

PhD Vlog 3 Month's On: Abigail Robertson

TIME	SPEAKER	AUDIO
00:00:00		[TITLE BOARD]
00:00:11	Abigail	Hi, and welcome back to the PhD Vlog. So I wanted to do an update and I know that the other Vloggers are going to be doing updates as well as to what I've been up to these last six months, which is a lot. A lot more actually once I wrote everything down, just sort of get an idea of what to say for this particular Vlog. The first thing I want to talk about is courses.
00:00:30		So last time we talked, I was taking completely different courses. I started new courses in January, and this semester I'm taking Medieval Latin. I'm taking a medieval research and bibliography course, and I'm also taking a seminar on the Gawain-Poet. So I have two literature courses, or two literary-based courses, and one history class. So it's about an average course load and these are courses that will help me prepare for comprehensive exams that are coming up here in the fall and I'll talk about those in a little bit. The only coursework I have left between
00:01:00		now and actually finishing what's required for my degree is a summer course and then three courses in the fall, so not a lot left. This summer, I'm taking medieval palaeography seminar here at my university that will go the whole month of June. So I'll get that done and it will count towards my degree. And then in the fall, I'll have three more courses to take. I'll have a German course that gets up my language requirement. I have a course on Chaucer and then I'm doing an independent study on relics that I hope will help me toward my dissertation. I also have my comprehensive exam schedule for this fall.
00:01:30		If you're not familiar with how comprehensive exams work, if they don't happen at your institution or if you're thinking about a PhD and aren't in a programme currently, these exams are exams that you take when you've finished your coursework and you're moving into thinking about writing your dissertation or starting a dissertation prospectus. These

		exams show that you have the necessary information you need to be a successful scholar in your field. I'll be taking my exams starting in September and they'll go from about the second week of September to the very last. To do that, I'll be reviewing notes, looking over texts and completing
00:02:00		translations that I haven't already done. I started translating and working on my comprehensive exams in December, so my goal is by May to be doing mostly review and then finishing up some secondary reading. But I have to keep on a consistent schedule. The most important thing you can do is have all of your reading done, all of your notes taken and just spend the last month or so just reviewing those things. So that's ultimately my plan. I have three exams; one in old English, one in middle English and one in Anglo-Saxon history. After those exams, I'll start thinking about my dissertation prospectus.
00:02:30		I have a rough idea of what I want to work on on my dissertation, but between now and the fall, and then after comprehensive exams, I'll refine those ideas by talking to members of my committee, effectively the same people who are on my exam committee, and get a better understanding of what I'd like to write on. From there, I'll have a dissertation prospectus that I'll have written up that will explain in about ten pages what it is I'd like to write on and I'll give that prospectus as part of a presentation called a prospectus defence. At the defence will be my committee members and based on the prospectus
00:03:00		that I present, they'll decide whether or not I'm ready to move into actually writing the dissertation on that topic. On top of that, I'll be attending three conferences this summer. The first is the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan, which is a big academic conference for medievalists here in the United States. After that, I'll be going to RMMRA which is the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association. The conference is hosted here at UNM and I'll be helping organise

		that and putting together abstracts and papers here in the next week, along with the
00:03:30		professors at my institution. And then in July, I'll be heading to London and then ultimately to Leeds to attend IMC Leeds, which is the International Medieval Congress at Leeds which is another big medieval congress except it's this time in the UK. The papers that I'm giving at these three conferences are pretty different. At Kalamazoo, I'll be talking about the Exeter Book Riddles that deal with weapons. At RMMRA, I'll be on two panels; well, one panel and one round table. The round table's about teaching medieval studies in the post [s.l. colonial 00:03:58] age. The second is a paper
00:04:00		on [s.l. Bead 00:04:00] and Geoffrey of Monmouth, and comparing the histories that they've each written. And then the third, the paper that I'm giving at Leeds, is on women, monasticism and sanctity which I'm really excited about. It's based on a seminar paper I wrote last year. On top of that, I also submitted a couple of abstracts for conferences that will be this time next year, just trying to get ahead of the curve. It's something you can do if you kind of find yourself with some downtime and you want to be productive but not necessarily work on something specifically for your class. For me, submitting abstracts or editing abstracts
00:04:30		or papers that I'll be giving at conferences is an effective use of time that isn't necessarily directly related to what maybe I should be doing but it's still in the academic realm, so that kind of productivity to me sort of helps engender more productivity and maybe that's toward my coursework or grading. But it's just something small I can keep on top of because submitting abstracts is something that can kind of come out of the blue if you're not keeping your eye on a calendar. Another thing I've been working on since I finished my last Vlog is improving my service to the institution and also to the profession.
00:05:00		Something that's important to me as a scholar is

		<p>that I have a balance between my teaching, my own scholarship and service. Since those are the kind of things you'll be doing if you have a tenure track position, I'm trying to do them now as a way of preparing and eventually showing a hiring committee that this is something that I'm interested in. I've tried to do that in a couple of ways. First, I've recently joined the Graduate and Professional Student Association here at UNM as the outreach and media chair. So my job will be to keep on track of the website, writing press releases and generally making sure that all the important</p>
00:05:30		<p>events that GPSA does during the year are accessible to the graduate students to whom they're most pertinent. I've also since started serving on the executive committee as a grad representative. The executive committee in my department is basically a committee that meets its faculty and they talk about issues that are pertinent to hiring, to tenure. As a graduate student, if you have an opportunity to work with faculty members on a committee like this, I highly recommend it. It's been helpful for me to kind of get a sense for what faculty service looks like. It also has gained, for me, unique insight</p>
00:06:00		<p>into some of the things that faculty members deal with on a weekly, monthly, yearly basis. Along with that, I'll be helping organise RMMRA, the conference that's being held at my institution that I'm also presenting at. Being part of a large-scale conference like this I think will be helpful in terms of organising in the future and also getting a sense for how conferences are put together, what sort of work that entails. Aside from those things, the thing that I've really been spending the most time with has been reading. Trying to read for my courses, read for my exams, finding things that I think might be</p>
00:06:30		<p>pertinent to whatever my dissertation deals with. And I think that's the most important thing you can do as a graduate student in your downtime is making sure you're keeping up on publications related to what you might be</p>

		interested in writing on or what your coursework is dealing with and making sure that you understand the arguments that are made in those. That will make doing things like literature reviews, whether it's for a seminar paper, a course, or for your dissertation, it will mean that you're on top of the most recent scholarships; you're not having to dig through all of those. It also means that you're able to participate in conversations in a really
00:07:00		productive way. When you go to a conference and someone's giving a paper, you might be able to make a comment based on something that you've read, or you might have read a book that a paper's based on. So it's really helpful just in terms of networking, but also staying on top of your profession. That's what the last six months have looked like for me. I'm really excited for the next six months because it means hopefully having passed my exams and moving into the dissertation process. Thanks so much for joining me and I look forward to talking to you in the future.

END OF TRANSCRIPT