

naturejobs

**THE CAREERS
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What makes a good PhD student? This is an intriguing question, and one that was addressed recently in a short article in *Naturejobs* (see *Nature* **441**, 252; 2006). Georgia Chenevix-Trench, a research fellow at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research in Australia, wrote the piece and discussed ways in which PhD students can make the most of their studies. The article has since become one of the most popular ever to be published on our website. As well as enjoying a large readership, the piece has sparked an unprecedented amount of feedback, with a number of postdocs adding their voices to the debate on how to make science more enjoyable. Getting to know your colleagues as people, not just as scientists, is a good place to start, they write. They add that savouring your surroundings beyond the lab makes the experience that much more enjoyable.

These comments took me back to a turning point in my own graduate work. I was walking beside Lake Mendota at the height of a Wisconsin winter, wrapped up warm to ward off the freezing temperature. It was too cold to focus on anything except putting one foot in front of another, and keeping my nostrils — the only part of my body exposed to the elements — from icing up. I recall stopping to look around me and noticing that the sky was azure, the air crystalline. All thoughts of teaching duties, research problems and writing jobs disappeared in puffs of frozen air filtered through the burgundy wool scarf I had wrapped round my face. I was completely in the moment — and totally outside my responsibilities. It was then that I saw with absolute clarity how to resolve my research problems: the way best way to analyse my data and how to present them visually.

That moment was, for me, the epitome of what I believe the goal of all scientists should be: a synthesis of efficacy and enjoyment. Taking time to savour your surroundings — whether that means colleagues, friends, art, architecture or nature — can help nurture you, whatever stage you are at with your career. And it can make your work worth doing.

Paul Smaglik, *Naturejobs* editor

CONTACTS

Publisher: Ben Crowe
Editor: Paul Smaglik
Assistant Editor: Gene Russo

US Head Office, New York
75 Varick Street, 9th Floor,
New York, NY 10013-1917
Tel: +1 800 989 7718
Fax: +1 800 989 7103
e-mail: naturejobs@natureny.com

US Sales Manager/Corporations:
Peter Bless
Classified Sales Representatives
Tel: +1 800 989 7718
East USA/Canada: Andrew Bennie
**NIH/Maryland/New York/
Pennsylvania:** Shelley Cohen

San Francisco Office
Classified Sales Representative:

Michaela Bjorkman
West USA/West Corp. Canada
225 Bush Street, Suite 1453
San Francisco, CA 94104
Tel: +1 415 781 3803
Fax: +1 415 781 3805
e-mail: m.bjorkman@naturesf.com

European Head Office, London
The Macmillan Building,
4 Crinan Street, London N1 9XW, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7843 4961
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7843 4996
e-mail: naturejobs@nature.com

European Sales Manager:
Andy Douglas (4975)
Advertising Production Manager:
Stephen Russell
To send materials use London
address above.
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7843 4816

Fax: +44 (0) 20 7843 4996
e-mail: naturejobs@nature.com
Naturejobs web development:
Tom Hancock
Naturejobs online production:
Catherine Alexander

European Satellite Office
Patrick Phelan
e-mail: p.phelan@nature.com

Japan Head Office, Tokyo
Chiyoda Building,
2-37 Ichigayatamachi,
Shinjuku-ku,
Tokyo 162-0843
Tel: +81 3 3267 8751
Fax: +81 3 3267 8746

Asia-Pacific Sales Manager:
Ayako Watanabe
e-mail: a.watanabe@natureasia.com