

What exists in life beyond an undergraduate degree?

"Do you think there's really life after college?" I asked my friend Aki as we wandered along the river bank. The question had been gnawing at my brain for quite some time, and it worried me more and more as my projected date of graduation grew closer and closer.

"Well," he said soberly. "Some say that it exists in the 'job market.' But, then again, others say that the 'job market' is really only a mythical conjecture, invented to still the fears of hopeful undergraduates."

"But what do you think?"
 "I don't think about it at all," he said. "I've decided to never leave college."

"What?" I asked with surprise. "You have to leave someday. You can't be an undergraduate forever."

"I know that," Aki said. "But there's always graduate school." As the truth of his words slowly sunk in, I was struck by a new conviction.

"That's it!" I exclaimed. "Aki, you're a genius!" Then, in a burst of enthusiasm, I took off running to the library where, for the next week, I was a whirlwind of active research, looking for the graduate program of my dreams.

"Eureka!" I shouted upon finding a program that, from its description, seemed to be destined for me. Then, in a fit of passion, I caught a ride with some friends of mine and went to visit this projected paradise in person.

It wasn't until I arrived at that strange and foreign campus and was standing like a lost child somewhere in the middle of it, that I finally came to my senses.

"What in the world am I doing here?" I asked myself. I wasn't sure, but it was too late to turn back. I had already made several appointments with various professors and they were expecting me. I had to follow through with my original plan — despite the fact that I really didn't have one.

Luckily, my first appointment went quite smoothly. The professor immediately provided me with copies of articles he had written and, without any prompting from myself, kept the conversation rolling by alternately asking me questions about myself and giving me information about the school.

My second appointment, however, did not go as well. The professor sat there silently and waited for me to initiate and direct the communication. He answered all of my questions briefly without expanding or asking me any questions about myself in return. The five minute interview seemed to last an eternity.

All in all that day, I probably spoke to about six or seven faculty members. I learned a lot about the school,

but I learned even more about how to interview a prospective school — and how not to. Next time I visit a school I will definitely do things differently.

First, before visiting the school, I will ask other graduate students and professors in my department what I ought to be looking for and for examples of questions I can ask relevant to my field of interest.

Second, I will have a resume ready which includes my name, a list of interests, grades and college entrance exam scores as well as any experience and honors I might have. This way, each professor I visit will have something to remember me by and will be more likely to recognize my name if

— “**Do you think there's really life after college?**” —

I apply to the college later.

In an appointment with a professor, I will be careful not to take things too personally. Different professors have different personalities and different ways of relating to students.

I will, however, have a clear idea of what I would like to learn from a particular faculty member. A mental list of specific open-ended questions

can help keep the conversation alive and reveal important information. For example, I found that I learned a lot by asking the professors about their past and present research interests. Some faculty members were also willing to give me their opinion on the cohesiveness of their department and to give me insight into typical faculty/student relationships within the department.

Perhaps the most important thing I learned from this entire experience was that brochures and pamphlets do not always completely and accurately depict schools or faculty members. For example, the faculty member in whom I was most interested turned

out to be an "independent" member who did not directly sponsor students. Furthermore, some of the other professors I met seemed to be very aloof, impersonal and indifferent, giving me the impression that their personal research was much more important than their work with students.

"These professors sound like 'real people,'" Aki observed when I related all this to him later.

"Yeah, so?"
 "Well maybe 'real life' is not only after college, but in it too."

Hmmm...
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