THE SELF AS A WORK OF ART:

Some practical suggestions for Graduate Students in Political Science at ANU (with special reference to the academic job market)

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1. Introduction

Graduate study in political science is fascinating. However, it is a means to an end. During the period at which you are at ANU, you have the opportunity to develop your understanding of political science. I would like to suggest that you might also view this as a period of self-creation: as a period in which you develop yourselves, in interaction with the material that you are studying and your colleagues. But do not forget that, in the end, what you are developing is also a commodity which has to be brought to market. You don’t get tenure for being a student. Rather, you will need, at the end of the day, to offer yourself to employers, whether in the university sector or elsewhere. This paper sets out some suggestions as to how you might set about this task, with integrity. You may view this either as a process in which you are engaged in self-development, or as one in which you acquire the ability to play a variety of roles or to wear a variety of masks, so that - when it matters, and if you so wish - you will be able to do what is required of you.

I should at once make two points. First, what follows is an overview of various suggestions as to things that graduate students might do, rather than a check-list of everything that they need to do. I cannot imagine anyone doing all that I am suggesting; and there is a risk that if they tried to do so, they might not get a good quality thesis written on time - which is crucial. Second, the suggestions that I am making are not about how to misrepresent yourself on the job market. Rather, they are suggestions as to how you might develop yourself, during your period as a graduate student, so that you become the kind of scholar whom people want to hire.

My reason for writing is that academic life is so interesting that it is all too easy to become absorbed in it, to the exclusion of the dimension of things which I will address here. Alternatively, you might think that it is improper to consider such matters. My reference, earlier, to ‘commodity’ was intended to shock. You may think that you should simply do what you consider important and worthwhile, and then present yourself to prospective employers on a ‘take it or leave it’ basis - possibly, while engaging, subconsciously, in a rousing chorus of ‘I am what I am’,1 or ‘I did it my way’.
If this is your reaction - and I think that it may well have been mine, had someone put the issue to me at this stage in my academic career - I would ask that you consider the following argument. It is that if you proceed like this, there is a risk that you will miss out on interesting opportunities which would otherwise have been open to you for the development of your own potential, and which would have enabled you to be of greater service to others. It is soul-destroying to be stuck in something uninteresting, and galling to see other people who are less capable than yourself doing things that you could have done better. The suggestions that follow are aimed at helping you to avoid ending up in such a situation.

In what follows, I will offer what I believe to be some useful advice. It draws particularly upon several years that I spent in the United States, when part of my professional duties involved giving such advice. During that period I attended many conferences, and took part in many meetings, at which other academics offered their suggestions on these topics, too, upon which I have freely drawn. I have also drawn on numerous conversations with graduate students and members of academic staff, about these issues. At the same time, such advice is, obviously, both fallible and highly personal in its character. I offer it for what it is worth, and would stress to you that in my judgement it represents at best the codification of good practice (usually by others, rather than by myself!), and should not be treated too seriously. Its role, rather, is intended to be a stimulus to your thinking about these matters for yourself. I would also strongly advise that you talk over these issues with others, and weigh what they have to say before you take action.

2. Some First Steps

A first, but key, move is to give some thought to what you want to do, and then to develop yourself over your time in graduate school so that you can achieve it.

So, what do you want to do? Your ideas about this may be both vague and tentative. A useful initial move is to check out your thoughts about this by meeting with people who are already doing what you think that you might like to do, and discovering if what they are doing is, indeed, what you want to do. In most cases, the people in question will be happy to meet with you, and, indeed, will be flattered that you are showing interest in their chosen career. If you would welcome some suggestions as to how to analyze what you might enjoy doing, and about how to make contacts with people along the lines that I have indicated, I’d recommend What color is your parachute? If such meetings do, indeed, confirm your interest, what you need to find out, at this stage, is just what you will have to have done, in order to obtain such a position (or the prerequisites to it) by the time you finish your graduate work. In the rest of this paper, I will assume that your interest is in an academic career, although much of what I will say will also apply (with the appropriate adaptations) to other goals.
What, specifically, might you do? One possibility would be to speak with those who have recent experience in making appointments in the field in which you have an interest, and discover the criteria that people are using to select who will get appointed. Talk with such people, also, about how you would be likely to fare if you continue with your current plans; and also about what difference other things that you might do would make. When, here, I referred to those with ‘recent experience’, what I meant was those who have been on recent appointments committees for such positions. They will be bound by requirements of confidentiality about the specifics of appointments, but they may be willing to give some general advice. If such people are willing to speak with you, it may be useful to discover what the field was like, and what, in general terms, made those who were interviewed for the positions stand out. Further, it would be useful to discover - again, in general terms - why the people who were eventually appointed were picked out. You could also usefully ask those who have recently been appointed to such positions what their experience of the process was like.

