

PhD Vlog 3 Month's On: Jack Donaghy

TIME	SPEAKER	TRANSCRIPTION
0:00:03	Jack Donaghy	Hey, folks. Jack here. I've now been a PhD student for around six months so I figured that now would be a pretty good time to jump back online and give you all an update on how it's been going. Okay, so what have I actually been doing for the last six months? Well, the main thing I've been doing is my literature review. So what does that entail? I'm pretty much reading and writing anything I can get my hands on which of relevance to the topic at hand.
0:00:28	Jack Donaghy	Just to give you a little reminder, my PhD is on the illegal eviction of people who live in private rented sector housing in Scotland. So I've been doing a lot of reading on kind of what you might expect. You know, housing literature, government papers on housing, studies of illegal eviction. There's been a few done already. Things like that to just kind of get a good base of what's gone before that is specifically linked to this area.
0:00:57	Jack Donaghy	And I've also been moving on a little bit because as part of a PhD, you could just work on all that stuff and then you might have a really good policy paper at the end of it but because you're going to be a Doctor of Philosophy, you've really got to link all this in with some theoretical issues. So I've been looking at a lot of stuff on kind of criminology because there is a lot of interesting stuff about just general deviance. Landlords who evict people illegally are engaging in deviant behaviour.
0:01:32	Jack Donaghy	But also a lot of the times, they are evicting people because those people were themselves engaging in deviant behaviour so there is a kind of interesting dynamic at play there which I've been trying to get all that together and link it into all the existing literature on illegal eviction in the private rented sector. I've also been looking at some kind of regulatory theories. A little bit more policy [p.g. wonkish] kind of thing.
0:01:57	Jack Donaghy	What's the point of regulation? What are the various types of regulation that go on? How do the regulations which exist link into broader regulatory theory? So I've been working a lot on that and it's actually been really interesting because you can get really wrapped up very specifically in your topic but kind of broadening it out and learning new things, it's definitely interesting because you're not just working on a PhD. You're still a student. You're still learning.
0:02:28	Jack Donaghy	So that's been really interesting. I've really enjoyed learning more about all these kind of theoretical issues around illegal

		eviction in the private rented sector and seeing how I can take all this stuff which is in books and articles, and they don't have a title that says 'The Theoretical' whatever 'On Illegal Eviction' but more general stuff, and seeing how you can link all this into your specific topic. So that has actually been really interesting.
0:02:53	Jack Donaghy	The main thing that I've got in my mind right now is my annual review which is coming up. I've got that in two or three months time and what that consists of; the main thing that I've got to do for my annual review is produce a really decent project proposal because this is the kind of preparation year and the next academic year, or not really academic year but the next year in my kind of little timeline. It's when I'm actually going to have to go out and start doing all these research methods, putting them into practice and finding out what is actually going on out there.
0:03:27	Jack Donaghy	So what does this consist of? So I've got to do a project proposal which has got to have a literature review. It's got to have a really good section on what is it you're actually going to go out there and do. A good method section, and it's also got to have a justification for why your project is important. You know, why is it that this is important and why should people care, and why should they let you continue with your PhD? So that's the main thing that I've got going on in my head right now. I'm kind of looking towards that. That's the next big milestone on the calendar.
0:03:56	Jack Donaghy	And also a little bit terrifyingly, as part of this review you have to give a presentation to just staff at Urban Studies. You know, they have these little sessions where PhD students giving their annual review give presentations and anyone in the department can come along. So on the one hand, it will be good to see what all of these experienced academics think of my project but at the same time I'm a little bit nervous for all the different questions they're going to ask so I've got to be really prepared for that, but yeah. So that's going pretty well.
0:04:28	Jack Donaghy	But one area which I wanted to highlight which I've kind of faced a few difficulties with is really nailing down my methods on what I'm actually going to do in my PhD. So just to recap, one of the main, in fact the main thing I want to do for my methods is interview people who have experienced illegal eviction and the way I was going to do this was we had already established a partnership with this organisation that helps people who have experienced among other things, housing problems and illegal eviction.

