

Social Science Slam

One of the aims of LSE Research Festival is to get researchers from across the School to experiment with new or unconventional ways of presenting their research and, on Wednesday 7 May 2014, a group of LSE PhD students will take to the stage as part of a Social Science Slam. This event, organised collaboratively with LSESU, gives each presenter just 10 minutes to explain their research topic in slam poetry style, to an audience from whom no prior knowledge is required, and who are encouraged to show their appreciation (or lack thereof) by cheering (or booing...). A winner will eventually be chosen based on audience applause, with a prize awarded for first and second places.

One of these brave PhD students, who also happens to be the LSESU Research Students' Officer, is Maria Carvalho. Here, Maria offers a glimpse of what to expect from the event, through a poem – An ode to PhD students.

An Ode to PhD Students

– *Maria D. Carvalho*

To research or not to research?

That is the perpetual question for PhD students.

On this quietly blustering Ivory Tower,

We have pledged to dedicate these years of our lives,

To study how the environment, and society, and the Universe works?

Holed up in these Ivory Towers,

A great vantage point to observe the world.

We ferret around in seclusion,

to try and find the research conclusion,

and end this confounded academic malaise.

Our predecessors tell us this is all quite normal,

That we have no need to despair,



Just write 500 words a day,

We'll apparently be well on our way.

They tell us that, 'There is no such thing as the perfect dissertation,
... just a finished one.'

This is just the first step of admission,
Into the illustrious Academy,
(Where is this hallowed place, by the by?)

For is this not why we decided to enter,
this rather maddening endeavour?

The research question that follows us and plagues us,
And haunts us and hunts us,
From libraries to our homes,
From the gym to the pub to the cafes,
We cannot even drown it out,
From the conversation with our friends,
Or our moments of quiet contemplation.

And yet it continues to pursue us:
What IS the answer to this question?
Actually, what IS the question?

We deconstruct the grand theories into individual concepts,
Sorting through the jigsaw puzzle of ideas,
To see how it all fits together,



Hoping against hope that we can piece together the big picture,
That is our research.

And once we manage to paint our grand picture,
We masticate on its implications,
And present its significance,
To our grand audience: Our peers.
They review and challenge,
Stress test the evidence, and theory, and conclusion,
Sometimes to the point of derision.

For any academic knows,
That knowledge is continually contested,
What is the point of a literature review?
If not to show the flaws and fallacies,
And gaps in theories.
Methodologies, data, analyses, conclusions,
Are a free-for-all fest of critical thinking,
To sediment a trajectory of theoretical knowledge,
Until those marginal few manage to make the paradigm shift.

And all we can hope for are that these ideas,
That we have painstakingly deconstructed and reconstructed,
Into a dissertation,
Perform with academic resilience.
It isn't it all worth it though?
To have the 'Mr' or 'Miss' or 'Mrs'
Changed to the gender neutral and superior 'Dr'



Our distinction in society recognized,
By two little letters in the front of our names
Or three or four little letters at the end [PhD./DPhil.]

But here we are today,
Asked to present our big pictures,
Beyond verbal prints on paper,
To images that are still and moving,
To slams of poetry and comedy,
It takes much courage,
To submit our work to this venerable festival that is our research.

Oh the life of a PhD student!
In spite of the uncertainty and setbacks,
In spite of its befuddling madness,
We pursue our own moments of 'Eureka!'
This is our driving motivation.
This is our privilege,
And for all of us,
A cause for celebration.

Social Science Slam will take place on Wednesday 7 May 2014 at 6pm in the 6th floor bar, Saw Swee Hock Student Centre. The event is free to attend, with no ticket required. Drinks will be provided. For more information see [Social Science Slam](#)

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