

started anew as refugees and raised eight children in extreme poverty, all of whom grew up to be successful and independent and loving. In short, my grandparents were brave, more accomplished, and more worthy of adulation than I could ever hope to be. They fought harder to survive and make a life and have a family than I will probably ever have to fight for anything in my life.

My parents similarly struggled in poverty and against racial discrimination when they immigrated to this country because they hoped to carry on the legacy of their own parents. Together, these past two generations of my family have made unimaginable sacrifice after unimaginable sacrifice to give me the luxury of this experience, among other things, that I apparently

hate so much. They sacrificed to give me the luxury of bemoaning my position in an advanced degree program at a world-renowned educational institution, to give me the privilege of knowing that even if I were to quit now, I could probably still secure a decent job or have the ability to switch into an equally if not more lucrative career.

For the past three years, I have been writing these columns, detailing every conceivable aspect of my graduate school experience that I have been unhappy with and every doubt or fear that has crossed my mind. Yes, it has been difficult; in fact, it has been the most difficult challenge I have ever had to face. Yes, there are many things about the graduate school structure that I would change, and maybe I can be instrumental in that

some day. Yes, I am scared. But never again will I think of graduate school as an insurmountable obstacle or a miserable experience. Instead, I will remember every time my grandparents cried as I left Taiwan, and every time they tried to slip hundred dollar bills into my pockets and make me promise not to tell my parents, and every time they showered me with gifts of gold and jade and told me I should visit more often to be properly spoiled like my cousins.

This is just another part of my beautiful life.

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Another One in the Books

Matthew C. Canver

In the blink of an eye, my first year of graduate school has already come to an end. This past year has brought many changes to my life: I wrapped up the first two years of medical school (including taking my first medical licensing exam), completed two lab rotations, joined my thesis lab, completed a number of graduate school courses, and passed my qualifying exam. It seems like just yesterday that I moved to Boston to start medical school. Now, I am beginning my fourth year in the M.D./Ph.D. program. My medical school classmates are now in their final year, the most senior students in the entire medical school, and are all in the process of deciding which medical specialties to apply to for residency. These same classmates will “match” into a residency program in nine months and be full-fledged doctors in just 11 months. It has been interesting to see my classmates gain a substantial amount of medical knowledge and to witness them

achieve a comfort level and skill within the hospital. However, it is very strange that the same people that I started school with will be graduating and moving on, which will be particularly apparent when a large number of friends and colleagues will leave Boston for bigger and better things.

Meanwhile, I am beginning my second year of graduate school, and the end of the Ph.D. program (let alone the M.D. program) does not appear anywhere in sight. At this point, most of the medical knowledge crammed into my brain for the United States Medical Licensing Exam Step 1, which I took a little over a year ago, has faded. It can be discouraging to know that my classmates are all starting to rise in their careers, while transitioning to graduate school has put me at the bottom of the totem pole in terms of knowledge and skills yet again.

I have always heard that the saddest day in the M.D./Ph.D. training is when their medical class has residency “match” day since their careers are solidifying while the M.D./Ph.D.s are seemingly meandering through their lab after two years. Despite this, I still feel no regret about choosing to do this dual-degree program. I am still excited (possibly naively) to

attempt to combine medicine and research in my future career. However, this definitely exacerbates the uncertainty problem in my mind with respect to my graduation date from graduate school. It is a constant reminder of the pressure to finish the Ph.D. degree to get back to medical school as soon as possible. Unfortunately, there is not much to do about this pressure

other than to work hard and hope for the best in lab.

Back in the graduate school realm, the preliminary qualifying exam (PQE) has come and gone. This basically just leaves several years of uninterrupted time in the lab before my hypothetical

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PERSPECTIVES ON GRADUATE LIFE *(continued from page 8)*

graduation in a year yet to be determined. The next big milestone is to set up my dissertation advisory committee, which is formally a committee set up to guide students through the thesis/dissertation writing process for the duration of graduate work. Informally, it is a group of people who determine your fate and control your destiny. In the process of helping you navigate through the maze of graduate school, this committee also decides when you can defend your thesis (and graduate). I am not sure if there is a lot of strategy for choosing committee members (at least I am not aware of any). My major consideration was to attempt to have a committee of all M.D./Ph.D.s or M.D.s. I assume that they will be more lenient when it comes to allowing me to graduate, since they will hypothetically

better understand the need/pressure to finish the Ph.D. degree and resume medical school; however, I am not entirely sure if that is the case in reality.

The advice that I was given is to choose committee members who are experts in diverse aspects of my thesis project. With this setup, I should be able to get support in all aspects of my project. While this seems like a great idea in theory, a constantly evolving thesis project makes it a difficult goal to achieve, especially since my thesis project will still be in its infancy when the committee must be chosen.

Another upcoming potential milestone is to apply for a grant. Specifically, many M.D./Ph.D. students apply for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) F30 grant, which is geared toward M.D./Ph.D. students. In my last column, I talked

about some of the unintended benefits of the PQE. Another one of these benefits is that it makes the idea of applying for an official grant a lot less intimidating. This is because the PQE (as with many other Ph.D. programs' qualifying exams) is roughly modeled after an NIH grant's guidelines and formatting. The main concern for actually applying for such a grant is having enough preliminary data, though I am sure that the amount of preliminary data required might vary from project to project. At this point, the idea of applying for an F30 is a distant thought, but it may soon become a reality.

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