From all this, you may discover a variety of things.

First, what were the categories under which jobs were advertised, and what did they typically require, over and above the completion of a Ph.D. dissertation? Everyone who applies for an academic position will be writing, or will have completed, a dissertation. So, what else is needed? One point which relates to hiring categories concerns what you can teach. Typically, this will involve your showing competence in more subjects than those upon which you have worked on for your dissertation. For example, if you are going for a Lecturer A position, this might require that you be able to contribute to general teaching in the department, and on a wide variety of topics - for example, as might be taught in a first-year survey course. Here, experience is vital: make sure that, prior to applying for such a position, you have had some relevant tutoring experience, and that you have done it well, so that you can get good references as to your teaching ability. (At ANU, the teaching opportunities are limited; but don’t forget that there might be possibilities at ADFA or the University of Canberra, or, say, for tutoring through the Jabal Centre - the Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students.) Some particularly important opportunities are currently offered at the ANU in the Graduate Teaching Program, the details of which - and the conditions for participation in which - you should check out. Also, make sure that you have relevant experience in the different fields that you might be required to teach. You may well think that, say, anyone can tutor Australian Politics, Political Theory, or Global Politics at a first-year level. But you will not impress people on an interviewing panel who are specialists in these fields if you tell them this, or even if you simply convey the impression that you think that this is the case. Much better to make sure you have something on paper that can make you look plausible. Similarly - to give an example from my own field - if you are writing a Ph.D. on Political Thought, bear in mind that you will typically have to offer teaching in several different fields within this broad area - for example, both contemporary analytical and Continental political thought, or the history of political thought. It makes you look
much more credible if you have actually done some teaching in other such areas, or if, say, you have published something, however brief.

One obvious move is to talk with those teaching specialist courses, to see if there is some way in which you can help out. (For example, they may be delighted to have you give a guest lecture on some topic on which you have a special knowledge, or they may be looking for assistance if they have to be away from the department at a conference during the semester.) Also, discuss with the head of your department if there is any chance of your being able to get more general teaching experience - e.g., of taking first-year tutorials - prior to hitting the job market. (It may, in this connection, be useful to talk with the lecturers who have special responsibilities for different parts of the course, to see what, in their view, are the prerequisites for someone to be able to take tutorials in this field, and making sure that you satisfy them.)

Second, you may need all kinds of skills. As part of the applications procedure, if you get onto the short list you will typically be asked to give a brief talk about your work, and also about your ideas on teaching. You will also be interviewed. How well would you do at such things? If you do not have these skills, acquire them. Nothing is grimmer for everyone involved than a poor speaker or a poor interviewee. But these are skills that you can pick up fairly easily - e.g., by asking your department to put on a mock interview prior to your undertaking a real job interview, and by giving papers and by making presentations (for example, to other graduate students).

Third, if you are applying for a position, you will need good references. This is something that involves your drawing upon work that you have done, and on relationships that have been built up, over a long period of time. If someone is to be able to write a strong letter in your support, they need to know what you are doing, to have seen your work, and also to think that it is good. If they are going to write about you as a teacher and as a potential colleague, they need to know enough about these aspects of yourself, too. You need to find out, in advance, if people will be willing to write on your behalf. It is important that you ask them about this on each occasion on which you might wish to use them as a referee - not least as they may also be being asked to write for other applicants for the same position. Do keep them informed about what you are doing. It would also be useful to discover how strongly they might be able to support you and, well in advance, what they think of you, so that if there are respects in which their view of you does not do you justice (or, indeed, if it does!), you can take steps to do things which will lead to a stronger reference. This will typically not be an enquiry that you can make yourself; but you might ask your supervisor, or speak with the head of your department, to see if they can help you discover points which you should be addressing.

