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Student life in the Combined Program  
in the Biological and Biomedical Sciences

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## SECOND LAB, SECOND CHANCE

BY KATHRYN TWORKOSKI

One of the biggest decisions that graduate students make is choosing the lab in which they will pursue their thesis work. For a large number of students, the lab they pick at the end of their first year is the place where they will spend the next five years of their lives. But some students discover that they really don't fit in the first lab they joined and elect to choose a new lab and start over on a new thesis project. Over the past few weeks, I interviewed five such students: four who felt the need to switch labs, and one who decided to leave grad school entirely. I hope that by sharing these interviews I can outline some of the problems that grad students face, which may ultimately help ameliorate these problems in the future.

Interestingly, when I asked these students why they felt the need to leave their old labs, they all gave the same initial response: they were concerned about their thesis projects. Some projects were too risky, some had no scientific background, and some projects had no obvious direction and left the students feeling unproductive. In fact, all four students who switched labs said that they chose their second lab precisely because they felt that the new lab offered them better thesis projects. Two students specifically noted that their new lab appealed to them because it gave them two or more projects to work on, which gave them a good blend of "safe" and "risky" projects.

Although most students cited their thesis projects as their main reason for switching labs, it was apparent that the interactions between the students and their PIs were also a major factor in decision to switch. Every individual I interviewed had problems communicating with their PI. In some cases, students disagreed with the way in which their mentor approached their research, but in three instances, the students specifically stated that they felt that their PIs weren't listening to them. These students said that they had discussed specific project-related concerns with their PI but that their PI had not addressed the issues in question. One student acknowledged that the disparity between his expectations and his PI's expectations may have generated this lack of response, while the other students said that they felt like their PI "didn't care" or "didn't have [their] best interests at heart." All four students who remain in grad school implied that their communication with their new PI is greatly improved and it seems that this enhanced communication translates into increased confidence in the students' new projects.

Most of the students seemed to feel that if they had to choose a lab all over again, they would have done things differently the first time around. Multiple students stressed the need to talk to older members in the lab to get a feel for how the

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### **Second Lab, Second Chance continued from page 1**

lab operates over the long term. They also recommend getting an idea of what projects are available in the lab and how feasible those projects might be. Yet three of the students specifically stated that picking a good mentor is more important than picking an interesting project. They feel that a good mentor will “help you pursue your interests” even if they are not part of your initial project description. Further, most of the students said that switching labs really wasn't as difficult as they thought it would be. In fact, most of the students said that they stayed in their old labs for an extended period because they were hoping that the problems they were experiencing would resolve themselves, but in retrospect that time might have been better spent starting a new project in a new lab.

Finally, one of the most important factors in picking a lab appears to be awareness of an individual's goals. Over the course of the interviews, four out of five students alluded to the fact that their graduate school goals had drastically changed in some way. One student said that he had initially accepted a high-risk, high-reward project because he felt that it would boost his career options, but later realized that he needed to focus on finishing graduate school before thinking about the next step in his career. Another student said that her experience in her first lab made her realize that what she really

wanted was to make connections with great researchers who could help her grow as a scientist. The student who decided to drop out of grad school entirely stated that she had started graduate school as a “continuation of [her] B.S. degree” and had never really had a definable reason for pursuing graduate studies. Since she left graduate school, she's started exploring other career options, and she feels a lot happier about her prospects.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the main conclusion that can be drawn from these interviews is that the nature of the graduate experience stems from the interactions between graduate students and their mentors. Graduate students need to approach their studies with some idea of what they expect out of graduate school, and they need to be able to convey those desires, along with any experimental issues that may arise, to their professors. Mentors, in turn, must be willing to listen to students' concerns, provide guidance on experimental matters, and help students attain their goals. At the same time, it is important to recognize when a lab is not providing the desired experience for the student or the PI. As one student put it, “some partnerships are better than others” and the key thing is to recognize what works best for both you and your mentor, “even if that means you have to back-track a little.” **B**

