CPSC 9500
(New) PhD Student Seminar

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Seminar 02
Why a PhD? / Finding a Topic
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What a PhD Is?

• Degree Signifying Expertise/Experience
• Opportunity for a Certain Lifestyle
• A Process (of creating knowledge)
Why Are You Pursuing a PhD?
Passion vs. Interest

• Q: “Am I smart enough to get a PhD?”

• A: Wrong question. Instead, ask yourself if you are **passionate enough** to get a PhD.

• By virtue of the fact that you are sitting here, you have the intellectual horsepower

• If you are passionate about some problem, with enough tenacity, you can make a meaningful contribution
What Does a PhD Take?

Pep talk for new Ph.D. students

September 2014  (assistant professor)

Summary

Here's a hypothetical pep talk to scare/motivate new Ph.D. students, especially those in computer science.

Welcome! The next five to seven years will likely be the hardest phase of your professional life so far. But if done right, it can also be the most rewarding. I’ll now explain.

Let me frame the Ph.D. experience in terms that you will intimately understand: getting good grades in school. Since you're here, you probably scored at or near the top of your class throughout elementary, middle, and high school, and even throughout college. It's safe to assume that you scored at least in the top 20% of your class. Some of you were probably in the top 10%, 5% or even 1% of your class. You were likely encouraged to do a Ph.D. because of your intellectual aptitudes. Well, to get a Ph.D., all you need to do is to score in the top 20% of your “class” in around three classes. That's all! Sounds easy, right?

What do I mean by scoring in the top 20% of each “class” for three classes? I mean that to get a Ph.D., you need to publish roughly three papers as the lead author. To publish a paper at a respectable peer-reviewed venue, your paper needs to be amongst the top 20% of papers in your field. The competition is fierce, so be ready to work hard and be prepared to fail and try again.

Some coursework

Research

Dependency on expectations based on job goals
A Flow Model for Research (hypothetical)

Reading

Experimentation

Writing

Evaluation
A Flow Model for Research (reality)