It is particularly important if you are planning to apply for a position overseas, that you discover exactly how things operate there. The procedure of applying for positions in the United States, for example, is different from that in Australia. It is also important that if you are applying for positions abroad, you use referees who will be known in that context, and also that you make sure that they know how the
applications system in that country works. (To give one brief example, there is a very
different style of references between the U. K. and the U. S., so that the former’s
positive but understated references will read like indifferent references in the U. S.;
while the latter’s fulsome praise will read like gross exaggeration in the U. K. One
possibility, here - as references are usually confidential - is, if logistics permit and
people are willing, to ask if a member of staff who knows both systems can speak
with your referees, and advise those who are writing as to the kind of thing that is
expected in the place to which you are applying.)

Finally, there is the matter of applying for a position, itself. One key point to bear in
mind is: nothing venture, nothing gain. You will not be considered unless you apply.
And you really should not hold back out of false modesty. There is nothing more
galling than to find that someone else, whom you believe to be less capable than
yourself, has been appointed to a position which you would have loved, but for which
you held back from applying. At the same time, do check with your referees in
advance, and on each occasion, that, in their view, what you are applying for is
sensible: it puts them in an awkward position if they are asked to write references for
a position for which they really cannot recommend you.

My personal view is that it is better to obtain a teaching position somewhere than to
wait until your ‘dream position’ comes up. If you have a job, you have the chance to
obtain teaching experience, to publish, and to make contacts of a kind which will help
you if you wish to apply later for a position somewhere else which you would prefer.
To wait for your dream position is risky. There is always the chance that the
position for which you are hoping will never be advertised - there may be cutbacks in
university funding, so that the position is not filled; or it may in the end be advertised
in some sub-field which does not fit your interests. Alternatively, some other
candidate may unexpectedly appear, who is stronger than are you. Of course, if you
know that other people think that you are the best thing since sliced bread and that
positions at universities with strong research traditions are coming up, and you are
being sounded out for them, it may not be sensible to take a position at a university
with a weaker reputation. (And, clearly, to take such a position may hamper your
chances of being appointed to the very best positions.)

Suppose that you apply for a job, but do not get anywhere. Assuming that we are
discussing an Australian job, after the event you could usefully ask your supervisor if
he or she could make informal enquiries of the department to which you applied as to
what the field was like, and as to whether the committee might have any comments or
suggestions about your application. If you got as far as an interview but did not get
the job, you can very reasonably contact the Head of Department, once the
appointment has been made, and ask for any comments or suggestions that they might
have (although this is not something that is often done). Do, though, be careful to
make any such enquiry politely, and to avoid giving the impression that you are
complaining that they did not hire you, or asking them to justify their failure to
appoint you! You might phrase an enquiry in terms of whether they have any
suggestions that might be useful to you, in applying for other positions.
3. The Curriculum Vitae: Self-Creation on Paper

In applying for a job, a crucial role is played by what you send with your application: your curriculum vitae and, in due course, letters of recommendation. For it is on the basis of this that people will be evaluating you. It is not my concern, here, to suggest how you should write a curriculum vitae - although it is important that you do this well. Those on an appointments committee will typically have many applications to consider and, with the best will in the world, they may not do justice to applications that are messy, difficult to read, or from which they cannot fairly quickly extract the basic information about yourself. Presentation can be really important. There are books on this topic,^3^ and you may be able to get assistance at ANU from the Careers and Employment Centre. You should, anyway, put a draft of your vitae past your supervisor and panel and head of department - and, indeed, past anyone else whom you think can give you useful input. My concern, here, is with what goes into the curriculum vitae, as this is something for which you need to prepare, over the whole period during which you are a graduate student. I should stress here, again, that while I am suggesting that you should ‘sell yourself’ in your vitae and in your letter of application, you must not make claims that you cannot substantiate. I wish to suggest ways in which you may develop yourself into someone whom it will be easy to sell.