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BY JUDY SPAK, MLS, AHIP

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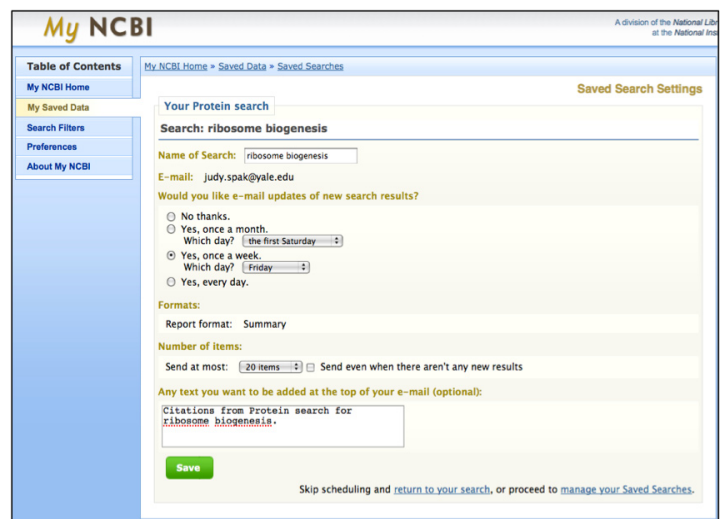
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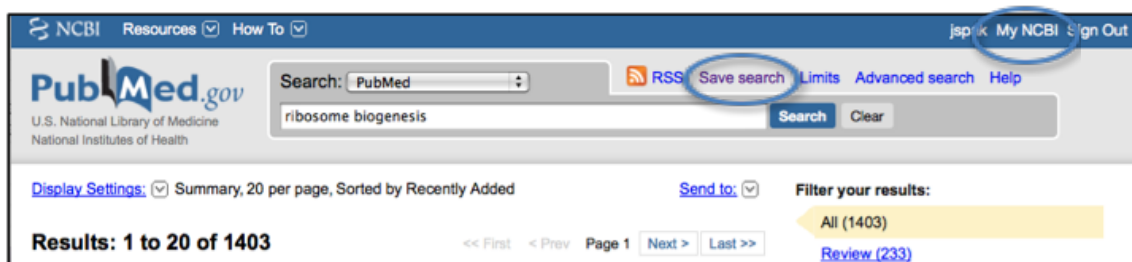
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# Lifestyles of the Poor and Academic

## CHEAP ENTERTAINMENT IDEAS IN AND AROUND NEW HAVEN

BY PHIL McCOWN

As I was driving in to work one day, I heard Tommy Tutone's classic "867-5309/Jenny". As I got into the repetitive beat of the music, especially at the phone number, I thought that clean, cheap entertainment ideas would make for an amusing article. So, in order of cheapest to most expensive (being about \$25), I give you a few ideas.

Host parties at your place. This idea gives you further incentives. First, you force yourself into cleaning up your place (or not, but beware the wrath of your guests). The second is "your house, your rules." Ask that everyone brings a bag of chips, a 6-pack of beer, \$5 for pizza, etc. As host, you can make claims on leftovers and never have to worry about junk food for a few weeks, beer for a few months, or meals for a few days.

Attend the free concerts and events on campus. Yale plays host to several amazing groups, concerts, and performers often with no charge or very low charge. If you don't get emails from the McDougal fellows, beg them to add your e-mail to their list, as they publish a weekly announcement list for such events.

Go to the Criterion for movies, but not before you stop off at the McDougal Fellows office for tickets. Movie prices can be a little obscene at times; however, there are ways to get around issues like this. For movies that screen Monday through Thursday, just show up at the Criterion with your student ID. If you want to see a movie on the weekend, though, stop off at the McDougal fellows office and ask for Criterion tickets. These are ticket vouchers that are good all the time and only cost \$7, in contrast to paying full price, which can be \$15 for some film screenings. Also, I recommend signing up for the frequent moviegoer card at the Criterion. Every so often, you'll get a coupon for a free popcorn or pop (yes, you New England people, I said pop).

Befriend someone with a car. Use your friends, but in a good way. Also, it's courteous to offer to chip in a few dollars for gas.

Make new friends, aka network. Not only is this good career advice, but it could fill in gaps that mysteriously creep into your schedule. You also never know when someone has tickets to a Yankees game and can't go because he's either sick, is a Red Sox fan, won two tickets and has no one else to go with him, etc.

Join the GSA or GPSS. No, this is not a membership plug (or is it?). The GSA offers food to their visitors and delegates and I'm sure I do not have to remind people of the legends of the GPSS senate when it comes to drinks and the like. Plus, regardless, you'll get to meet new people..B

### Students Who Bake:

#### Taste of Autumn

By B. Mónica Bowen



#### Apple Cranberry Chai Cookies

It is now autumn, and gone are the days of sunshine and watermelon. The days may be getting shorter, and the treats less icy and refreshing, but that doesn't mean the fall season can't still be delicious. For the person yearning for a taste of autumn in no time, follow this recipe for apple cranberry chai cookies. The results are large, succulent, almost cake-like spiced cookies that go splendidly with your steaming beverage of choice.

#### You will need:

- 1/2 cup (one stick) butter\*
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 Tsp vanilla
- 1 Tbsp chai latte mix
- 1.5 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 pinch of salt
- 1 pinch of cinnamon
- 2 diced apples
- 1/2 cup dried cranberries
- 1/2 cup oatmeal

\*Margarine can be used in place of butter or, for a healthier and nuttier taste, almond or hazelnut butter.

