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100 Reasons NOT to Go to Graduate School

This blog is an attempt to offer those considering graduate school some good reasons to do something else. Its focus is on the humanities and social sciences. The full list of 100 reasons will be posted in time. Your comments and suggestions are welcome.

Complete List to Date

1. The smart people are somewhere else.
2. Your colleagues are your competitors.
3. Your pedigree counts.
4. It takes a long time to finish.
5. Graduate school is not what it used to be.
6. Intellectual expectations are falling.
7. Labor demands are increasing.
8. There are very few jobs.
9. It is very, very hard.
10. There is a psychological cost.



Boy Studying by Lewis Hine, ca. 1924



▶ xtra normal

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So you Want to Get a PhD in the Humanities

Doctoral training is critical

- To schools
 - Cheap, highly motivated labour
 - More research and teaching
 - Define and sustain academic identity and reputation
- To the broader economy
 - From consumers to producers of knowledge

Attracting PhD students in increasingly difficult

- Hard work
- High opportunity cost
- Limited investment return
- Uncertain career prospects
 - Dropout rates can be high
 - More PhDs than academic positions
 - Specialization, overqualification limit options outside universities
- Market saturation cheapens prestige

What made me happy as a PhD student

- Intellectual challenge
- Rigorous training
- Excellent supervision
- Autonomy to pursue research interests
- Funding, budget for research visits, EDEN seminars etc
- Treatment as junior colleague

Dewatripont et al – Bruegel policy contributions

Performance of European universities affected by

- Poor governance
- Insufficient incentives
- Insufficient autonomy
- Budget constraints

Measures proposed include

- Encouraging and monitoring
- EU-wide merit-based competition
- Enhanced researcher mobility

In Hungary...

- Government spending cut > 30%
 - 25% drop in university applications in 2012
- Compulsory schooling age cut from 18 to 16
- New HE law
 - Chancellors appointed by government
 - May become rector without PhD
 - Universities lose exclusive right to nominate teachers
 - Must work in Hungary after graduation
 - Reduce power of student unions

What can be done to improve doctoral training?

Arnoud De Meyer (JMD, 2013): different training models

- More interdisciplinary work
- More diverse career paths

Recent changes at CJBS include

- Limited supervision capacity, so only students we can fund ourselves
- Panel interviews and admissions
- Rigorous training on research methodologies
- Panel supervision
- Emphasis on networking