As the SIOP conference approaches, our tenure as “TIP-TOPics for Students” columnists nears an end with this being our farewell column. The last 2 years have been enjoyable, with each of us learning a tremendous amount about the field. But it is time for us to step aside and watch another set of students transform this column. We would like to thank all those who helped contribute to our column, both formally and informally. Our friends, colleagues, and professors all aided immensely. We would also like to thank those who e-mailed us suggestions for topics and feedback. In addition, we look forward to seeing you at SIOP. If you see us, by all means walk up and talk to us. We’d like to hear your thoughts, just as you have heard ours.

In our final version of TIP-TOPics, we span the I-O universe with a gamut of topics. We start out on a more serious Path to Glory, discussing the all-important master’s thesis process from start to finish. Next, we proceed with hints about writing a good resumé and conducting a successful interview in Career Corner. Finally, we conclude with a pedagogical view of the silver screen in Psychology et al.

On a side-note, we would like to encourage everyone to consider joining the SIOP Student Discussion List. It serves as a good tool for discussion on hot topics in our field. Go to http://www.siop.org/comm/student-sdl to find out more. Thanks and enjoy the column!

Path to Glory

One of the primary obstacles blocking you from your master’s degree (terminal or not) is your thesis, a body of work written primarily and exclusively by you. You will, among other things, find a thesis advisor and committee for your thesis. You will research, ruminate, and research some more. You will write multiple drafts, meet with your advisor, and propose to your thesis committee. You will run the proposed study (unless archival data are available and apropos), analyze the data, write it all up, defend it, and then celebrate your master’s euphorically. But before attaining celebrity (or celebratory) status, you will spend hundreds of hours of time, energy, devotion, blood, sweat, and tears on your thesis.
You should think of your thesis as a license to do research and a way to “get your feet wet” in the nitty-gritty of research. Ideally, by the time you earn your degree(s), you will be able to build, design, and implement your own research. This seems daunting as a first- or second-year because you do not have the necessary equipment to go out on your own. The thesis process is a way to gain this needed experience. It is also preparation for your dissertation (if you continue towards earning a doctoral degree). The scope and magnitude of the dissertation is wider and larger, and the topic is likely more difficult and involved. The collaboration with your advisor is decreased; it is the next step towards independence.

In order to help with the attainment of the elusive master’s thesis, we devised a set of questions one should address to help lead them towards that goal. Some of the more commonly-heard questions will be addressed along with some notable questions we should have asked while going through the master’s process.

**What background information should I have before starting?** Each I-O psychology program has a distinct set of rules and regulations for graduate-level students. Most departments offer a graduate handbook or a thesis handbook. Before going any further, make sure to read this document. With this background information you can ask others the right questions. After reading the handbook, talk over some of the technicalities (e.g., thesis length, how to ensure not having your proposal “shot down”) with graduate students who have experienced the process. Upper-level graduate students have accumulated a wealth of knowledge and are usually happy to share their experiences. Some programs have informal mentoring programs where an upper-level student is matched with a first-year student. Whether designated or not, find a student mentor and learn from them. Oh yes, and don’t forget about faculty members who deal with theses routinely. Getting a feel for the norms of your program is a good move.

**Who takes care of the administrative duties?** While many of the administrative procedures occur later on in the process (e.g., scheduling a room for your proposal), you should make friends with your administrative staff. “The Staff” not only has the ability to make your thesis experience pleasurable but also has the power to make it your worst nightmare (e.g., “Oh—I totally forgot about your meeting in the conference room—there’s someone scheduled in there now. Sorry.”) At the least, a solid working relationship is highly advised.

**Who will my thesis advisor be? How should I pick?** As you know, you will be working in collaboration with a faculty advisor. Unless your department is very small, you will have some flexibility in choosing who will be your “Thesis Chair.” This decision is very important—it is best if your working style and your advisor’s style are fairly congruent. If you want someone to be there to help you for every question you have, work with Dr. HoldMy-
Hand; if you wish to be left alone and to figure it out by yourself, your better off working with Dr. Solitary Confinement.

