Ten Typical Industry Stereotypes of Ph.D.’s & How to Combat Them

1. Academics Don't Work Very Hard
Describe all the steps required to complete the Ph.D. program with appropriate framing:

- Gain expertise in broad fields and particular specialty.
- Pass qualifying exams (most people would blanch at having to write a six-hour exam or face cross-examination for three hours on 18th century French drama).
- Develop a unique project, secure funding, manage a diverse committee of busy and often exacting faculty experts, and research and write a book-length manuscript while also teaching UCSD undergraduates.

2. High Performers Don't Come from The Academy

- Highlight your track record of achievement (i.e., GPA, Phi Beta Kappa).
- Emphasize the extreme competition to get into elite graduate programs like UCSD and to secure fellowships/grants from national funding sources.
- Explain your ability to perform at a high level for national/international experts in your field. (Silicon Valley, biotechs, and increasingly management consulting are prominent professional realms that are full of high performers with academic backgrounds.)

3. Ph.D.’s Are Just Overgrown College Students

- The difference between your analytical and communication skills and theirs is not one of degree but of kind -- the quantum leap kind.
- You have been selected to teach one of the strongest student bodies in the nation (hundreds of high school students with 4.0s can't even get into UCSD).
- As a TA, you provide students with the skills and training these same firms target when they aggressively recruit UCSD undergrads.

4. If You Don’t Go Into Academia, There's Something Wrong With You

- My career goals fit better with industry than in the confines of the academy.
- want to use my energy and talents to effect change directly, to have an impact.
- I am looking to use my skills & abilities in a more applied setting.
- I have taken the time to make a considered, thoughtful choice.
- These days most talented people have multiple careers.

5. You're Just Marking Time Until An Academic Job Comes Along

- Explain your interest in the position/organization in terms of your personal goals.
- Explain that you've done significant research on the organization and can clearly articulate why you are sincerely interested; that you are not there out of dire necessity or on a whim.
- Link the job you are applying for to analogous prior experience as a means of demonstrating you prior interest in the field or type of organization.
- Consider doing an internship or volunteer stint to show your willingness to invest in the kind of work they do before asking them to invest in you.
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6. We’ll Have To Pay You More
   • Ph.D.’s offer enhanced value and a track record of achievement and accomplishments.
   • You bring to their work not just the specialized knowledge of an academic domain, but advanced skills and experience (see skills chart in this booklet).
   • You have demonstrated entrepreneurship (think about the parallels between a dissertation and a start-up), initiative, and ability to complete complex projects with minimal supervision.
   • Ph.D.’s are used to working long hours to meet deadlines with high-quality work.

7. Ph.D. = Elitist, Anti-Social, Abstract
   • Emphasize role as teachers demystifying material for diverse student population.
   • Tone down your vocabulary; avoid the use of academic jargon.
   • Stress collaborative experience you have had and your desire to work in more of a team setting where your work will have more of an impact.

8. Ph.D.’s Lack Management/Collaborative Skills
   • Explain the concrete management tasks involved in shepherding your project to completion in a complex bureaucratic environment (the necessity to sell the idea; to balance input and expectations from multiple sources; to organize research, writing, travel, presentations all while working to earn income).
   • Illustrate your experience in project management: moderating discussions/meetings, mentoring/training as a TA, organizing a panel/conference, running a study/lab group, being a departmental representative, etc.

9. Your Type Of Ph.D. Is Irrelevant
   • Emphasize the process; skills and experience, rather than the end product.
   • Describe your research as a series of puzzles you have solved and search for analogies to the kind of problems/puzzles they confront in their work.

10. Ph.D.’s Will Correct Others' Grammar; Be Prissy & Precise
    • Eliminate the use of jargon, even if asked to describe your academic work.
    • Use humor, empathy, open body language, and active listening.

* Courtesy of UC Berkeley Career Center *