Before I turn to this, let me say something about the application itself. In Australia, advertisements (or the further details that will be supplied to you on request) will typically spell out what will be required of candidates, almost on a point by point basis. Indeed, there is currently a tendency to incorporate selection criteria into the details sent to applicants. It is vital that, in your application, you give some thought to these criteria, and address each of them, specifically, in your letter of application. This means that you will be indicating that you are taking seriously the concerns of the people making the appointment (and those who stand behind them: one or other item's being on the list may be of considerable importance in the light of discussions that have taken place in the department or the university, prior to the position’s having been advertised). The committee will itself have to take these points seriously, both in making an initial evaluation of the applications, and in its considerations as to whom to appoint.

Let me now return to what gets onto your vitae.

3.1 The choice of the topic for your MA or Ph.D.

You need to consider that you are making your choice of a dissertation topic not just on the basis of the attraction to you of this particular piece of research, but also as an act in self-description, and as influencing what you will do, later. First, you will become, for academic purposes, the person who has chosen to work upon your dissertation topic, and other people will react to you on that basis. You will need to get articles or a book out of your work on
this topic, and you will also typically be expected to do additional research on this topic later in your academic career. Accordingly, do make sure that you are really interested in it, and are happy about being identified as a person who does this kind of work.

However, I would also suggest that you choose your topic with an eye to the market. By this I mean: choose a topic in which there is likely to be continuing interest, rather than something which, when you announce it, people’s immediate thought will be: why on earth did he or she choose to work on that. This is vital both for the job market, and for getting your work published. For if you have made a poor choice, you will immediately be at a disadvantage. I do not mean, by all this, that you should be preoccupied with spotting trends, or that you should pursue what is fashionable, even if you think it worthless. Rather, I am suggesting that you should make your choice with an eye to what the reception of your work is likely to be, and that it is pointless to disadvantage yourself needlessly. Accordingly, other things being equal, you will gain by not choosing to work on a topic that has never really taken off, by not coming in towards the end of a fashion, or by not choosing to write on something that, in the view of other people, has been done to death. Also, look at how the issue upon which you are proposing to do research relates to the job market: it is crazy to be preparing yourself for a position which simply does not exist. At the same time, a colleague who made an excellent choice for her topic has suggested to me that students should not be afraid of choosing a topic at the leading edge of their discipline, even if people in the mainstream of the discipline might urge caution - although, clearly, you cannot tell whether or not a topic will ‘take off’ while you are working on it.

As to how you approach your research, one suggestion which seems to me important is that you gain by making sure that you join in an ongoing conversation, rather than, as it were, shouting abuse at other people from a corner of the room. What I mean by this is that you need to make sure that you address the existing state of the discussion of your topic, and in terms that are comprehensible to other participants. If your work is to be appreciated and valued, it will, in the first instance, have to be appreciated and valued by those people. Even if you wish to offer a radical critique of how things are currently done, it is important that you show how what you are saying relates to the views of other people, in terms that they can understand. Of course, there are exceptions, and important innovations and criticisms may come from outsiders, and may be delivered in distinctive terms. But it is striking the way in which those who produce such criticism have often previously established themselves through producing more orthodox work, or that they are, in fact, often addressing their own, smaller, audience of critics of a received viewpoint. (One crucial question to ask yourself, if you do wish to address such a group, is: can addressing such a group get me a job?) Of all the suggestions that I am making here, this is the advice that I have personally found it most difficult to follow. I guess that I am a polemicist at heart. But I have certainly
experienced the disadvantages of not proceeding in the way that I am here suggesting.

Next, make sure that you get the full support of your supervisor and panel for your work. Be very careful about pressing onto them a topic which they do not think is very good. This is important, for two reasons. First, because if they are themselves active and publishing in international journals, they will have a good feel for what is likely to be found interesting by other people. They are also likely to have a good feel for whether or not a topic can be brought to completion in a Ph.D. (While working in the U.S.A., I came across students who were trying to accomplish, in their Ph.D. thesis, what would, in fact, have been a program of research which could have lasted them a lifetime.) Second, you will need the wholehearted support of your supervisor and panel when you go onto the job market, because you will depend on them for strong letters of recommendation. At the same time, it is vital that you work on something which interests you, and to which you can maintain your commitment.

