

BUILDING AN ONGOING MENTORSHIP AND SUPPORT NETWORK

Cybelle Smith & Anne Park

Mind DivE In

October 9th, 2021

HELPING YOU DEVELOP INTO YOUR BEST POSSIBLE SELF

PhD = one tool for professional and personal development

Connections with mentors / network / support team should be helping to build you into the person that you want to become

HELPING YOU DEVELOP INTO YOUR BEST POSSIBLE SELF

What is getting your PhD going to help you to accomplish?

- If you want to become faculty and/or do research in a technical field, could be a good choice

HELPING YOU DEVELOP INTO YOUR BEST POSSIBLE SELF

If you aren't committed to becoming faculty or doing technical research:

- What parts of yourself do you want to develop?
- Is there a way to develop those parts while making more money and staying happy in an environment that you enjoy?

What are pluses and minuses of academia, industry and non-profit organizations?

Be wary of master's programs / any program with high tuition that would put you in debt

AGENDA

Mentoring

Choosing a good school/academic mentoring team

Your Broader Support Network

What is it and how do you build it?

Professional Networking in Academia

How do you make and sustain connections?

AGENDA

Mentoring

Choosing a good school/academic mentoring team

Your Broader Support Network

What is it and how do you build it?

Professional Networking in Academia

How do you make and sustain connections?

ACTIVITY TIME!

- Think about a mentor that has influenced you positively.
- What did they do right?

FINDING MENTORING AND SUPPORT FOR OUR MULTIFACETED SELVES...

- Mentors at many levels
- Primary faculty mentor ≠ sole source of support!
 - committee, collaborators, lab mates, peers
- Mentors oriented to helping with aspects of belonging to an underrepresented group
 - Don't always have to be faculty mentor, or even in academia
 - e.g. Professor Dwayne Watson -- multi-disp. professional support group

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM A FACULTY MENTOR?

- Career guidance
- Establishing lab culture and expectations
- Discussing science and ideally sharing the joy of doing/learning about science with you!
- Helping you learn to:
 - design experiments
 - interpret and analyze data
 - create research products (posters, journal articles, grants, patents)
 - give good academic talks
- Facilitating networking and collaboration; promoting your career
- Some degree of personal support / accommodations to major life events

CHOOSING A GOOD MENTOR OR CO-MENTORING TEAM

What factors are you personally considering as you choose a mentor or mentors?

CHOOSING A GOOD MENTOR OR CO-MENTORING TEAM

What factors are you personally considering as you choose a mentor or mentors?

What about additional factors relevant to the overall choice: mentor(s), program and school?

MAKING & NARROWING DOWN LIST OF POTENTIAL MENTORS

The summer before you apply...

1st round screening = fit to research interests, is school a non-starter?

- Who was the first or senior author on a paper you really liked?
- Whose talks or posters did you enjoy seeing?
- If they are senior faculty, check what their lab's alumni and collaborators are up to
- Ask around to figure out what schools have clusters of productive faculty in your area, and web-stalk them (or check top ten programs in your field)
- If school / location is a non-starter for you, screen it out

MAKING & NARROWING DOWN LIST OF POTENTIAL MENTORS

2nd round screening -- build a list of ~10-15 potential mentors/programs:

- How excited are you about their research program?
- Check for placement record on their lab website (where are their alumni now? How many are postdocs/faculty at reputable schools or have excellent industry placements?)
- Are they junior vs senior faculty

(junior = more hands on, senior = more connected)

Right after this stage, bring in your current faculty mentor if you have one or ask a faculty member in your intended field of study to check your initial list:

- Try to get word on each candidate mentor's general reputation, how easy to work with, whether their students do good work, etc.

MAKING & NARROWING DOWN LIST OF POTENTIAL MENTORS

3rd round screening -- email faculty to figure out who is accepting new students this year (ideally, do this August/September of the year you apply)

- This will further narrow down your list
- If still too many possible mentors, check your heart and apply to the programs you are most excited about
 - Other factors: location preference, type of program, whether offers lab rotations, whether more than one potential faculty mentor there

MAKING & NARROWING DOWN LIST OF POTENTIAL MENTORS

4th round screening -- remember, you interview them at the same time they interview you!

Nowadays, in some fields there are two types of interviews:

- Informal “pre-interviews” the fall that you apply (could be before or after submit application, but you and faculty member directly arrange it)
- official rounds of interviews that program invites you to after you apply

I would hold off on asking the tougher questions until the official interview stage

POTENTIAL FACULTY MENTORS:
GREEN FLAGS & RED FLAGS

INTERVIEW WEEKEND: WHAT DO YOU ASK AND WHO?

So you've applied and been invited to interview...

INTERVIEW WEEKEND: WHAT DO YOU ASK AND WHO?

Questions to ask the prospective mentor:

- How hands on are they?
- What's their mentoring philosophy?
- What are their expectations for time spent in the lab?
- Is it ok if you reach out to current grad student(s) by email?

INTERVIEW WEEKEND: WHAT DO YOU ASK AND WHO?

Questions to ask the prospective mentor:

- How hands on are they?
- What's their mentoring philosophy?
- What are their expectations for time spent in the lab?
- Is it ok if you reach out to current grad student(s) by email?

Questions to ask lab members / grad students in program outside the lab

- Any history of abusive behavior or harassment? – feel out for that, but can frame as, what's your impression of them? What do you think their approach is like as a mentor? Are their students happy?
- Be aware of and try to get more clarity on potential red flags

INTERVIEW WEEKEND: WHAT DO YOU ASK AND WHO?

