

Organizing a “PhD Programs” Workshop

by Elissa McCormack

While I was a M.A. student, I organized two workshops for my school, the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology (DSPT), to help those students who were interested in pursuing their PhDs understand how to navigate the admissions process.

1) PhD Admissions Panel

This was the easiest workshop to organize because it didn't involve much planning on my part, beyond searching for and bringing representatives of the admissions office. In this case, the proximity of DSPT to UC-Berkeley and its membership in the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) were great assets. I contacted:

- The Dean of UC-Berkeley's Graduate School (as a general admissions representative)
- The Dean and Head of Admissions for the GTU (as a theology/religious studies representative)
- The Head of the UC-Berkeley Philosophy Department Graduate Program (as a philosophy representative)

All of the planning, in terms of scheduling, asking the speakers how much time they'd want, etc. was done via e-mail. I asked DSPT's Academic Dean to introduce the panel, and then each speaker took 10-20 minutes to talk, followed by time for questions. This received a very positive response from students.

2) PhD Programs Workshop

This workshop focused, like the panel, on tips for applying to PhD programs. It was based on a survey that I asked the school to send out to alumni who had gone on for their PhD and reading that I had done in the book *Getting What You Came For* by Robert Peters. Using all this information, I put together a PowerPoint presentation giving students tips and advice about how to best find their way through the application process. The good thing about this workshop, unlike the Admissions Panel, is that once the background work of putting the PowerPoint together was completed, I was able to run the workshop twice, using the same information. I also created a handout to be used as I presented the PowerPoint, in case anyone wanted to take notes on it.

I asked the DSPT's Academic Dean to introduce the workshop and, with his assistance, invited an alumnus/a who had successfully gone through the PhD admissions process to come and give their own perspective. (The difficulty is in finding a *good* example in an alumnus/a; the person we had come to our first workshop was studying art and religion, so only had applied to the GTU.) After the introduction from the Academic Dean, I presented my research into the admissions process, which was followed by the perspective of the alum, and an opportunity to ask questions.