3.2 Choice of a Supervisor and Panel

Your choice of a supervisor and a panel is itself important. You need to make sure that, as a whole, they can give you what you need, by way of knowledge of the field, contacts and support. Ideally, you will want someone who is helpful, conscientious, interested in and enthusiastic about your project; who knows the ropes; who, ideally, can act as a mentor; whose recommendation will count; and who can bring you up to speed for the job market. You are, clearly, unlikely to find all those virtues in one person - which is why it is good that, at ANU, one has a panel. (By writing of ‘choice’ in the heading of this section I do not mean that you will necessarily have a free choice as to the members of your panel. My concern, rather, is that you should think hard about what you need, so that you can discuss these issues, and be prepared to negotiate with your supervisor and panel. It is important that you should be open to their suggestions: it is, after all, the university and not you who will be making the award of the Ph.D., and your supervisor and panel will know more about what will be required of you by your examiners than do you.)

My suggestion would be that, first, you take a clear view of yourself and of your needs. Do you need someone who can give you a lot of assistance and sympathy? If so, there may be advantages to working with a person who has a reputation for such things, even if they are not themselves a highly productive scholar, with an international reputation. But if you choose such a ‘nice guy’, or, say, someone whose thought may be penetrating, but who is, perhaps, a bit idiosyncratic, make sure that you have other people on your committee who meet your other needs. For a letter of recommendation from the ‘nice guy’ may be of little use to you at all. If, say, someone is on editorial boards of major journals, and is always off at international conferences, they
may not have much time to give you detailed comments on your work. But
their suggestions, introductions, and recommendations may be worth their
weight in gold. All told, I would suggest that you try to obtain a panel of such
a kind that they will, together, help you to meet the various criteria that I have
offered you suggestions for discovering, elsewhere in this paper.

I would also suggest that you talk with your supervisor, and with members of
your panel, at the time at which arrangements are being set up, as to what they
will expect of you, and what you can expect of them. For example, how
frequently will you meet with your supervisor? How often will you give him
or her written work? In what form will he or she give you comments on it?
What contact will you have with other people on your panel, what form will
their input take, and how will you handle things if you find that you are
getting different advice from the different members of the panel? It is also
important that you clarify exactly what will be required of you, at each stage
in your progress, not only by your supervisors, but also by the university.
The Graduate School Handbook contains vital information on these matters,
and the Graduate School also has various services and publications, which it
would be useful to check out.

3.3 Other Entries for Your Vitae

First, teaching experience. How important this will be will depend on you and
the job for which you will be going. If you are the kind of person upon whose
work the international scholarly community are waiting with bated breath,
then whether you can teach is going to be neither here nor there. If your aim,
more prosaically, is first to get a Lecturer A position and subsequently to
work your way into a regular lectureship, then, clearly, teaching experience is
important. The key thing, here, is to have such experience, and to have good
references concerning your teaching and administrative ability. (The Graduate
Teaching Program is again worth checking out.) But there is no advantage to
piling such experience up, to the detriment of getting your thesis written in
good time, and getting your research published.

Second, get experience by making presentations at seminars and conferences.
You can usefully start in your own department, but use this as a way of
getting experience which you can then make good use of, elsewhere. Do bear
in mind that, if you have to give a statement of intent, this, provided that you
give the talk a suitable title, can be the first entry under ‘papers given’ in your
vitae.

Third, it is useful to have publications. One way of starting is by writing
reviews of books. To do this is not especially attractive to academics (not
least, as reviews usually do not ‘count’ as publications for them). But this
means that review editors of journals will often be interested in hearing from
people who are willing and able to write reviews, and you can do worse, say,
than write to the review editor of a journal to mention your field of interests, and, say, refer to a recently published book which you would be interested in reviewing. (Give them, also, the phone number of your supervisor, so that they can check you out - but do, of course, talk with your supervisor about all this, first!) Writing a review is a useful way to break into print, and it can also be used as evidence of your having an interest in a field other than that in which you are writing your dissertation. There is, though, no point in piling up such reviews, to the detriment of your thesis, or more serious publications. Do, also, resist the temptation to be too much of a smartass: it is not well received from graduate students, and may do you harm in the job market. If you are writing a review, you should also make sure that you get it back to the journal when it is required: to get a review back late, or not to get it done at all, is not a good way to introduce yourself to the scholarly community. It is also well worth considering whether you should publish material from your dissertation, prior to submission; though talk the pros and cons of this over with your supervisor. Also, you can establish your competence in fields other than the one in which you are writing - say, which you may need to do for the purpose of making plausible your claim to an ability to teach in that area - by publishing there. But there is no advantage in doing this, if your dissertation will suffer.

