



During his PhD, Adam Ruben performed at comedy clubs to provide additional income.

Christine Buske also worked non-stop during her neuroscience PhD at the University of Toronto Mississauga in Canada. At one point, she was teaching three undergraduate courses, running a fitness class and dedicating 24 hours per week to a software start-up — all the while maintaining a colony of zebrafish to study shoaling behaviour. “It was insane,” she says. “I was on, on, on all the time.”

She toughed it out, however, padding her wallet and CV along the way. And on graduation in 2012, she managed to turn her experience into a full-time job, working as head of outreach at the start-up’s UK office. Buske now leads the European expansion of Science Exchange, a California-based outsourcing platform for research and development services. “I made strategic choices,” she says, “in what seemed like madness.”

INVEST IN YOUR FUTURE

The income from a side job is often intermittent and unsteady. That can make it hard to incorporate into a regular budget. “But that leaves an opportunity to use that money to do things that are really going to propel you along financially,” says Amanda Ochsner, a video-game researcher who runs a personal-finance blog called Frugal PhD.

Ochsner, who landed an assistant-professor position at the University of Findlay in Ohio this year, recommends setting aside one to two months’ worth of living expenses. After that, she says, put extra savings into a retirement account. Even small amounts soon add up.

Low-paying gigs can also provide non-financial dividends down the road, notes Jennifer Polk, a Toronto-based life coach for PhDs. “It’s precisely those distractions that might get you a job later on,” she says, especially for those looking outside the lab.

That was the case for Laura Herlan, who worked part-time at a pharmacy throughout

her PhD studying the genetics of kidney injury at Charité Medical University in Berlin. The extra money was attractive, but for Herlan, a qualified pharmacist, so was the opportunity to stay on top of the newest medicines and any changes in the German drug-reimbursement system. Since graduating last year, Herlan has started work as a medical-information manager in the Berlin office of Sanofi, a global pharmaceutical company. “It’s a good fit,” Herlan says.

A side job can also provide a fallback career if the academic track doesn’t pan out. Organic chemist James Ashenhurst was doing his second postdoc in 2010 at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem when he started tutoring undergraduate students over Skype. He had been searching for chemistry jobs in industry and academia for two years, without success. His wife, chemist Janet Macdonald, was also seeking an academic appointment, so he needed something he could do wherever she was hired. “The tutoring business would provide flexibility for me to live anywhere,” he explains.

It worked out. Today, Ashenhurst’s business — now called Master Organic Chemistry — has expanded to sell study guides and is run out of the couple’s home, while Macdonald runs a nanomaterials lab at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee.

Still, for some, a side job is simply about providing an added sense of enjoyment and work–life balance. That’s why Dirk Wenig, a postdoc at the University of Bremen’s Center for Computing and Communication Technologies in Germany, works as a bartender at a favourite pub called Schmidt’s Kneipe. “I do it because I love it,” Wenig says. “It is a great contrast to my scientific work, and it helps me to relax.” ■

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STUDENTS

Immigration targets

There is little evidence that large numbers of international students overstay their visas in the United Kingdom, according to a report from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Roughly 97% of the 181,000 international students whose visas expired in 2016–17 left the United Kingdom after their studies concluded, says the report, debunking previous estimates that as many as 50,000 overseas students stay on illegally. The report cites data that are based on exit checks introduced in 2016. It says these figures more accurately reflect student behaviour than do earlier numbers calculated on the basis of the ‘International Passenger Survey’, a set of questions asked of people leaving the United Kingdom at ports or airports to determine their future plans. In its report, the ONS said it will continue to study immigration and emigration patterns, and identified a need for a greater emphasis on the complexities of life for international students. The office is expected to release plans for improving its statistics this month. The latest data have led to renewed calls for students to be taken out of UK net-migration targets.

UNIVERSITIES

Low diversity levels

African American, Hispanic and female faculty members at US universities continue to be under-represented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), despite an overall trend towards greater diversity, according to a study (D. Li and C. Koedel *Educ. Res.* <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0013189X17726535>; 2017). The authors compared senior and junior faculty members in biology, chemistry, economics, educational leadership and policy, English and sociology across 40 public universities from 2015 to 2016. They found that diversity is greater among junior faculty members than it is among senior ones, particularly in science- and maths-intensive fields, because younger faculty members tend to come from more diverse backgrounds. However, African American faculty members remain under-represented in both groups. The authors conclude that limited diversity in academia is due primarily to high levels of under-representation in STEM fields and that non-STEM fields are more diverse. The study found that efforts to combat under-representation, launched at many institutions, bring no pay premium for new recruits who improve diversity.