

Two days ago someone asked me about doing graduate studies. He had a master's degree and was wondering about whether to do a PhD. I told him that if he could imagine doing something else with his life, he probably should do so. Doing a PhD is just too painful. It's long (in my field it typically takes about 6-8 years *after* doing a Masters; lots of students take longer), it's really hard, it's really painful, and there's no guarantee of a job when you're finished. If it's your passion, and you can't imagine doing anything else, you should do it (I told him). But otherwise ... not so much.

Looking back over old blog posts, I see that I talked about graduate studies almost exactly four years ago today. Here is what I said then:

I teach one undergraduate and one graduate course a semester. Teaching undergraduates is a passion of mine. I love doing it. These are nineteen year olds who are inquisitive, interested, and interesting. I enjoy lecturing to a crowd like that, figuring out what can make complicated material intriguing and compelling, keeping them attentive, helping them understand such important topics. Some of my colleagues find teaching undergraduates a real chore; others find it very difficult. I find it to be a pleasure and it comes naturally to me. So I'm very lucky about that.

What is really HARD, though I enjoy it intensely too, is teaching graduate students. The graduate student seminar is a very focused experience. A seminar usually last three hours (meeting once a week) and it involves an intense pouring over texts in the original ancient languages (Greek, for my classes), discussion of heavy-hitting scholarship, critique of students' work, and so on.

But even though it's hard, it is very rewarding. And there is nothing - absolutely nothing - that can substitute for....

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