and student research at Cal State Fullerton. Research Week is devoted to promoting campus community and community partner relations. This week also serves as a reminder to students and faculty that diverse research has a significant impact on the community at large.

Each day of Research Week embodied a unique theme such as “Celebrating Research at Cal State Fullerton” and “Integrating Teaching and Research.” These themes served to create an inclusive environment for both the CSUF and greater Orange County communities. Additionally, the opening ceremony and the opportunity afforded students to showcase their research further helped to tear down the barrier between faculty and students/founders.

During the “Showcasing Student Research and Creative Activities” event, Evan Foley presented his research comparing black hole masses and spins in electrons by utilizing different initial data methods. Foley is a graduate student at CSUF carrying out his research through the Masters in Physics program. Foley works in collaboration with professor Geoffrey Lovelace’s larger research efforts in understanding and modeling gravitational waves; the research is being conducted in Cal State Fullerton’s new Gravitational Wave Physics and Astronomy Center (GWPAC).

The GWPAC was established with the intent of observing the universe in novel ways and studying nature’s most violent astrophysical events (e.g. supernovas and the collisions between black holes or neutron stars). Foley’s and Lovelace’s work is founded on Albert Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity and his Nobel Prize-winning observations of gravitational waves’ effects on the Hulse-Taylor binary pulsar. Foley highlights that his research began when he was an undergraduate student at CSUF. As he planned to continue as a graduate student, the faculty offered him a position in the new GWPAC upon completion of his undergraduate program.

A second research collaboration featured at the “Showcasing Student Research and Creative Activities” event looked at factors that motivated first-generation Latino males to go to college. Five graduate student researchers co-authored this study: Vanessa Figueroa, Michelle Gonzalez, Carolina Lepe, Isabel Reyes, and Victor Rojas. Their research uncovered that first-generation Latinos are largely motivated by thoughts of future employment and economic stability. This stability will potentially help them and their families reach the next socio-economic level. In addition, their research indicates that family opinions influence the participants’ decisions to pursue higher education. Above all, participants in the research study hope to transcend the “standard for today’s Latino Male” and create a better model for the next generation. Figueroa and Gonzalez both thanked Dr. Meri Beckham for this research opportunity.

Both Gonzales and Figueroa have come to realize the effects of conducting research. For instance, Gonzalez’s research has possibly identified several determinants of higher education pursuit among Latinos as well as the need for future literature to study such issues. For Figueroa, being a part of this research has led her to want to dedicate her life to “working with underrepresented and first-generation students.”

Research Week is a perfect example of the integral part research plays in the CSUF graduate community. Regardless if it is being founded on the principles of gravitational force or on the principles of human motivation, research is present at Cal State Fullerton and is helping both the community and researchers work toward the common goal of an improved society.
The Beginning of a New Career

After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish from Cal State Dominguez Hills, Juan Antonio Tavares decided to pursue a M.A. because he wanted to develop a better understanding of the language and find a way to counter the discrimination that Spanish speakers face in the United States.

While working on his master’s, he had the opportunity to work closely with Dr. Pilar Valero-Costa of the Modern Languages and Literatures Department. Tavares reflects on his experience by stating, “Working with Dr. Valero-Costa gave me the opportunity to expand my area of teaching interests. I was able to help my students by assisting them in their assignments.” This experience helped him realize that he really wanted to teach and have the opportunity to share his knowledge with others.

As he completed his Master of Arts degree in Spanish in fall 2012, Tavares confronted the question: “After graduate school, what’s next?” His dream has always been to become a professor and teach Spanish, but he knew it would not be easy to find a teaching position in today’s competitive job market. Nevertheless, this was no reason to give up.

He hesitantly started to apply for jobs after he completed his master’s degree because he knew many of the positions he hoped to get required a doctoral degree. Shortly after graduating from Cal State Fullerton, he was contacted by Cal State Dominguez Hills for an interview. This took him by surprise because it was within three months of finishing his degree. He was hired to teach Spanish for non-native speakers and literature.

“What surprised me the most during my job interview,” says Tavares, “was the fact that my involvement in student organizations and school activities was important to my interviewer.”

Tavares started working as a lecturer at both Cal State Dominguez Hills and Compton Community College this spring. He remarks that it has been the best experience of his life. His future plans include applying to doctoral programs in Spanish Literature at UC Santa Barbara and The Catholic University of America.