#### What to do:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease two baking sheets and dust them with flour to prevent sticking. In a bowl, cream the butter and sugar together. Add egg, then vanilla, and the chai latte mix. Add flour a half cup at a time, stirring until fully incorporated. Add salt and cinnamon and remaining chunky ingredients (apples, cranberries and oatmeal). Scoop one large tablespoon of cookie dough at a time onto the greased baking sheets. Place cookies about two inches apart (they will spread). Bake for about 12-15 minutes and then let cool another 5-10 minutes. Share with others to be a big hit at lab meetings, or to gain favor with a faculty member you're trying to get on your qualifying committee... B

## The BUZZ



**B** magazine and the entire BBS Program says farewell to Anne Scott, Registrar in MCDB. Anne is truly a legend at Yale, having been Registrar since 1982 and having assisted literally hundreds upon hundreds of graduate students. Thesis committee meetings, NIH training grants, stipend checks, TA positions, and countless other aspects of graduate student existence would not have been possible without Anne's tireless efforts for the past 30 years. We wish her the best as she begins her retirement. **B**



### WANTED: Your Playlists

\*\*Think you have the perfect playlist for listening to while in lab? Then share it! E-mail your own original playlist to [bmail@yale.edu](mailto:bmail@yale.edu) and it could be reviewed in the next issue of *B* Magazine. Guidelines to a good playlist: Try to keep it at ten songs and no longer than 70 minutes. Earn some extra points if your playlist is themed!

## THE PLAYLIST:

SUBMITTED BY KATRINA MEETH, PATHOLOGY

REVIEWED BY ALEX KUKREJA



### Playlist in Review:

1. Elvis Presley – “Burning Love”
2. John Cougar Mellencamp – “Cherry Bomb”
3. The Rolling Stones – “Gimme Shelter”
4. Pearl Jam – “Yellow Ledbetter”
5. Bruce Springsteen – “Dancing In The Dark”
6. Enrique Iglesias – “I Like It”
7. Tom Petty – “I Won’t Back Down”
8. Blues Traveler – “Hook”
9. The Guess Who – “No Sugar Tonight”
10. Jefferson Airplane – “Somebody To Love”
11. Pearl Jam – “Love Reign O’er Me”
12. Three Dog Night – “Shambala”
13. Red Hot Chili Peppers – “Otherside”
14. Go West – “King Of Wishful Thinking”

### Review:

The best part of this playlist has got to be its overall consistency. Not only does this playlist contain a great selection of songs, but it flows almost seamlessly in and out of mid-tempo pop rock, gentle and anthemic rock ballads, and upbeat pop. Elvis Presley always makes for a solid opener, starting things off with his uptempo blues rocker, “Burning Love.” Listen to how each of the instruments make their appearance at the start of this track and eventually meld into a rollicking beat that will get your foot tapping. The sound of cheerful, sunny strings announces John Mellencamp’s “Cherry Bomb,” a reminiscent tune that captures the carefree days of summer. As “Cherry Bomb” fades away, the unmistakable sounds of the innocent intro to the Rolling Stones’ “Gimme Shelter” fade in, eventually morphing into the intense clash of drums and guitars that lend credence to Mick Jagger’s opening line about the threatening storm on the horizon. The thunderous tumult of “Gimme Shelter” recedes into the beautiful Hendrix-esque opening of “Yellow Ledbetter.” Released as the B-side to Pearl Jam’s megahit “Jeremy,” this song became a concert staple for the band and serves as a sorrowful rock ballad about losing a loved one to war. While the flow is temporarily disrupted by the sudden explosion of the synth and snares of “Dancing In The Dark,” the abject frustration in Springsteen’s lyrics and voice quickly draw you back into the music. If you think this song is heavy on synthesizers, it pales in comparison to the sugary pop hit “I Like It.” Lyrically, the song is unremarkable, but the pounding beat and synth-riffs demand your attention, making it hard to resist. Bringing the energy down a bit, Tom Petty’s persistently defiant “I Won’t Back Down” offers an uplifting message with a chorus you’ll find hard to keep from singing aloud. The witty lyrics and the virtuosic harmonica of the Blues Traveler’s, “Hook” is pure joy, while The Guess Who’s “No Sugar Tonight” is simple and somewhat silly but totally rocks all the same. “Somebody To Love” delves into pulsating, psychedelic pop and releases into Pearl Jam’s cover of The Who’s dramatic and compelling ode to the renewing power of love, “Love Reign O’er Me.” While I will leave it to you to decide which version is best, Pearl Jam does a fair job of recapturing the intensity and emotion of the original, thanks in part to the addition of fresh, invigorating strings. This leads us into the blissful “Shambala,” a groovy tune with that characteristic 60s mellow vibe. “Otherside” is another well-executed rock ballad touching upon themes of pain and depression and to close the list we have “King Of Wishful Thinking” by Go West. A perfect example of the sound of pop music during the 80s/early 90s, the song describes the singer’s attempts to fool himself into believing he has conquered his feelings for a past lover, a concept that is strengthened by the deceptively enlivening feel of the music. Full of bright and mostly inspiring songs, this is one fun playlist that will surely lift your spirits. **B**