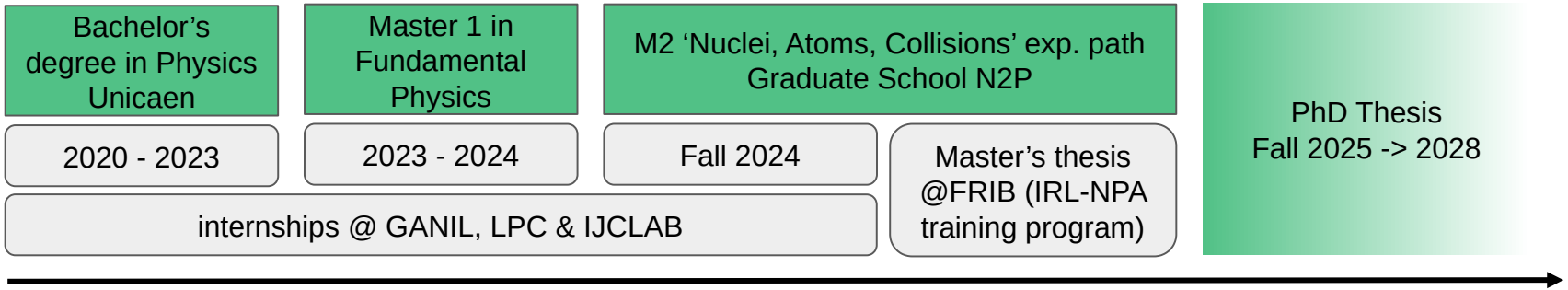
Testimony from a PhD student

Nathan Rousseaux

16/10/2026

MY BACKGROUND

- **Topic** : “Measurement of (n,α) excitation functions of ^{16}O and ^{19}F in support of Gen-III and Gen-IV nuclear technologies”
  -> nuclear data, applications of nuclear sciences for energy
- **Funding** : CaeSAR project (LPC Caen, Caen University) through the Normandy Region



PhD, WHY ?

before starting a PhD…

Practical reasons

- 3-year **fixed-term contract** + student status
- **1.8k€ net** (2.3k€ gross) for **37h** weeks
- **54** days of annual leave

Scientific reasons

- Focus on **quality** rather than productivity
- Contribute to advancing knowledge
- Curiosity, **enjoyment** & intellectual stimulation

…Today

- A PhD topic provides a **framework** : it's up to you to shape it with **your ideas**
- Sidequests : summer schools, conferences, teaching, science outreach…
- **Transferable skills** : project management, problem solving, critical thinking, communication…

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- **Uncertain career prospects** :
  - Budget cuts, funding
  - Permanents positions are rare, competitive hiring process
  - Limited added value in some private sectors *(depending on the field and position)*

- **Two similar research topics can lead to very different experiences** :
  - Consider non-scientific factors: location, supervisor, working environment…
  - Workload, expectations, day-to-day conditions can vary considerably

/!\ non-exhaustive (subjective) list

FINAL WORDS

- The master’s degree is a first step in research. Explore and have fun!
- Should you do a PhD ? == do you enjoy research ?

Thanks for your attention. Questions?

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