It is important to know that there is no such thing as perfect student-advisor fit. Every advisor-student relationship has at least one component that is not ideal. Some professors may have long turnaround times (e.g., drafts, emails), or may not be around at all. Some are great minds but may have no expertise in your topic of interest. Some just smell funny! OK, so there’s a low baseline on that one. The idea is that you should look for the best fit. Find a professor who best meets your needs.

I have heard a few professors advocate that for the thesis it is better to sacrifice a topic that’s not super-duper interesting in order to work with a congruent faculty member (as opposed to having a super-duper interesting topic and an advisor that you can’t work with). This practice is not always the case, but it should be a consideration. If things don’t work out with you and your thesis advisor, that’s okay. In most schools you can change professors after the master’s thesis to another faculty member. Common sense dictates that you do not alienate your thesis advisor, however. You can go your separate ways as long as you do it with grace and professionalism.

Who will be on my committee? You want people who are interested in your topic, yet make sure you don’t select members whose sole mission may be to sabotage you (e.g., if there’s that one professor that you just can’t get along with, don’t put them on the committee). Especially handy in this situation is your thesis advisor. He or she can tell you faculty members’ interests and how your research relates to theirs. Graduate students can tell you about professors’ tendencies during thesis presentations (e.g., “Oh yea, Bob—Dr. Flutie tends to fall asleep during thesis defense meetings—don’t take it personally”). It is also important to pit professors’ strengths together. Make sure that there is someone familiar with your content area and someone who is strong with methodology and statistics. Try to get someone who has a macro, big-picture view and someone who can correct your grammar and minutiae as well. Finally, at all costs, avoid feuding faculty. We’ve heard horror stories about putting two professors in the same room who are engaged in a political squabble.

What will my thesis topic be? Take cues from your faculty members. Get to know faculty members’ interests either by directly discussing it with them or by reading articles written by them. This will give you a foundation of knowledge from which to continue. Also, look through the last few years of Journal of Applied Psychology, Personnel Psychology, and other top journals. This will give you a feel for a wide assortment of topics in the field, and it is a great learning experience. Another excellent resource is What to Study: Generating and Developing Research Questions (Campbell, Daft, & Hulin, 1982). The authors investigated top I-O journals over 10 years to determine what questions have been asked and which nonquestions should have been
asked. Even though the piece was published 20 years ago, many of the questions that should have been asked have yet to be addressed. Another highly recommended book is Cone and Foster’s (1993) *Dissertations and Theses From Start to Finish*. This 349-page book elaborates upon all aspects addressed in this article, chapter by chapter (e.g., Chapter 3: the thesis topic).

Discussions with grad students and professors alike yielded four general guides for finding thesis topics. The first is of the “have it handed to you” variety. In other words, a preexisting question or project currently being worked on is turned over to you. The downside of this situation is that you do not get to pick your topic and thus a lot of the learning and maturity that occurs due to the topic selection process is lost. The upside? Your advisor will have much of the literature on a topic present, which will save endless hours of digging through the library and filling out interlibrary loan forms.

A second way to find a topic is to “divide and conquer.” After narrowing the thesis topic to one broad area (i.e., feedback), you will realize that there is way too much information to cover everything. Thus, you will have to select a subtopic of a subtopic within the larger topic (e.g., feedback-seeking behavior of sleep-deprived and malnourished graduate students in a classroom setting). Once you narrow it down to a manageable yet challenging question, you will be on your way to conquering your small area. The caveat here is to make sure not to take on a task that is too big for a thesis. The goal of the thesis is to get some experience and to get it done. It takes a long time anyway—there’s no need to prolong it by making it unnecessarily complicated. For example, millions of covariates could be tested, but save it for the dissertation or a side project once your thesis is complete.

