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## PhD students: Advice for academic job market applications

15 OCT 2012

I am sitting on my first search committee, and some advice begs to be offered. This goes beyond my [previous more general job market advice](http://chrisblattman.com/2008/11/09/academic-job-market-advice/) (<http://chrisblattman.com/2008/11/09/academic-job-market-advice/>).

1. **Make sure your letter-writers send their letters.** If you want your application to be deeply discounted, have a negligent advisor. This is rare but happens. It is perfectly reasonable to send them friendly reminders. You can do your part by [asking for a rec letter the right way](http://chrisblattman.com/advising/letters/) (<http://chrisblattman.com/advising/letters/>).
2. **Prepare a research statement that shows your trajectory.** This should outline what you have done, and what you plan to do in next, why it is important, and how it all fits together. Have your advisor and colleagues read this and comment. Revise fourteen times before submitting.
3. **Write a concise CV.** I don't know about my colleagues, but I don't need to see a page-long list of conference presentations. If you must list these, at least do so in a condensed way. Focus on your research contributions and teaching. At Berkeley Econ, they forced us to polish and polish a one-pager. That is extreme, but I think all can be said about an ABD in 2 pages. If you've been out a few years then more is reasonable.
4. **Communicate delivery, productivity and genius.** Easier said than done. And mostly

easier to say if done. We are not only looking for people who can do brilliant work, but who can get it out the door. Evidence of publication is helpful here. If you have no publications then communicate your publication status (e.g. one submitted working paper and a book proposal, or three papers likely to be submitted next year, plus future projects you have already started).

5. **Send us something meaty to read.** If you are writing a book as a dissertation, the intro and conclusion are not sufficient. Send the meat, and make sure you have a summary somewhere. Even better is an article version of the book alongside the book. And if you have too many things to submit than the online form lets you attach, put files together in one PDF to submit.
6. **Remember that, mathematically, everything you submit after your best work reduces the average quality of your application.** Yes, quantity adds to overall quality, especially if it shows an ability get things out the door, but at some point there are articles or op-eds or old jobs you should leave off your CV.

I may have more to say as the process continues, and as experience grows. Take these as the first exasperated responses. Speaking of which...

**Advisors and letter writers:** A pet peeve of mine taking form is your failure to give a concrete sense of the person's relative ranking and ability. I find nothing more clear and refreshing than a comparison of this student to you previous students, or to the job performance other graduates who have gone on to specific positions and achieved this or that distinction. Otherwise, everyone says the same platitudes and it is very difficult to tell the good from the great.

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(<https://twitter.com/Kiconcoa/status/257890777248722945>)

1. [NextScientist \(http://twitter.com/NextScientist\)](http://twitter.com/NextScientist)

View October 15, 2012 (<http://chrisblattman.com/2012/10/15/phd-students-advice-for-the-academic-job-market/#comment-38724>)

I will take your advice into account now that I need to find a post-PhD job.

In NextScientist (<http://nextscientist.com>) we have some posts on career advice and online presence for young scientists. I list them below:

-Â Grow Your Academic Footprint With A Science Blog: A Free Videotutorial (<http://www.nextscientist.com/grow-academic-footprint-science-blog/>), our video guide that helps you to set up your own science blog.

-Â 7 habits of highly visible PhD students (<http://www.nextscientist.com/7-habits-highly-visible-phd-students/>), it includes some tips on social media and blogging.

-Â 3 Questions You Should Ask Your PhD Supervisor Before Choosing A Career In Sci-

ence? (<http://www.nextscientist.com/3-questions-choosing-a-career-in-science/>), a reality check before jumping on an academic career.

-Â [A statement of purpose for graduate school](http://www.nextscientist.com/statement-of-purpose-for-graduate-school/) (<http://www.nextscientist.com/statement-of-purpose-for-graduate-school/>), the letter I was submitting when I searched for PhDs.

- We have other posts onÂ [science blogging](http://www.nextscientist.com/writing-science-blog-saved-phd/) (<http://www.nextscientist.com/writing-science-blog-saved-phd/>)Â andÂ [social media for scientists](http://www.nextscientist.com/social-media-trinity-scientist-20/) (<http://www.nextscientist.com/social-media-trinity-scientist-20/>).