0:04:58	Jack Donaghy	So shortly after I started my PhD, I started volunteering with this organisation just to kind of see what it is they do. What is their client base like? Just to make sure that whatever I get started on, my methods, I'm not going in without knowing what they really do. So making sure I go in with a really good idea of what's going on and that actually turned out to be a really good idea because if I hadn't done that then I probably wouldn't have appreciated that 90% plus of their clientele really don't speak any English at all.
0:05:30	Jack Donaghy	Which is a real challenge for when you want to do qualitative interviews. Even if you had a whole lot of money and you could employ translators, etc, I think you would probably still face a lot of issues with the quality of the qualitative data you would get. So this, the interviews were on some sideline method that I was using to enhance my PhD and this was the main thing and it turned out it wasn't going to work. So that was a big blow.
0:05:56	Jack Donaghy	So it really got me down. It definitely got me down because I was worried the whole thing was just going to collapse. I suppose one of the things that I was aware of is that no one actually has to collaborate with you on your PhD. You know, I was in the fortunate position that I had this partnership established with this other organisation and I think we're still really going to be able to work together. I think we're going to be able to get a lot of work done together and they're still really keen to work on the project. But just for this kind of main bulk of interviews, I needed to go out and establish a new link with another organisation.
0:06:32	Jack Donaghy	There's not that many organisations who could help with this kind of a project, working in Scotland. It would be very possible in the space of two weeks to send off an email to all of them and for them all to come back and say "No," which would be a major problem for the PhD. But fortunately, I've started going around these organisations, sending them off individual emails and the responses have actually been pretty positive so I just want to talk a little bit about the best ways to approach organisations and how you can help them, and how you can get them to help you.
0:07:02	Jack Donaghy	So you could send off a whole load of emails and say, 'Hello, I'm a PhD student and I'm doing this research. Please can you give me access to all your clients, all your case files and please let me know as soon as possible. Thank you.' But that's really not going to get you anywhere because you've got to be able to offer them something in return, but what can you offer them in return as a PhD student?

0:07:25	Jack Donaghy	Well, let's say you're approaching local authorities. One of their main interests is in cutting down homelessness in their areas so if you can go up to them and say, "Well, I'm doing this research on unlawful eviction in the private rented sector and I think this could be a major contributing factor to homelessness. And what I want to do is I want to identify the issues which are preventing us taking care of unlawful eviction, and one of the things I want to figure out is how we can cut down the number of unlawful evictions that take place.'
0:07:56	Jack Donaghy	Then they're probably going to be quite interested in that because hopefully they'll be hoping that you can help them cut down the number of homelessness cases that come through their doors, which would be a major advantage to them. And also in Scotland, there is a number of organisations who have housing and homelessness advice as one of their core remits, kind of charitable organisations. They often have lobbying arms, so you can go up to them with a similar set of justifications as you've got to a local authority.
0:08:24	Jack Donaghy	So say, 'I want to identify how we can cut down on homelessness.' But you can also say, you know, 'I know you're interested in lobbying and basically I'm a free researcher. I'm going to be producing a thesis at the end of this but hopefully, you might be interested in taking this research and using it in your discussions with government on improving housing.'
0:08:52	Jack Donaghy	So there are definitely ways that you can get people onboard. No one has to help you but actually, I've found that people are surprisingly willing to help, which is really nice and I definitely have a lot more faith in people now. So overall, the PhD is going pretty well. The next big milestone is the annual review so with a bit of luck, I'll get through that in one piece and I will be back in a few months time to let you know how I'm getting on, but until then, good luck in your PhDs, good luck in your Masters degrees, whatever you're doing. Good luck in your PhD applications and I'll hopefully see you soon.

END OF TRANSCRIPT