

From PostGrad to Professional: Useful tips for choosing and executing a doctoral thesis

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Nothing is more satisfying than standing on the starting block knowing that you have a backbone to take you through the race -- not a wishbone.

[David Wilke: Montreal Olympics 1976]

Many information technology dissertations are wishbones. Sometimes students have the backbone to finish one. The main idea for a dissertation to be successful is to draw a bridge between theories and practice (Easterby-Smith et al., 1999). Although it often seems that everyone but you knows "the (unwritten) rules," it is obvious that the majority of post-graduate students could benefit from street smarts when it comes to writing a dissertation. This article tries to smooth the transition from post-graduate to professional.

The future of academic information systems will be shaped by doctoral students. Doctoral students need, therefore, to recognize that they -- not their supervisors or colleagues -- are in charge of their study, (Grover, 2001). The goal of this paper is to offer guidance to students on entering, surviving and flourishing during post-graduate study and beyond. I teach in the Information Systems and Technology department at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and so much of the advice is addressed to this group, but others might find it useful. It is also rather South African-specific, but students elsewhere may find a useful idea or two.

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