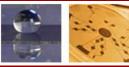
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## The Ohio State University ▶ Research News

# On Research...

Blogging about research issues at Ohio State University









About us

# The Initiation . . .

Posted on May 26th, 2008 by earleholland

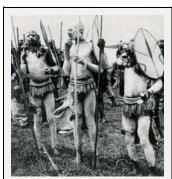
In past cultures, it might have been a trial by ordeal — a test of adulthood or a demonstration that a person was coming of age and earning respect before the elders.

Research Communications Staff

On college campuses, it's called the thesis or dissertation defense.

In academe, where the majority have themselves run this gauntlet, we tend to see the event as ordinary, the endstage of the process leading to a graduate degree, and the first real benchmark in attaining a recognized expertise.

People outside the academy don't really understand. Insiders too often forget its import. And those enduring it often feel naked at the podium.



Depending on the degree, students can spend two to five years building up to this moment where everything seems to be on the line. More frighteningly - it is! For an hour or two or three, the candidate explains research that has filled his or her world and faces often unpredictable questions. It is a solitary chore and failure here means a major delay - of even the demise - of the dreams of a degree.

Depending on the discipline, the defense can be intimate, with just the student's graduate committee at hand. In other regimes, it is public, as it was when Aron Buffen stood center stage in Mendenhall two weeks ago. Before several senior faculty, two center directors, other scientists and graduate students, he explained what Peruvian ice cores told him about past weather, and what that might mean in predicting the future.

Few, beyond Buffen, saw this as a seminal event.

Why do we do it this way? Graduate School Dean Pat Osmer says that centuries-old tradition plays some role, but that there's more to it than that.

"This is very much in line with what a scholar does in professional life. We're being scrutinized all the time. We have to be able to present our work to peers and then defend it strongly," adding that good graduate programs provide ample chances to practice this before the "defense."

"It gets worse after graduation," he says, "and the stakes are much, much higher."

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As for Aron, he's relieved that it's over. In fact, he characterized the experience as a "victory lap," largely because "no one in the room knows more about the work than you do." Eventually, he expects to continue towards a doctorate but for now, he's anticipating a little time off.

Oh yeah, he passed.\_\_Earle Holland

#



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Tags: Science policy //

2 Comments »

# 2 Responses to "The Initiation . . . "

Bobs SEO // Jan 1, 2010 at 7:26 pm

Ahh, the dissertation defense. That brings up some memories of yesteryear...

osu graduate // Mar 4, 2010 at 1:01 pm

[...] an OSU graduate student in Environmental Science. Stefanovich was part of a team that studied ...On Research... The Initiation . . .... ordinary, the end-stage of the process leading to a graduate degree, and the first real [...]

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