

# Public health research in an academic setting

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# Outline

## Audience polls

- Getting to know you

## About me

- Current position
- Research areas

## How did I get here?

- Career trajectory

# Highs and lows of academic research

## Pursuing an academic career

- Types of careers in academic research
- Should I do a PhD?
- Tips for success on the academic path





# Audience Polls

Getting to know you

# About me

*Applied health services and policy  
researcher focused on advancing a  
public health approach to substance  
use in Canada*





# Assistant Professor

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University of Alberta School of Public Health

- Health policy and management stream
- Tenure-track

Appointment officially started in April 2016



**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA**  
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

# Scientific Director, ICHWP

Inner City Health and Wellness Program  
(ICHWP), Royal Alexandra Hospital

ICHWP has clinical, education, and research  
arms

Applied research in partnership with affiliated  
clinicians, senior hospital leaders, and  
community partners

Appointment officially started in April 2016



# Main projects

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Canadian Harm Reduction Policy Project (CHARPP)

Evaluating the Addiction Recovery and Community Health (ARCH) Team

Examining policy, legal, and practical aspects of providing harm reduction services in acute care

Access to Medically Supervised Injection Services in Edmonton (AMSISE)







Career trajectory



# Education and experience

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Bachelor of Arts in Sociology (University of Alberta, 2003-2007)

- 3<sup>rd</sup> year political sociology course led to a strong interest in drug policy

Social Science Researcher (Canadian Forestry Service, Natural Resources Canada, 2007)

Master of Arts in Sociology; Certificate in Addiction Studies (University of Toronto, 2008)

- Supervisor Dr. Patricia G. Erickson (CAMH/U of T)
- Specialized in Political Sociology
- Course-based but with a research component
- TA and RA positions

Research Coordinator (Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta, 2008-2010)

- Community University Partnership for the Study of Children Youth and Families, in partnership with the Women and Children's Health Research Institute

# Education and experience

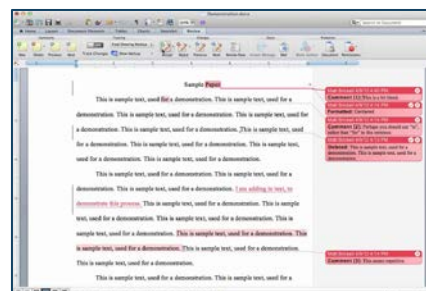
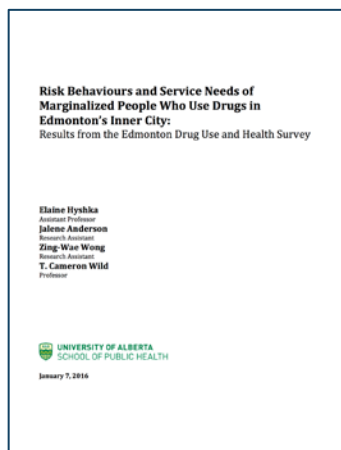
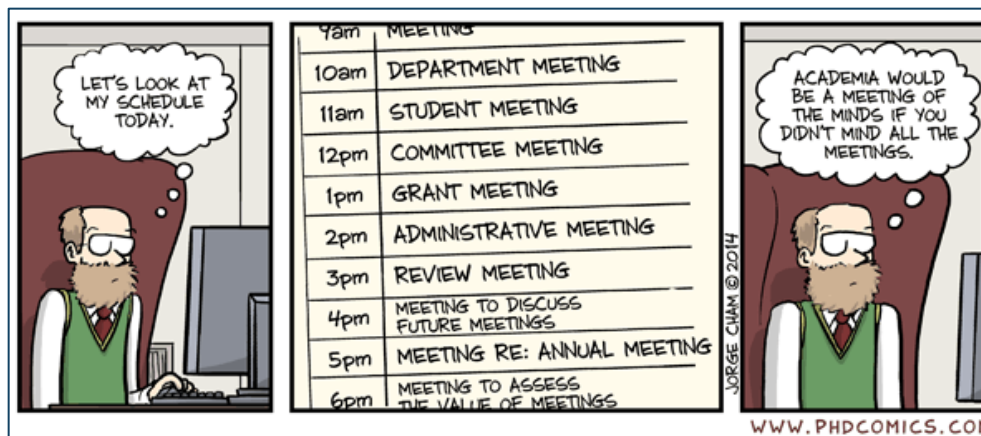
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## Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health Sciences (University of Alberta, 2010 - 2015)

- Specialized in Health Promotion and Socio-behavioural Sciences
- Supervisor Dr. Cameron Wild
- Pre-Candidacy period
  - Western Regional Training Centre in Health Services and Policy Research Fellowship
  - Summer placement at the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS
  - Began volunteering with AMSISE
  - RA/TA
- Post-Candidacy
  - City of Edmonton Office of the Councillors (Policy Advisor)
  - Inner City Health and Wellness Program (Evaluation Consultant)
  - Instructor
- Dissertation: “Assessing consumer perspectives on population need for substance use services”

# The day-to-day

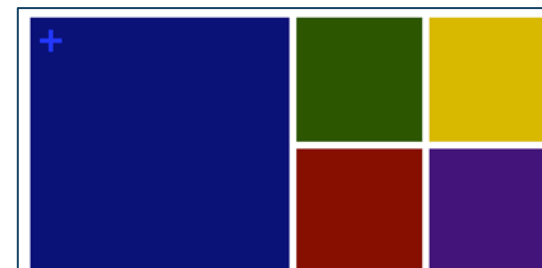
Highs and lows of academic research



## College of physicians endorses effort for safe-injection services in Edmonton

KEITH GEREIN  
More from Keith Gerein

Published on: September 8, 2016 | Last Updated: September 8, 2016 6:56 PM MST



From Confederation to the  
Canada Health Act

Instructor: Elaine Hyskka  
SPH 500, September 12, 2016  
School of Public Health, University of Alberta





# Pros and cons of an academic career

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## PROS

*Pursue your own interests*

Contribute to knowledge

Flexibility

Credibility/platform

Mentoring opportunities

Work environment

## CONS

Very long hours/lots of demands

Lots of uncertainty

- Jobs, grants, etc.

Rejection is a part of life

Challenging to find work-life balance

Mobility/family





Pursuing an academic research career



# Types of academic research careers

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Faculty/Professor

Research Associate/Affiliate/Scientist

Research Professionals

- Research coordinator
- Research assistant
- Statistician/analyst
- Administrator
- Clinician

Clinician-scientist

Consultants





# Should I do a PhD?

## Considerations:

- Career goals
- Specialist vs. generalist
- Passion for research
- Autonomy
- Perseverance
- Uncertainty
  - Tenure track positions are very rare
- Flexibility
- Financial situation



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# Tips for success on an academic path

Understand what it takes to be successful early

Always have a (non-academic) Plan B

- Consider breaking up your training

Take advantage of your trainee status

- Don't be afraid to cold call

Always pursue external funding

- Learn how to sell yourself and your work

Coursework can lead to publications

Be kind





Questions or thoughts?