Fourth, if you can do so without disrupting your work, obtain recognition outside your department. Talks, publications, invitations to teach, prizes and grants are all here useful. Why? Just so you avoid being in a position in which people may wonder whether the praise that you are getting from your department is completely disinterested. After all, your mother would also be likely to write a good reference for you! At the same time, be realistic about all this. If such opportunities are few and far between and also highly competitive, then don’t waste too much time on them, especially when the time is being taken from your work on your thesis. It is, though, worth noting that such awards are much more common - and are easier to obtain - in the United States, so that it might be worth looking at P.S. to see if there is anything listed there for which you might apply.

Fifth, Australia still suffers from cultural cringe. This means that you can gain from international experience. Is there an exchange program in which you can participate? Is there some overseas qualification which you can take? Can you participate in an international conference? (Bear in mind that if there is field research money attached to your degree which you are using overseas, you may be able to plan your trip so that you can also attend a conference.) Can you get an invitation to visit a department overseas? (Discussion groups on the Internet may be a useful way of making contacts for such purposes.) It is worth bearing in mind that to people in many parts of the world - notably the U.S. - things Australian are mildly exotic, and interesting (and this includes not just marsupials, but also yourself).
Sixth, when you are going to conferences or on fieldwork, plan in good time, so that you can take with you: (i) a general letter of introduction from your Head of Department (do also check out if other people in your Department have useful contacts in the places which you will be visiting); (ii) information about yourself and your work, in the form of: (A) a printed business card, in which you identify yourself as being at ANU, and which includes phone, fax and e-mail addresses (check with your department as to how a graduate student can best describe him or herself; it is also worth asking if there is money available to help with the printing of these things); (B) a one-page outline of your dissertation topic; (C) a one-page version of your CV. All of these things you can leave with people when you meet them, so that they have information about you in a form which is easy to use, rather than scribbled on the back of an envelope or a paper table napkin.

Seventh, check out the costs and benefits of joining professional associations. They typically offer cut-price student membership, and membership not only brings with it a subscription to the relevant association’s journal, but also to its newsletter, which can often include useful information about conferences, prizes, professional opportunities such as courses and fellowships, and also new publications. Membership of the appropriate association, and attending its conference, is also a sign that you are taking the profession seriously.

3.4 Become a Young Scholar, not a Student

As colleagues, people want scholars, not students. What do scholars do? They publish. (And in sensible places: If you have something so good that it might get into an international refereed journal, don’t accept an invitation to publish, instead, in a collection that a friend is putting together. Papers in collections often cannot be traced via indexes of journal articles or through data bases, and also seldom get more than a line or two if the book is reviewed. If you are going to submit to good journals do make sure that your work really is up to scratch, and find out all that you can about how the refereeing process really works. You should, though, think hard about whether the time and effort that might be involved should really be taken from your thesis.)

Scholars also participate in conferences. They have contacts with other scholars in their field (e-mail discussion groups are here invaluable). They also have clear ideas what they will be working on, once their thesis is finished. This last point is particularly important. There is always the risk that other people may wonder just how much your thesis depended upon the input of your panel. It is important that you should develop a clear - but realistic - program for future research. This can be handy, also, for job interviews. For there is a danger that, in an interview, you may get into gladiatorial contests over the contents of your thesis. But you may be able to discuss your program for future research in a manner that is less likely to invoke such conflict.
You also need to develop a network of contacts and co-workers. This is important for various reasons. For example, you need an audience for your own work - not least as it is unlikely that anyone will be working on just the same kind of issue as are you, in your own university. It is also important that you can relate what you are doing to the work of other scholars. How can you establish such contacts? One initial move is to write to people whose work impresses or interests you. It is delightful for an academic to discover that his or her work is being read and enjoyed. Much of what one does as an academic is, as it were, cast out into the void, and it is great if one hears that it is being read, and still better if it is appreciated. If you write in such terms, it is likely that the person to whom you write will be interested to discover what you are doing, and it may happen that this leads to fruitful exchanges, or to useful contacts with other scholars. Another thing to do, is to discover useful conferences. These are not always the major conferences in one’s discipline. Major conferences - notably in the United States - can be very large, and places at which it is difficult to meet people if you are new to the profession. There may, though, be smaller, more specialized conferences, or conferences held at relatively remote locations, where those participating may be more willing to meet and talk with younger scholars - not least, because one does not have to compete with the attractions of a big city! Any conference will be useful not only for meeting people, but for obtaining copies of papers upon which people are working, prior to their publication, and also for discovering what is about to be published. Large U.S. conferences - such as the American Political Science Association - are particularly useful for this purpose.