Graduate students often find themselves pondering their future, and as graduation approaches, it becomes even more pertinent. Tavares’ advice: “My advice to those who are starting their graduate program is to get involved in school activities or at least be part of a school organization because it helps you when it comes to applying for jobs as they do take it into consideration.”
I entered the master’s program in American Studies at CSUF in 2011 to both satisfy my desire to learn more about the world and to explore more career options. Upon entering the program, I had little idea what I wanted to do after I graduated. I wanted to become a professor, I want to research, and I want to write. It was thrilling to finally have this kind of clarity. I don’t mean to overstate this, but deciding on a career path has been something that I agonized over. After graduating with a broad liberal arts degree in 2005, I spent years testing out different career fields. I’ve agonized over career choices and spend much of my time trying to find a more practical direction to this star and heading for a Ph.D. Despite the dangers, I want to move forward. As I drove through the mountains this past summer, I finally had the time and the quiet I needed to put the pieces together. On that road I realized that, given my interests and abilities and given what it is that I want to accomplish with my life, earning a Ph.D. and becoming a professor just makes sense. American culture is something that interests and excites me on a deep level; to be able to spend my life researching American culture, reading, writing, discussing, and teaching—it’s all I could hope for. This is my chance to live my life in a way I find personally meaningful and fulfilling. If it doesn’t work out—if the big professor job never materializes—at least I’ll know that I tried. I’m hitching my wagon to this star and heading for a Ph.D.

So far, things are working out. With the very generous and gracious help of faculty in my department—the guidance of Dr. Mike Steiner, the inspiration of Dr. Karen Lystra, the friendly support of Dr. John Ibson and Dr. Erica Ball, and the tremendous mentorship of Dr. Pam Steinle—I was able to put together a competitive application. I was accepted with full funding to two fantastic schools and look forward to attending Indiana University in the fall. This success is due wholly to my time in the American Studies master’s program at CSUF. I could not have achieved any of this without the rigorous academic challenge of the department and thoughtful guidance of the faculty. My time at the CSUF master’s program in American Studies has given me the opportunity to pursue a career that I find personally meaningful. For that, I will be forever grateful. I’m headed down the road towards a doctorate—exactly where I want to be.

I started three hours into a road trip through the Sierras last summer when I realized that I want to go on for a Ph.D. I want to become a professor, I want to research, and I want to write. It was thrilling to finally have this kind of clarity. I don’t mean to overstate this, but deciding on a career path has been something that I agonized over. After graduating with a broad liberal arts degree in 2005, I spent years testing out different career fields. I’ve agonized over career choices and spend much of my time trying to find a more practical direction to this star and heading for a Ph.D. Despite the dangers, I want to move forward. As I drove through the mountains this past summer, I finally had the time and the quiet I needed to put the pieces together. On that road I realized that, given my interests and abilities and given what it is that I want to accomplish with my life, earning a Ph.D. and becoming a professor just makes sense. American culture is something that interests and excites me on a deep level; to be able to spend my life researching American culture, reading, writing, discussing, and teaching—it’s all I could hope for. This is my chance to live my life in a way I find personally meaningful and fulfilling. If it doesn’t work out—if the big professor job never materializes—at least I’ll know that I tried. I’m hitching my wagon to this star and heading for a Ph.D.

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On February 20, 2013, the College of Education, the Educational Leadership Program (Ed.D.), and the Center for Research on Educational Access and Leadership (C-REAL) hosted “From Theory to Practice: Implications for Leadership, Access, and Diversity,” a research symposium that featured the research projects of approximately 45 doctoral students, master’s students, and recent alumni. The research projects covered several topics ranging from kindergarten to higher education and included issues dealing with administration, leadership, and diversity. Research is about finding new strategies and solutions to ongoing problems; the dedication of the doctoral students exemplifies just that. The symposium was an evening event that provided a platform for students and alumni to share their valuable experience.

Following the poster session, the panel discussion hosted Ed.D. alumni. The panel consisted of recent graduates Damon Bell, April Cunningham, Chan Ton, and William Wallace. Panelists shared their research and discussed how the results of their studies can lead to different approaches to improving education for undocumented students in college, expanding the role of librarians as educators, and increasing the satisfaction of disadvantaged community college students with college.

HIGHLIGHTING DOCTORAL STUDENTS’ RESEARCH:
Dr. Gregory Merwin, a recent graduate, presented his project titled “Characteristics of Effective Pedagogy of Third Grade English Learners in Language Arts: An Exploratory Case Study.” The purpose of his study was to address the academic deficiencies of third grade English Learners in the area of language arts. As the principal at Dr. Albert Schweitzer School in the Magnolia School District in West Anaheim, he was able to observe what techniques best help third grade English learners develop their language and critical thinking skills. His study has allowed him to recommend solutions and implement strategies at Schweitzer School to improve the educational opportunities of children at his school. Some of his recommendations included professional development, extended day for English learners, and increasing parental involvement.

MASTERS STUDENTS AND THEIR RESEARCH:
22 Master of Science students in the Educational Leadership Department presented their posters. Sergio Hernandez, Sean Leathy, Julia Nguyen, Noumy Medina, and Magaly Perez presented “Factors that Motivated Institutions.” The purpose of their research was to “create a better understanding of the Hispanic student experience emerging at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) by filling a gap in the literature and highlighting student perceptions and experiences at emerging HSIs through a comparison of an emerging HSI with an established HSI.”

