UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

March 7, 2019
Shelly Leachman

Wealth of Resources

Earning a Ph.D. used to come with the assumption that an academic career would follow. Today, though? Not so much.

As more people earn doctorates than there are academic jobs for them to fill, there has been an accordant shift: new Ph.D.s are increasingly taking jobs in private industry, government and nonprofits. But if academia is all they've ever known, how can they best make that transition — and translate their skills and expertise to the wider world of work?

Beyond Academia, a two-day, career-focused conference of talks, workshops, panels, networking sessions and more hopes to help. Organized by graduate students, for graduate students, the event is meant to offer a professional leg up to soon-to-be Ph.D.s as they rapidly approach a new chapter.

The now-annual conference at UCSB intends to prepare graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in all stages and disciplines to pursue a wide range of career options after graduate school. The 2019 gathering will be held March 8–9 at the campus's Corwin Pavilion and University Center. A complete schedule is available at the event website.

"Graduate education prepares those who undertake it for many career options," said Robert Hamm, assistant dean of graduate division and a co-founder of the conference. "I hope that the attendees get a good sense of the range of opportunities available to them and create plans that will take them to the careers

that truly excite them."

It did just that for alumna Tanya Das '17, who earned her Ph.D. in electrical engineering and will speak at the conference in a government and public policy career panel.

"The Beyond Academia conference exposed me to a wealth of resources essential to helping me navigate my career exploration outside of academia," said Das, now a Democratic professional staff member of the U.S. House of Representatives. "The conference and workshops that lead up to it helped me learn a variety of skills that have been essential in my professional career since, including networking, conducting informational interviews and understanding how to identify your skills as an academic beyond research. It's also very cathartic to speak to other graduate students going through the same confusion and process as you are."

Alumnus Steve Brown, meanwhile, will sit on a data science career panel during the conference, discussing his own transition from graduate student to Silicon Valley professional. Recipient of a Ph.D. in materials, Brown today is a senior data scientist at software maker Intuit.

"The biggest learning I took away from Beyond Academia," noted Brown '17, who attended the conference as a student, "was that starting a new career and career exploration is a process with specific actions you can take to achieve it."

In addition to six themed career panels, the conference will also feature workshops on topics including job search strategies, leveraging internships, building and maintaining professional networks and articulating one's transferable skills. A keynote address will feature Anne Krook, a former academic who transitioned successfully to the corporate and nonprofit workplaces and now helps graduate students, postdocs and undergraduates do the same through her consulting practice.

"I hope the participants recognize that their academic pursuits are preparing them for a myriad of fulfilling careers to choose from, whether or not it's obvious to them now," said Arica Lubin, associate director of UCSB's Center for Science and Engineering Partnerships, conference co-founder with Hamm and an alumna herself (Ph.D., biochemistry). "I hope they also see that there are resources and networks to help them explore and be ready to embark on this next phase of their life if they just seek them out. And I hope they are inspired to focus on building their network and

professional relationships.”

After all, that’s partly why Lubin and Hamm founded the conference in the first place. Having seen the impact that similar events were having at UC Berkeley, UC San Diego and other institutions, they decided a Ph.D. career conference would be a boon to graduate students at UCSB, too.

And how right they were.

“What started out as an experiment by a small group of motivated graduate students and postdocs and two passionate staff has evolved into a well-orchestrated, student-driven initiative that spans discipline and career divides,” said Lubin. “This conference is an example of the ingenuity and dedication of our graduate students and postdocs to make something happen that contributes to their broader community of peers and empowers them with agency in their own career pursuits.”

Seconded Hamm of Beyond Academia’s evolution: “We hoped that it would be embraced and it was. More importantly, each year’s organizing committee adds to the conference and pushes it in new and exciting directions. The growth of the conference is a real testament to the creativity, resourcefulness and professionalism of our graduate students and postdocs.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.