A third thesis-finding idea is to combine two separate domains that were previously unrelated. This is a very interesting method, although a difficult one to produce due to the lack of research for such a “new” area. Most faculty will say that if a research area was never researched before, there may be a reason why—like it’s very difficult to do research in that area. This isn’t to condemn research in that area, but buyers beware! Your advisor should be able to help you decide if it is a worthwhile area to explore.

Finally, you can find an interesting published piece of research and attempt to replicate (and expand) the findings. While there is nothing inherently wrong with replicating a study (since the goal of the thesis is the research experience), another purpose of the thesis is to make a contribution to the field. Changing a couple of aspects of a current study may very well be valuable. And replications are not done nearly frequently enough in our field.

**What’s next?** After reading tons of articles, you will write the introduction and method section for your proposed study. After many drafts of your thesis proposal, you will be given your day in I-O court. You will stand before a panel of arbiters (your committee), scared out of your mind, and plead your case with them. All of your hard work should lead to the prover-
“knowing what you are talking about,” which is bound to impress your committee. The committee may have a few suggestions for alterations to your proposal, perhaps some questions about your logic, and might bring up additional research which should be examined. This is routine. Their purpose isn’t to make you squirm (although some enjoy this); rather, they are trying to improve the quality of your research.

The thesis is about perseverance as well. Think of your thesis as an airport—expect delays. Whether it is the Institutional Review Board (a.k.a. Human Subjects Review Board) deciding they want a full-board meeting for your project or getting all members of your committee in the same state for your defense, things will go off-schedule. And you will have to roll with it. It happens to everyone; the only difference is how people deal with it.

After proposing the study and making the necessary corrections, you’ll run your study. Have protocols and stick to them. After you enter the data (by yourself or with the help of some outside source), make sure the data was entered correctly, clean the data (e.g., don’t include those participants who showed up drunk to your experiment), analyze it using the most appropriate statistical program, and determine if your prior predictions are actually supported. Then you get to write it up and consult with your advisor again. And when you are ready, you defend your master’s thesis—and celebrate like you just won “American Idol.”

How can I possibly do it all? Your master’s thesis is the most important document of your life to this point, but it is by no means the best document you will ever write (remember—it’s training for the pros). It is important to devote a significant amount of time to it, but there’s no need to obsess over minutiae for 2 years. A common outlook of graduate school veterans is that it is important to do something every day towards completion of the thesis. This could be reading a journal article, writing drafts of the proposal or defense, or simply thinking about your topic for 15 minutes. The theory behind the “a little every day” method is that it is impossible to stray off track or to forget about it for days on end if at least something, no matter how small it is, is done every day. It is very easy to ignore the thesis. It is amorphous and ambiguous, and the faculty expects it to be worked upon on top of your usual course load. While this probably does not shock most of our readers at the cognitive level, it is a much more daunting of a task behaviorally than initially expected.

Finally, remember—you can do it! The reason you were accepted into graduate school is because the professors had enough faith in YOU. They believed that you could do it. And those professors are all pretty smart—just prove them right!!

Career Corner

As the SIOP conference approaches, it dawns on us that some people will actually be graduating soon and entering the “real world” (oh, how we look
forward to that day for ourselves). Since many people will be going through the job search at SIOP in a few days, we thought it would be informative to give some advice about resumés as well as some interviewing tips. For those seeking more information in addition to this section, there was a very informative column in last month’s TIP (“Placement Center Employers’ Concerns”) detailing information pertinent for job seekers. We want to elaborate on that information and give more general advice about the job search process. The following information is slanted more towards applied jobs, but hopefully some knowledge can also be gained by those intending on pursuing an academic job. We hope you enjoy the column and happy hunting!

The Resumé

Deciding on a purpose. When designing your resumé, determining its purpose should be your first consideration. In other words, know your audience and appropriately tailor your resumé. Only include information that is relevant to the job you are pursuing. Your resumé won’t necessarily get you a job, but hopefully it will get you an interview (the rest is up to you).

