

Joe Graves Jr.

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Can you tell us a little bit about your job and experience at grad school? What does an average day look like for you?

My time is still spent primarily in basic research. The performance of daily research tasks is conducted by my graduate students. I confer with them about the results of experiments and the analysis of experimental results. I also do a great deal of reading primary and secondary literature and working on my own original research papers and synthetic review articles.



What sparked your interest in Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM)?

I always had a curious mind that wanted to answer the big questions. As early as I can remember I wanted to know about the origin of the universe, the origin of life, the origin of human life. I always wanted to make the world a better place. The scientific method is the only way to generate testable answers about these subjects. It is also an important means to interact with the world and provide solutions to problems like disease, hunger, poverty, and injustice.

How did you start on your path to a career in STEM and what did that path look like?

I began my schooling shortly after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Schooling in the New Jersey suburbs was still mired by assumptions of African-American intellectual inferiority (as it is now.) I was tracked into instruction for people they thought incapable of science or mathematics. Finally, when a student teacher took the time to quiz me on the books I was reading, they realized that they had a gifted student on their hands (not mentally retarded...as they assumed I was.) By middle school I was getting A's and B's in the top level science/math courses and was the chess champion of my school. The assumption of my intellectual inferiority (based upon my socially-defined race) was a constant theme of my schooling from high school to PhD. My response to this was to work harder and never give up. This is why I became the first African-American to ever earn a PhD in the field of evolutionary biology (1988.) I also found it necessary to incorporate into my research a scholarly analysis of the basis of the false assumptions of racial inferiority still operating in the American university system. These are presented in my two books on the topic: *The Emperor's New Clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the Millennium*, and *The Race Myth: Why We Pretend Race Exists in America* (both 2005).