PH.D PANEL - URBAN PLANNING COALITION
November 27th, 2012

Where did you go for your Ph.D, what topic did you do, why and how it lead you to SJSU?

Asha Weinstein Agrawal (Urban Planning)
- Got her PhD at Berkley: Research on history of how people think about traffic congestion
- She went into the PhD program because she wanted to teach
- She almost dropped out of the PhD because she felt miserable at times
- Don't start a PhD Program unless you know you need it (you can do some careers without a PhD)

Gregory Feist (Psychology)
- Psychology wanted to know about creativity, what makes people different
- What made creative people unique (focus on scientist)
- Worked on the East Coast, UC Davis and SJSU (twice)

Karthika Sasikumar (Political Science)
- Her father was a professor (Asha and Greg as well), come trend
- Grew up in India, came to U.S. for Grad School, did not originally think she was going to living in U.S.
- Did her Ph.D at Cornell, studying the India Nuclear Crisis
- Came to SJSU because it is flexible, bc the school emphasizes more than just publishing
- Believes that there are really few people who should get Ph.D.
  - 3 reasons to get or not get a Ph.D
    - Do it unless you know you want to be in academia
    - People usually want do it because they are good at a subject, but that is not a good reason because if you are good at the subject you should also be good in the professional field
    - Don't do it because your family, friends or whoever wants to do it, because it is a 6 to 7 year process and at a time when all your friends are making money and starting their career

Julia Curry (Mexican-American Studies/Sociology)
- She got a PhD because she had this drive to learn about how things work
- She said she went for all the reasons that the other panelist said do got for a PhD for
- UT Austin is where she got her PhD because she went to work under a specific professor

Question: What should an applicant consider when applying for PhD

- Intricate motivation is key, need to enjoy the process, a lot of it is independent, grinding and laborious (a question that really grabs you)
- Asha three things
  - Is a career that requires it?
  - Do you like being a student and passion to learn
  - You have to be reasonably smart not necessarily super smart
- You will be working alone for a long period of time but with little feedback, can you handle that, do you have the self discipline
- A lot of people will drop out

Question: How can you make yourself a more competitive/attractive candidate

- Don't go right after undergrad, go explore a bit first and work for an NGO and see if you really like research, because if you like teaching you will still need to do research
- Show them beyond your grade: internship, volunteer but keep a record of the things you have done (say what you learn from your experience)
- In the Statement: how well you can write is important, how can you think and be passionate in your writing.
- Writing well shows you can think well and clearly (it should take at least a month to write the statement) things that sound unique to you is going to sound generic after hundreds of applicants
- In the statement: personally stories, unique events
- Do your homework about the school and who you want to study with
- Take the time away from undergrad to PhD programs, people in the PhD are going to be older, with more experience by virtue of age
- Expose yourself to people from diverse backgrounds in the field
- Consider not only where you want to get a PhD and the "status" of the school will affect where you can get a job, that is something to consider that
- Get to know the professors' research
- Be in the right place that fit you, don't jus choose a place because of where you will get funding
- Networking is important
- Having work experience in any field will enrich your study
- Think of applying to the university as if you are asking them out on a date
- You know the school well and not just applying to all different school

- Application process, size of the program is important, smaller program have more personal interviews
- Never to be rude to the administrative staff of the university, because they also talk to the admission people, make a good impression with everyone
- Talk to other students in the program (students will have a different perspective)

Audience Questions
- Choose a school beyond because you like a professor
  - Because professors move a lot, the world changes and topics interest will change
  - If you have a specialize interest in a topic, contact the professor
  - Choose a department that has a strength, so you can still focus on the topic even without the professor
  - Some facility and mentors who do great research but make horrible teacher
  - Getting the student perspective will help you understand the teaching methods of the person you are interested in

Choosing a university
- Find their strengths, not only in the field but also other departments
- Finding out where you want to live
- Funding Issues
  - Don't pay good moneys to go to a PhD program, find funding from something (TA or Research Assistant)
  - PhD will typically fund you, for at least the basic stuff or tuition waiver
  - If you do not get a food funding package, talk to the instructors about work
  - Look at fellowship list for funding (keep applying for them)

Skipping a master and going straight to PhD?
- If you don't know if a PhD is what you want to do, getting a Master is a good time and place to figure it out

Good place to research
- Read the topic two or three journals and see what topics they are publishing in the articles

Statement of Purpose
- Can be a statement of research, can show something about how you think
- Follow the instruction of the school
- Stick to the limit

Putting together application

- Do not put things off to the last minute
- Departments will take pride in helping the students but must give the instructors enough time
- Excellent letters of reference, means that the instructor needs to know you
- Important to ask a instructor not if they can write a letter but rather "can you write a strong letter"