

Establishing a Presence: Advice for PhD Students



Being Director of Graduate Studies gives me plenty of time to reflect on what I'd like students to get out of graduate education. For budding academics, you have all likely heard (countless times!) that the ultimate "deliverable" is high-quality journal articles. Of this there is little doubt – at least in the fields I'm familiar with (social sciences and business). Beyond that, it is important to establish a *presence* in the field. This can involve such traditional activities as reviewing journal articles, presenting and organizing at conferences, conducting guest seminars, and being involved in sub-field specialty groups. With the spread of new and social media, there is also a new way: *establishing a digital presence*. If you put in the work during your PhD studies, over the course of your graduate career you *will* become one of the world's experts on some area of research, and I would encourage all PhD students to explore the ways that you could make this presence known to your relevant

academic community. Increasingly, knowledge and ideas are being shared online – and if you are not actively involved in influencing these knowledge networks you are missing out.

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I am not talking about just having a LinkedIn or Academia.edu account. Your ultimate goal in establishing a digital presence will be to *add value* to the conversations that are already happening online. This can be done through microblogging on Twitter, Tumblr or LinkedIn, through a conventional long-story blogging platform, or via original video or slide content such as Slideshare. Here are several paradigms for you to consider as you mull over the digital presence that best fits your interests and talents:

- The provocateur – push, prod, and provoke the academy in a direction you feel strongly about.
- The curator – become the source others turn to for by aggregating and re-framing relevant content.
- The teacher – teach others how to do what you know.
- The advice-giver – advice is cheap, but you may have something useful to add.
- The marketer – promote your work, but in a way that is not merely self-serving. Rather, show how your work builds on and enhances existing research. Contribute to the discussion.
- The practice whisperer – translate the findings of your research in a way that practitioners will find useful. Similarly, you could seek to be a *public intellectual*, as called for by [Nicholas Kristof](#).

These are just some of the ways you can make a presence in the field. Play around with it and find your identity. One of our graduate students, Wayne Xu, has done an excellent job in using a [new blog](#) along with [Slideshare](#) to take a teaching

role. One of UB's long-ago graduates, [Han Woo Park](#), has similarly become one of the most successful posters on [Slideshare](#). Personally, my blog mixes the role of provocateur, teacher, advice-giver, marketer, and translator (I leave the curating to others).

Establishing a digital presence is not a replacement for writing strong journal articles, but it is one of the ways you can make your ultimate impact more powerful. In the end, whether you decide to create a web presence in addition to the traditional route or not, be sure you infuse everything you do with *quality*. The academic world seems huge but it isn't. Word gets around. Lastly, talk with your advisor – he or she is there to help you set a long-term strategy for not only publishing high-quality journal articles but also for making your presence in the field known.