Choosing a format. There are many ways to lay out a resumé. You may choose to highlight your accomplishments, experience, or previous research depending on the type of job you are seeking as well as your specific strengths. If you think that your accomplishments are more impressive than the amount of work experience you have, then highlight your accomplishments first and just list your work experience. One thing to keep in mind when listing your previous work experience is to maintain the confidentiality of your client, unless they have given you previous permission. In other words, if you worked for various clients while at a consulting firm, you may not be able to legally list your clients by name but rather just by location (e.g., consulting with a large home improvement firm stationed in the Southeast). Furthermore, don’t be shy about listing your accomplishments (but don’t embellish).

Preparation tips. When preparing your resumé, use strong action verbs. This means briefly listing key responsibilities and accomplishments for each job listed. Describe your responsibilities in the past tense throughout the resumé to maintain consistency, but avoid using pronouns (e.g., I, me, our, my, we, etc.). Also, spell out terms instead of using abbreviations whenever possible. The goal is to keep the resumé looking simple while getting your point across.

Things to avoid. Some faux pas seem to go without saying, but you’d be amazed at what people put on their resumé! First off, your resumé should never exceed two pages, and you should include a cover letter unless instructed otherwise. Also, avoid fancy colors in your attempts to be creative. Stick to the basics (e.g., gray, white, off-white). It is critical to proofread your resumé several times. In addition, ask someone else to critique your resumé to make sure you didn’t forget anything. Have them proofread the document
as well. Finally, don’t embellish on your resumé, and make sure the dates and job titles are accurate. A number of high-profile people have been fired for lying on their resumé, so there is a good chance an employer will verify the information included on the document.

The Interview

Researching the company. Never interview with a company about which you know nothing or that fails to interest you. You may think you can “wing it” through the interview, but interviewers can see right through your shenanigans. Therefore, make a concerted effort to learn about the company’s business before the interview. Talk to people who work there and/or go to the company’s Web site. If you are interviewing with a large organization, you may be able to find company-level information about them at such sites as www.business.com or www.marketguide.com.

Preparing for the interview. Many people believe they can walk into an interview and adequately answer any question thrown at them because, by golly, they have an advanced degree and know they are qualified! That may be the case, but remember that everyone is pretty well qualified at this level. What’s going to distinguish you from other applicants is your ability to answer interviewers’ questions and if the company feels you “fit” with their culture. Thus, it is in your best interest to arrive prepared. Know your resumé. Devise both possible behavioral questions (e.g., “Tell me about a time when you had to overcome conflict in your team”) and situational questions (e.g., “You have been given the responsibility of designing a selection measure while maintaining diversity in the organization, what would be some of your considerations while compiling your measure”), and practice answering them based on information included on your resumé. Furthermore, it’s best to simply keep in mind the possibilities you have for answering interviewers’ questions rather than memorizing particular replies. Thinking on your feet and improvising is a quality on which you will be judged. So, with increased practice you will have additional options for detailed, thorough responses to interviewer’s questions. Another good learning tool is to go through a mock interview at your university’s career center or just use a camcorder to record yourself going through a mock interview. Either avenue will give you an opportunity to get feedback on your mannerisms and weaknesses you may want to work on.

Besides preparing for questions, it is also helpful to develop questions for the interviewer. This indicates that you’ve done your research and are interested in the company. We strongly discourage you to say “No” when the interviewer asks if you have any questions. Furthermore, questions help you to evaluate the company and the position in comparison to other job offers. Some topics to consider inquiring about are job scope, organizational priorities, evaluation of performance, and opportunities for personal growth. Also,
feel free to take notes on the answers the interviewers give in response to your questions. This certainly will not hinder the “image” you convey and can be very helpful as long as it doesn’t interfere with your ability to answer questions. And finally, you may want to send a thank-you note to the company shortly after your interview in an effort to show your gratitude and your level of interest.