Vanessa Figuera, Michelle Gonzalez, Carelina Lepo, Isabel Reyes, and Victor Rojas presented “Factors that Motivated First-Generation Latino Males to Go to College.” While working on a seminar project, this cohort noticed that the literature and the data pointed to an interesting phenomenon: “Over the last 30 years the college attainment for Latino male undergraduate students has gradually dropped. There has been an 18.2% decline in entering Latino freshmen at four-year institutions. Little has been done to find solutions and/or to better understand why Latino males are not represented in higher education.” This study set out to find alternative solutions to increase the representation of this group in higher education by interviewing a number of first-generation, first-time freshmen Latino students to get a grasp on their motivations for pursuing a college degree and the challenges they faced.

Story by Gloria López

Last September, 433 graduate students responded to a survey intended to improve understanding of graduate student needs. Among the questions the survey asked which days and time of day were best for providing tutoring or workshops. Of the 410 respondents, 53% chose Saturday as the best day for services, however, for services on a weekday, the three-hour evening period between 6pm and 9pm was the top choice for 48%. This choice of evening hours corresponds with graduate student enrollment: 60.5% (1799) of all master’s students (4226) were only taking evening classes (classes beginning after 4pm) in Fall 2012.

Most survey respondents said they are working (74% of 417 respondents) with 22% working 20-40 hours; 28% cited that they work more than 40 hours each week. Despite the time spent working, however, a lack of financial resources was cited as an “obstacle” or “major obstacle” to completing the degree by 82%. Family obligations are significant: 41% (n=170) noted that one or more family members depend on them for a substantial part of their income. Providing home care for a family member (child, sibling or parent) was cited: 24% (n=92) that they care for their children; 16% (n=58) said that they care for a parent or an aging member of their family.

Catalina Olivera, project director for EPOCHS, suggested that the respondents’ availability on evenings and Saturdays, as well as the harried nature of graduate students’ lives, are significant. Unfortunately, many services to students are available only during weekday hours, for example, the Offices of Financial Aid, Student Health and Counseling Center, and Cashier’s. The EPOCHS program currently sponsors tutoring, workshops, and counseling for graduate students during the evenings and Saturdays. For more information on EPOCHS, see www.fullerton.edu/graduate.

Story by Dr. Katherine Powers

GRADUATE STUDENTS SPEAK OUT
SURVEY RESULTS

Graduate Students and Work
74% reported that they work
28% work more than 40 hours a week
22% work 20-40 hours a week

Graduate Students and Family obligation
24% care for their children
16% care for a parents or an aging family member
41% are responsible for one or more family member
APPLYING TO PH.D. PROGRAMS

Steps You Can Take This Summer

Applying to Ph.D. programs is a gigantic, time-consuming, overwhelming pain. If you are planning on applying to Ph.D. programs (or Sc.D. or M.D. or what have you) next fall, save yourself some stress and hassle and get a jump start on the process this summer.

Find a Faculty Mentor

You need a mentor. Let me say it again: YOU NEED A MENTOR. Why? First of all, they know more than you do. They intimately know the application process from multiple angles, having been on the application end of the process as a student and on the admitter end as a faculty member. They have probably even recently helped other students gain admittance into programs. They can also probably give you a good idea about the reputations and trajectories of the various programs you may be considering.

To be perfectly honest, I could not have successfully navigated the application process without the help of my faculty mentors.

So, how does one find a mentor? It’s actually a lot easier and less formal than you might think. After I decided that I was serious about pursuing a Ph.D. program last summer, I emailed three professors with whom I felt I shared good student/teacher relationships. I told them I was interested in pursuing a Ph.D., gave them an idea of my research interests, and then asked whether they would be interested in meeting with me to help me figure out where I was headed. It was that easy.

Beyond being a source of information, my mentors offered practical guidance. One gave me very specific, step-by-step advice on how to construct my statement of purpose. After I had finished writing it, another went through each and every line, making sure every word was perfectly chosen and every sentence flowed naturally into the next. I cannot over-emphasize how helpful and important it is to have a faculty mentor.

Research Schools

Hopefully, your faculty mentors will give you a good idea of what schools might be a good match for your research interests. Using their suggestions as a base, begin looking into all of your options. The sheer amount of information on each Ph.D. program’s website can be overwhelming. My suggestion is to first look through a program’s faculty. You need to find at least one faculty member conducting research in your area of interest to make the program a good fit for you. Once you are sure there is a faculty member conducting research in an area that interests you, spend some time investigating the program itself. The sort of aid they offer students, their specific application requirements, etc.

