

# On Research...

Blogging about research issues at Ohio State University



[Home](#) [About us](#) [Research Communications Staff](#)

## 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.

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 end-stage 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 — or 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."

### NAVIGATION

- \* [Home](#)
- \* [About us](#)
- \* [Research Communications Staff](#)

### RECENT POSTS

- \* [A graphic misrepresentation . . .](#)
- \* [Of ghoulies and ghosties and long-legged beasts . . .](#)
- \* [A cascade of lemmings . . .](#)
- \* [Not what Ben meant . . .](#)
- \* [Of science, baseball, and cricket . . .](#)

### SOCIAL MEDIA

- \* [OSU Research News on the Web](#)
- \* [Research News on Facebook](#)
- \* [Research News on YouTube](#)
- \* [StumbleUpon](#)

### WHAT WE READ

- \* [Dot Earth — Andrew Revkin/New York Times](#)
- \* [Framing Science](#)
- \* [Health News Review](#)
- \* [Knight Science Journalism Tracker](#)
- \* [Real Climate](#)
- \* [Science News](#)
- \* [Speaking of Research](#)
- \* [The Great Beyond](#)
- \* [The Panda's Thumb](#)
- \* [The Plainspoken Scientist](#)
- \* [TierneyLab](#)
- \* [WiredScience](#)



### CATEGORIES

- \* [Climate change](#)
- \* [Environment](#)
- \* [Physics](#)
- \* [Researchers](#)
- \* [Science Communication](#)
- \* [Science policy](#)
- \* [Space](#)
- \* [Uncategorized](#)

### ARCHIVES

- \* [February 2012](#)
- \* [January 2012](#)
- \* [October 2011](#)
- \* [September 2011](#)
- \* [August 2011](#)
- \* [July 2011](#)
- \* [May 2011](#)
- \* [April 2011](#)
- \* [March 2011](#)
- \* [December 2010](#)
- \* [October 2010](#)
- \* [September 2010](#)
- \* [August 2010](#)
- \* [July 2010](#)
- \* [June 2010](#)
- \* [May 2010](#)
- \* [April 2010](#)
- \* [March 2010](#)
- \* [February 2010](#)
- \* [January 2010](#)
- \* [December 2009](#)
- \* [November 2009](#)
- \* [October 2009](#)
- \* [September 2009](#)
- \* [August 2009](#)
- \* [July 2009](#)
- \* [June 2009](#)
- \* [May 2009](#)

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

#



More »

Powered by Bookmarkify™

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 [...]

### Discussion Area - Leave a Comment

Name (required)

Mail (will not be

published) (required)

Website

- \* [April 2009](#)
- \* [March 2009](#)
- \* [February 2009](#)
- \* [January 2009](#)
- \* [December 2008](#)
- \* [November 2008](#)
- \* [October 2008](#)
- \* [September 2008](#)
- \* [August 2008](#)
- \* [July 2008](#)
- \* [June 2008](#)
- \* [May 2008](#)

### META

- \* [Log in](#)
- \* [Entries RSS](#)
- \* [Comments RSS](#)
- \* [WordPress.org](#)

### RESEARCH NEWS WEBSITE



« [The Art of Listening Data versus Dinner . . .](#) »

---

**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY** ■ [WWW.OSU.EDU](http://WWW.OSU.EDU)

© 2006, The Ohio State University | Enarson Hall 154 W 12th Avenue | Columbus, Ohio 43210 | 614-292-OHIO

This page is maintained by: [University Relations](#). [About this site](#).

[Contact](#)

If you have trouble accessing this page and need to request an alternate format, contact [webmaster@osu.edu](mailto:webmaster@osu.edu).