**Things to avoid.** Besides the obvious eliminations such as poor dress and unpreparedness, there are some subtle things you should also avoid in the interview. First off, refrain from making derogatory comments about previous jobs or classes. You may speak of difficulties you had to overcome, but try to put a positive spin on the situation. Also, you shouldn’t talk about salary or benefits unless the conversation has been initiated by the company. Finally, incorporate a variety of situations when you address questions so that the interviewer can get a glimpse of your expertise and various skills. We’re sure there are a number of other things an applicant can say to eliminate them from contention, but don’t let that hinder you from thoroughly answering questions. Just be aware of what you say in the interview and be prepared for anything.

**Psychology et al.**

Let’s all go to the movies! Let’s all go to the movies! Let’s all go to the movies…and have ourselves some fun! Yes, movies about the workplace are plentiful and many relate to concepts taught in I-O courses. These films can be excellent pedagogical tools for encouraging class discussion, promoting active learning, and enhancing lecture material. However, with all the existing movies about the workplace, you may wonder which ones are useful for your I-O psychology teaching goals. Well, that’s were we come into the picture, so to speak. In this article we provide the titles and brief plot synopses of movies that might be appropriate for the classroom. In addition, we offer suggestions on how these films might be applied toward the teaching of I-O concepts, such as ethics, incentives, sexual harassment, job analysis, and corporate culture. So, grab some popcorn, sit back, relax, and enjoy the show!

Ethical issues permeate our nation’s organizations. While the recent executive-level breaches at Enron, Tyco, and WorldCom have garnered worldwide attention, moral and ethical questions arise at lower hierarchical levels of the organization. For example, burger flippers have to decide whether to serve that hamburger that fell on the floor, and stockbrokers must determine whether to sell a bad stock. Even we, as I-O psychologists, are faced with situations in which the choice between right and wrong is colored by shades of gray. How might professors teach students the importance of ethics in the workplace as well as actively engage them in this learning process? Several films might serve this purpose. In these movies, characters must decide between selfish as well as moral and legally questionable behaviors and that which is considered correct and acceptable action according to the law and, quite often, their con-
science. A primary example is the film, *Wall Street*, in which a Wall Street investment banker greedily engages in insider trading while using his power and influence to manipulate his protégé to do the same. *Boiler Room* also presents Wall Street as corrupted by greed, and another character is faced with an ethical dilemma regarding finances. Both films could be shown in the classroom as an impetus for group discussion regarding the definition of ethics, when and why it is important, and how individuals come to decisions regarding situations in which costly professional and personal ethical decisions must be made. Class discussion can be difficult to start and maintain, and using movies about hotshot Wall Street executives or slimy Wall Street stockbrokers provides a fun, exciting context for a serious topic.

How do organizations increase productivity yet maintain workers’ job satisfaction? Simple. Bring in an I-O psychologist and have them figure it out! But how might we as students gain insight into the incentive process before facing this issue out in the field? Read a textbook? Sure. However, professors might once again use films to encourage active learning that would help students more fully understand the complexities of developing and incorporating incentive systems. Two movies come to mind in attempting to enhance teaching this topic. *Outland*, a science fiction movie in which a federal marshal stationed on a planet occupied for the purpose of mining titanium must discover the link between excessively high productivity and high psychosis-related deaths. In the comedy *Gung Ho*, a U.S. car company is bought by the Japanese and the American workers must increase their productivity by 40% or witness the closing of the plant. One classroom technique might be to show the film and to make groups of students analyze the incentive system used in the movie: base it on theoretical material, discuss the pros and cons, and provide recommendations for improvement. Next, students could develop their own incentive framework, again based in theory, for the situations presented in the films and present these plans to the class as if at a conference. Students could be asked what they would do under the same circumstances and taught about whistle-blowing as well. The movies described present a rich context for students to work with: company structure, leadership, corporate culture, and so forth. Although internships clearly offer preferable hands-on learning experiences, using movies in the classroom may be a more powerful tool for engaging students than textbooks or lectures.