One other possibility that I have personally found particularly useful, is to organize a panel for a conference around an issue on which you are working. You need to check, first, with the conference organizers as to whether - and how - this can be done. At some conferences such an initiative may be welcomed (especially if their format involves multiple concurrent sessions). If it is, this gives you a great opportunity. For organizing such a panel gives you the chance to call anybody who has a reputation in the field, to ask them if they might be interested in participating, or, if they cannot, if they can suggest other people whom you might contact. Such conversations will typically put you in touch with other people working in your field of whom you may not even have known, and you will often find yourself getting into discussions about the substance of your work. To get such a panel together is also likely to bring you into contact with other people with interests similar to yours. It may lead to exchanges of papers, to useful criticism, to invitations to deliver talks - and also to the spread of your reputation as a person who is working in this field, and who is active and - I hope! - has interesting things to say.

I have already referred, on several occasions, to the advantages of participating in discussion groups on the Internet. There are now such groups on just about every topic that one might imagine. They do, however, have their own ethos,
and different groups differ somewhat in character. It is important, before posting material yourself, to spend a little while ‘lurking’ without yourself contributing: getting the feel of the group. In addition, do bear in mind that your messages will be being sent all over the world, and arriving on the desks of people who do not know you personally, and do not have much context on the basis of which to interpret what you are writing. Accordingly, be very careful about writing in anger, or posting anything that others might interpret as a personal put-down to other people. Much better to wait a day or two to see if your response still looks good, than to post swiftly and regret what you have done at your leisure.

4. Concluding remarks

I will conclude with four, brief points.

First, if you find suggestions such as those that I have made here attractive, I would stress the importance of pursuing them with integrity. What we are concerned with, here, is the development of yourself, and of your relations with others who will be your colleagues in academic life, over many years. The point of these suggestions is to help you make the best contribution that you can, and to add, fruitfully, to the world of scholarship and teaching.

Second, I have written because I believe that competence, in the things to which I have referred, is to the advantage not just of yourself, but of others, too. No-one, it seems to me, is aided, if people do not make the best of their talents, and if they do not pick up the kinds of skills that help them to interact fruitfully with others.

Third, why am I telling you these things now? It is because I would suggest that you need to be engaged in this process through your entire period in graduate school - and indeed, at least until you retire! These are matters on which we all need to work - both on our own, and also with colleagues. There is, I would suggest, no way in which one can prepare oneself for the job market just at the point when one wishes to apply for a position. Rather, such preparation requires clarification of ones own aims, discussion with others, and work, over a long period of time.

It is, however, all too easy to harm oneself, by not giving thought to such matters. And that, it seems to me, is a terrible shame. It can led to the waste of a life, and to the waste of all the resources that have gone into one’s education. It also seems to me an important source of personal frustration, and of loss of what one could have accomplished for other people. But to argue this further would be in danger of leading me into ideas in political philosophy from which I think that you should be spared on the present occasion.5

Finally, I should stress that you should not take what I have written here as gospel but, rather, treat it as a basis for thought, and for discussions with other people. I would be delighted to receive comments, questions and, specially, criticism: not least
so that I can learn more about these matters, and that subsequent versions of this paper may be of more help to future graduate students.6

1 For the benefit of my older readers, I should mention that my reference here is to something from, I believe, Chorus Line, rather than Popeye the Sailor Man.


4 The American Political Science Association’s news and short-article journal; see also the seventh point in my text.

5 The curious might wish to see my *Hayek and After* and *The Political Thought of Karl Popper*, both London & New York: Routledge, 1996.

6 Please contact me by e-mail at: Jeremy.Shearmur@anu.edu.au marking as subject ‘self 1997’.