I hope you find them useful.

Cheers,

Julio

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2. [@NextScientist](http://twitter.com/NextScientist) (<http://twitter.com/NextScientist>)

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@cblatts I would add: don't send a generic letter, make it personal and targeted

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3. [@gsacarleton](http://twitter.com/gsacarleton) (<http://twitter.com/gsacarleton>)

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RT @cblatts: PhD students: Advice for the academic job market <http://t.co/eiR8j2Tt> (<http://t.co/eiR8j2Tt>) #highered #cdnpse

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4. [@ConduitJournal](http://twitter.com/ConduitJournal) (<http://twitter.com/ConduitJournal>)

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PhD students: Advice for academic job market applications <http://t.co/nsIF8jHE>  
(<http://t.co/nsIF8jHE>)

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5. [@cjpaul tweets \(http://twitter.com/cjpaul\\_tweets\)](http://twitter.com/cjpaul_tweets)

View ([https://twitter.com/cjpaul\\_tweets/status/257834764881514496](https://twitter.com/cjpaul_tweets/status/257834764881514496)) October 15, 2012 (<http://chrisblattman.com/2012/10/15/phd-students-advice-for-the-academic-job-market/#comment-38735>)

“Mathematically, everything you submit after your best work reduces the average quality of your application.” <http://t.co/cpD10l2d> (<http://t.co/cpD10l2d>)


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6. [@smsaideman \(http://twitter.com/smsaideman\)](http://twitter.com/smsaideman)

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@cblatts does a big service for academic job aspirants: <http://t.co/U5t2E2Xb>  
(<http://t.co/U5t2E2Xb>)

 ([https://twitter.com/p\\_orchard/status/258005097525702656](https://twitter.com/p_orchard/status/258005097525702656))

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7. *Martin*

View October 15, 2012 (<http://chrisblattman.com/2012/10/15/phd-students-advice-for-the-academic-job-market/#comment-38740>)

Professor Blattman, I think you may have unintentionally cutoff your last sentence in item #4. Great collection of pointers!

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8. [@ryanbriggs \(http://twitter.com/ryanbriggs\)](http://twitter.com/ryanbriggs)

View (<https://twitter.com/ryanbriggs/status/257881324029882368>) October 15, 2012 (<http://chrisblattman.com/2012/10/15/phd-students-advice-for-the-academic-job-market/#comment-38745>)

PhD students: Advice for academic job market applications (from @cblatts)

<http://t.co/y05pHVq2> (<http://t.co/y05pHVq2>)

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9. [@stevenliaotw](http://twitter.com/stevenliaotw) (<http://twitter.com/stevenliaotw>)

[View \(https://twitter.com/stevenliaotw/status/258249476844695552\)](https://twitter.com/stevenliaotw/status/258249476844695552) [October 16, 2012 \(http://chrisblattman.com/2012/10/15/phd-students-advice-for-the-academic-job-market/#comment-38761\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2012/10/15/phd-students-advice-for-the-academic-job-market/#comment-38761)

RT: PhD students: Advice for academic job market applications <http://t.co/IDah0Ei2> (<http://t.co/IDah0Ei2>)

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[\(/about/\)](#)

I'm an Assistant Professor of Political Science & International and Public Affairs at Columbia University. I use field work and statistics to study poverty, political participation, the causes and consequences of violence, and policy in developing countries. [\[Read more\] \(/about/\)](#)



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- [2013: Promoting order and property rights under weak rule of law \(http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2268045\)](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2268045)
- [2013: The logic of child soldiering and coercion \(http://chrisblattman.com/documents/research/2013.LogicOfChildSoldiering.IO.pdf\)](http://chrisblattman.com/documents/research/2013.LogicOfChildSoldiering.IO.pdf)
- [All \(http://chrisblattman.com/research/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/research/)