Study for Entrance Exams

Ph.D. programs often require that you take a test, such as the GRE, in order to gain admission. It would be wise to study for these tests so that your results reflect your best effort. If you are free from coursework this summer, it is the perfect time to study for and take these entrance examinations.

Begin Your Personal Statement

Most Ph.D. programs will ask you to write a personal statement. In your personal statement, you will be asked to summarize your research interests, your reasoning for applying to a program, your suitability for graduate study, your hopes for the future, and pretty much your entire academic background. It might be a good idea to start hammering away at your personal statements (with the help of your faculty mentor) in the summer so that each and every word is meaningfully crafted.

Enjoy Your Summer

Applying to Ph.D. programs adds a much higher level of stress to your schedule as an extra course. While doing a lot of the leg work in the summer will help alleviate some of the stress in the fall, you are still going to end up with a tough semester. So, make sure you take some time to enjoy the summer before your final year at CSUF.

Good luck with your applications!

Story by Jed Kuhn

WORKS CITED


The Office of Graduate Studies provides leadership in graduate student affairs, programs, and policies, administering EPOCHS federal grant as well as several scholarship programs: Graduate Equity Fellowship, CSU Pre-doctoral Fellowship, Giles T. Brown Thesis Award, and EPOCHS Research Fund. All master's theses and doctoral dissertations are reviewed in the Office of Graduate Studies, an important final step before graduation for many students. The Office of Graduate Studies serves as an authority on state regulations and campus policies overseeing procedures, including enrollment, classification, leave of absence, academic standards, and assisting department graduate program advisers. Central to the Office's service is the evaluation of each graduate student's study plan for classification status, as well as review for graduation check and posting the awarding of the graduate degree.

### FAQs

**Question**: What if I have finished all my classes, but I am still working on my project. Do I have to be enrolled?

**Answer**: Yes, during Fall and Spring semester, you must be enrolled. If you have no other classes to take, then you enroll in GRAD 700. You might be able to enroll in GRAD 700 via University Extended Education. Come to the Office of Graduate Studies at the start of the semester to pick up the paperwork.

**Question**: I am graduating in Fall and applied for a grad check, but I haven't heard anything. Is there something wrong?

**Answer**: Grad checks are processed by Graduate Studies sending a grad check and study plan to the adviser during the student's final semester, usually about week 8. Once the grad check is returned from the adviser, Graduate Studies will send an information copy to the student.

**Question**: What if I need to take a semester off?

**Answer**: To take a semester off, file a Leave of Absence form. All graduate students need to be enrolled every semester, or they will be discontinued. Form is available at www.fullerton.edu/graduate

**Question**: I thought I would graduate in Summer, but now I realize I won’t be finished. What should I do?

**Answer**: Come into the Office of Graduate Studies and ask to “update” your grad date to Fall 2013 or later.

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**DEADLINES**

- **JULY 5** ▶️ LAST DAY TO ENROLL IN GRAD 700 FOR SUMMER 2013 (FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ONLY)
- **JULY 12** ▶️ LAST DAY TO SUBMIT YOUR THESIS OR DISSERTATION TO THE THESIS/DISSERTATION READER FOR AUGUST 2013 GRADUATION
- **AUGUST 9** ▶️ LAST DAY TO SUBMIT YOUR THESIS OR DISSERTATION TO THE BOOKSTORE FOR AUGUST 2013 GRADUATION
- **SEPTEMBER 10** ▶️ GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH FUND

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**OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**What We Do**

The Office of Graduate Studies provides leadership in graduate student affairs, programs, and policies, administering EPOCHS federal grant as well as several scholarship programs: Graduate Equity Fellowship, CSU Pre-doctoral Fellowship, Giles T. Brown Thesis Award, and EPOCHS Research Fund. All master’s theses and doctoral dissertations are reviewed in the Office of Graduate Studies, an important final step before graduation for many students. The Office of Graduate Studies serves as an authority on state regulations and campus policies overseeing procedures, including enrollment, classification, leave of absence, academic standards, and assisting department graduate program advisers. Central to the Office’s service is the evaluation of each graduate student’s study plan for classification status, as well as review for graduation check and posting the awarding of the graduate degree.

**Who We Are**

- Dr. Katherine Powers, Director
- Catalina Olvera, Project Director, EPOCHS
- Cathy Hess & Lynn Winter, Evaluators
- Yesica Peñate, Administrative Support Coordinator
- Pam Migliore, Administrative Specialist, EPOCHS
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- Gina Armendariz, Dr. Gerardo Arellano & David Donley, Graduate Learning Specialists
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- EPOCHS Graduate Assistants: Angela Gutiérrez (community outreach), Janette Hernandez (evaluation), Jed Kuhn (social media), Mikael Lee (designer), Gloria López (writer), Frank Ramos (events), María Salazar (translator)

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**NEWSLETTER**

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