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My mother went to a PhD Project conference in 2001 and thought being an academician was a good idea, but not for her. I was unaware of her attendance; news of it might have been buried in an e-mail.

Afterward, she encouraged me to go. Since my junior year in college I had considered becoming a professor, but I was discouraged by my assumptions about a number of things, including the associated salary. I was doing an independent study for a professor who encouraged me to pursue a Ph.D. when I realized that it could be a fulfilling and economically viable career.

Still on the fence, I was unable to attend the conference at that time. I was teaching English in China in 2002, and I applied to programs from there. I started the pre-doctoral program at NYU in Spring 2003. The program was essentially a Ph.D. boot camp for those of us who didn't have well developed research and math skills. I attended The PhD Project conference that fall. It helped me confirm that I wanted to do this.

I have gone to every Doctoral Students Association conference since 2004. I have found mentors as well as friends; I have learned the nuances of the career. The DSA helps me keep it all in perspective. If the school year is draining or I am feeling overwhelmed, the DSA is an annual dose of encouragement – it revives the zeal. It reminds me why I am here.

Like most junior faculty, tenure is my priority but it is not my only goal. I also want to be good at teaching, good in the front of the classroom. I want to help my research assistants understand the value of thinking critically and analytically. Eventually, I would like to be a faculty adviser to a student group. I can't mentor an entire cohort, but if I can get one person through a tough school year, I will have made my mark.