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- [2011: Post conflict civic education and peacebuilding in Liberia \(http://www.poverty-action.org/project/0139\)](http://www.poverty-action.org/project/0139)
- [2012: Forecasting local-level conflict in Liberia \(https://www.poverty-action.org/sites/default/files/liberiaearlywarning-valeipa.pdf\)](https://www.poverty-action.org/sites/default/files/liberiaearlywarning-valeipa.pdf)
- [2013: If you give the poor cash, does it help? \(http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTHDOFFICE/Resources/5485648-1332253705502/Evidence2Policy-Uganda.pdf\)](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTHDOFFICE/Resources/5485648-1332253705502/Evidence2Policy-Uganda.pdf)
- [2013: The effect of cash grants on poor women \(http://chrisblattman.com/2013/05/02/invest-in-women/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2013/05/02/invest-in-women/)
- [All \(http://chrisblattman.com/policy/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/policy/)

## Advice: Development


- [Books development workers and academics should read \(http://chrisblattman.com/2011/06/21/books-development-economists-and-aid-workers-seldom-read-but-should/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2011/06/21/books-development-economists-and-aid-workers-seldom-read-but-should/)
- [Development tourism \(http://chrisblattman.com/wp/wp-admin/link.php?action=edit&link\\_id=69\)](http://chrisblattman.com/wp/wp-admin/link.php?action=edit&link_id=69)
- [Getting a job in development \(http://chrisblattman.com/tag/development-jobs/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/tag/development-jobs/)
- [How to take advantage of an MA program \(http://chrisblattman.com/2011/12/06/the-problem-with-graduate-degrees-in-international-affairs-and-development/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2011/12/06/the-problem-with-graduate-degrees-in-international-affairs-and-development/)
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- [Research in war zones II \(http://chrisblattman.com/2011/03/23/should-student-researchers-go-to-conflict-zones/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2011/03/23/should-student-researchers-go-to-conflict-zones/)
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- [So you want to be an impact evaluator? \(http://chrisblattman.com/2009/01/07/so-you-want-to-be-an-impact-evaluator-a-cautionary-tale/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2009/01/07/so-you-want-to-be-an-impact-evaluator-a-cautionary-tale/)
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- [What to bring for field work II \(http://chrisblattman.com/2010/07/24/what-to-bring-to-the-field/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2010/07/24/what-to-bring-to-the-field/)
- [What to bring to the sky \(http://chrisblattman.com/2013/05/31/what-to-bring-to-the-sky/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2013/05/31/what-to-bring-to-the-sky/)
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- [Working in a developing country \(http://chrisblattman.com/2008/06/02/advice-for-working-in-a-developing-country/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2008/06/02/advice-for-working-in-a-developing-country/)

## Advice: Academic

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- [Choosing an MA, MPA or MIA \(http://chrisblattman.com/2013/10/04/what-ma-mpa-or-mia-program-is-for-you/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2013/10/04/what-ma-mpa-or-mia-program-is-for-you/)
- [Courses: 10 things I tell undergrads \(http://chrisblattman.com/advising/undergraduate-general/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/advising/undergraduate-general/)
- [Courses: How much economics should you study? \(http://chrisblattman.com/2012/01/11/how-much-economics-should-you-study-in-college-or-why-economics-is-like-a-martial-art/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2012/01/11/how-much-economics-should-you-study-in-college-or-why-economics-is-like-a-martial-art/)
- [How to ask for a recommendation letter \(http://chrisblattman.com/advising/letters/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/advising/letters/)
- [How to discuss a paper \(http://chrisblattman.com/2010/02/22/the-discussants-art/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2010/02/22/the-discussants-art/)
- [How to email your professors and employers \(http://chrisblattman.com/2010/11/08/students-how-to-email-to-your-professor-employer-and-professional-peers/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2010/11/08/students-how-to-email-to-your-professor-employer-and-professional-peers/)



- [How to get a PhD and save the world \(http://chrisblattman.com/2007/12/12/how-to-get-a-phd-and-save-the-world/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2007/12/12/how-to-get-a-phd-and-save-the-world/)
- [Moving from RA to co-author \(http://chrisblattman.com/2008/07/01/ra-versus-co-author/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2008/07/01/ra-versus-co-author/)
- [On quantitative field research \(http://chrisblattman.com/2009/10/16/after-the-surge/\)](http://chrisblattman.com/2009/10/16/after-the-surge/)
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