

## **Illuminating PhD research as a career path for undergraduates**

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Over the past decade major structural changes have washed over physiology departments at Australian universities. Changes include large increases in undergraduate student enrollments and the transition to graduate entry into medical training. For Sydney University (at least), these changes have been accompanied by fewer students progressing from the Honours year into PhD studies in Physiology (Phillips, 2009). The Biovideo project is an attempt to improve our understanding of undergraduate perceptions of the life of a practicing scientist, and of how their perceptions might influence their decision to embark on a research degree. In 2009, four third-year Neuroscience undergraduates undertook the project with guidance and support from two Physiology academics (BM and WP). Eight undergraduates took part in focus group qualitative research sessions. These discussions suggested that many undergraduate students have no idea what a career in science entails (while medicine apparently offered a much clearer career path). Students felt that an impediment to such knowledge was the lack of small-group and individual contact with academic-researchers due to large class sizes. In the second part of the project the students recruited and interviewed people at various stages of a career in biomedical sciences. They devised a set of questions to probe the personal experience and motivations that led each individual to pursue research. The interviews were video taped and edited to 2 minutes for You-tube. Our intention is that these interviews might form the starting point for a supra-institutional library of video micro-biographies to help future physiology undergraduates gain a clearer idea of what a life in research can offer. The initial biovideos can be accessed *via* <http://www.physiol.usyd.edu.au/~billp/biovideo/~billp/>.

Phillips W. (2009) Whither Physiology? *AuPS News* **March**: 3-4. .