Decreasing the existence of sexual harassment in the workplace requires the development of sensitivity training programs, often by I-O psychologists. However, defining what constitutes sexual harassment ranges from clear-cut, overt actions to less delineated, more subtle behaviors. When is touching someone’s arm OK and when is it inappropriate? Do the same standards exist for women and men? The issue of sexual harassment can be brought to life in the classroom through the use of (yes, you guessed it)—movies! Two exemplary films that might be used for their content (rather than their critical
acclaim) are *9 to 5* and *Disclosure*. The first film is about three secretaries who have a male chauvinistic, misogynist boss who berates, harasses, and belittles them at every available opportunity, and how the harassed women get mad and get even in a big way. The second movie is about a female corporate executive who seduces her married, male subordinate and threatens his job if he refuses her advances. Now, the blatancy of the sexual harassment in both films is evident and may seem problematic for their use in the classroom. However, what can be brought to students’ attention, more vividly than by a case study, is how the harassment is occurring: touching, eye contact, job manipulation, language, and so forth. These are the same areas on which sensitivity training should focus. Incorporating these movies into lecture material can provide examples of images and words that might be hard for students to otherwise visualize and imagine. The films might also be used as a springboard for a spirited discussion of the topic.

From teaching about sexual harassment to describing multiple jobs, the big screen can be a useful resource. What type of work do workers do? What are the components of various jobs? How do workers learn their occupations? While most consultants perform job analyses in the field, it is impossible to take an “Introduction to Industrial Psychology” course without learning about the topic. However, the presentation of this material is primarily through textbooks and lecture material. Perhaps a more active way to teach the material might behoove our field…drum roll please…is by using movies! Woo hoo! That’s right! What could be more fun for students than watching a film depicting a particular occupation and then writing a job analysis for it? You got me! There are a multitude of films that provide excellent job portrayals. Some of them are: *Glengarry Glenn Ross* (sales), *The Negotiator* (negotiator), *Insomnia* (detective), *All the President’s Men* (newspaper reporter), and *Broadcast News* (television reporter), to name a few. Granted, the Hollywoodized depictions of these careers surely limit the validity of the job analyses students would perform. But, engaging in a hands-on experience would enhance their learning of important classroom concepts.

Knowledge of the work world before becoming an I-O psychologist is critical, and there are definitely avenues to gain this experience along the path toward the start of a career. But there are many students who take I-O courses who have never worked, yet are trying to understand concepts such as motivation, job satisfaction, and leadership. Lacking a context in which to frame these topics can hinder their ability to learn this material. It is no doubt possible to be an effective teacher by using real-world examples and case studies in your lectures to emphasize key points. But, what may be more exciting might be to show one of several movies about the workplace, where the workplace is the story, and use this film as a pedagogical tool throughout the semester to provide a context explaining the concepts in the course. There are several films that focus on the workplace: *Office Space, Haiku Tunnel,* and *Working Girl*; and in
which morale, managers, office politics, job satisfaction, leadership, organizational structure, and even I-O consultants are amusingly portrayed. You can use this material in conjunction with theory or even in helping your students develop paper ideas. Bringing the workplace into the classroom can help students better learn concepts related to understanding organizations.

In conclusion, there is some practical advice for using movies in the classroom. First, before you show a film, watch it first…the whole thing. There may be profanity, sexual content, or other things you may consider inappropriate for your viewing audience. Second, if you are pressed for time, select clips from various movies and use them strategically throughout the semester. Third, if possible, share your ideas with a professor who has taught your course to ensure that you are correctly presenting the material and covering all the major concepts. Well, what more can be said? Good luck and good viewing!

Once again, we’d like to say how much we’ve enjoyed writing this column for you over the past 2 years as well as give hearty thanks to Debbie Major as editor of TIP. We also want to wish the new authors of TIP-TOPics the best of luck with their new responsibilities and hope they find their experience writing about I-O graduate student issues as much fun as we did! So long!

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References