Questions to ask the prospective mentor:

- How hands on are they?
- What's their mentoring philosophy?
- What are their expectations for time spent in the lab?
- Is it ok if you reach out to current grad student(s) by email?

Questions to ask lab members / grad students in program outside the lab

- Any history of abusive behavior or harassment? – feel out for that, but can frame as, what's your impression of them? What do you think their approach is like as a mentor? Are their students happy?
- Be aware of and try to get more clarity on potential red flags

Any other advice/suggestions for information gathering?

Anecdotes / stories / mistakes from those that have gone through this?

YOU'RE ACCEPTED! WHAT NOW?

The PhD is a long road.

Choose a place where you will be happy during that time.

Enjoy the journey!

TROUBLE IN PARADISE: NAVIGATING CONFLICTS WITH MENTORS

For a PhD program, your relationship with your primary faculty mentor(s) will last longer than many marriages.

Clear communication and expectation / boundary setting with your advisor(s) can help:

- avoid conflicts in the first place
- resolve them when they occur

TROUBLE IN PARADISE: NAVIGATING CONFLICTS WITH MENTORS

When you can't resolve / process just by talking to advisor:

Minor conflicts: talk to labmates / peers / friends

Major conflicts: talk to other faculty confidentially

Serious stuff: external mediator or your department chair

Worst case scenario: may be possible to switch advisors

Tap your broader support network!

AGENDA

Mentoring

Choosing a good school/academic mentoring team

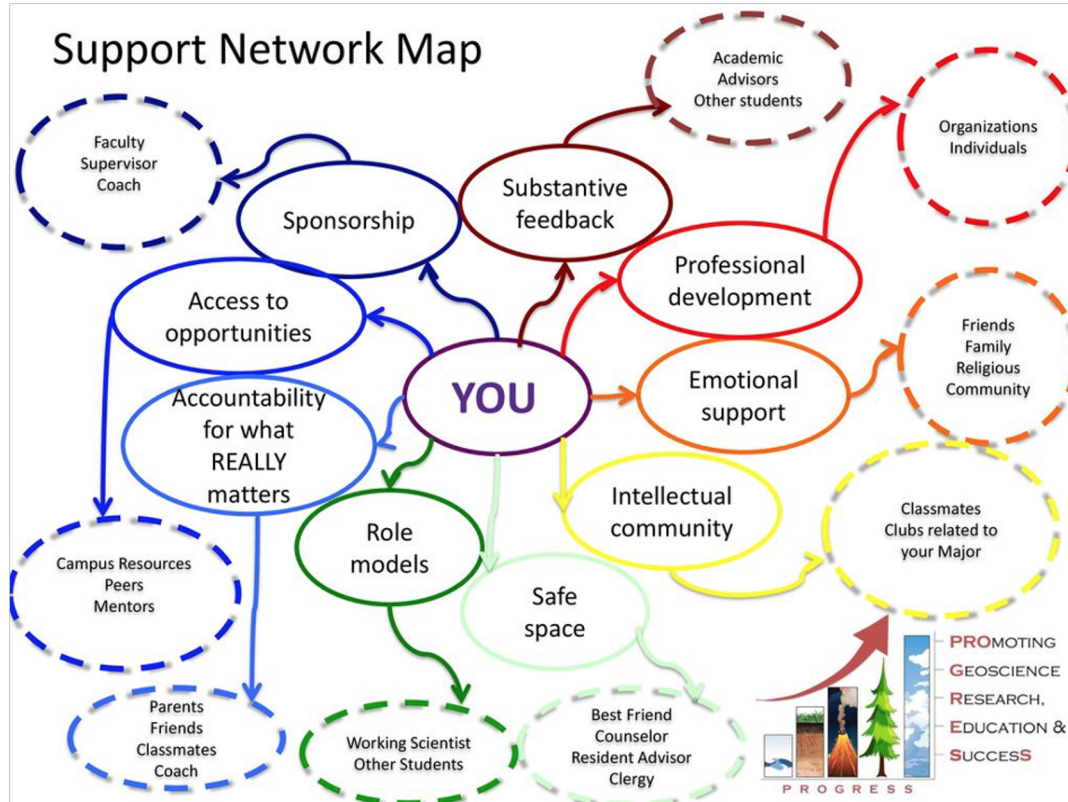
Your Broader Support Network

What is it and how do you build it?

Professional Networking in Academia

How do you make and sustain connections?

WHO IS IN YOUR BROADER SUPPORT NETWORK?



SOME CRITICAL PLAYERS:

- Co-mentors
- Committee members
- Collaborators
- Your mentor's network (alumni etc.)
- Other faculty in department
- Senior / junior labmates
- Peers in other labs
- Members of same society / conference
- Your counselor / mental & physical health care team
- Your friends and family outside of academia!

SERIOUSLY, DON'T SOCIALLY ISOLATE EVEN IF YOU'RE BUSY!
YOU WILL NOT BE AS PRODUCTIVE.

REGULAR SLEEP, REGULAR SOCIALIZATION.
IT'S A MARATHON.

SENIOR AND JUNIOR LAB MATES – A CRITICAL LIFELINE!

Different labs have different cultures / expectations, but no matter the lab, forging friendships with your labmates is a good idea.

Labmates may help you:

- Learn techniques
- Deal w/ statistical / technical problems

It's a give-and-take / pay it forward model.

Be conscientious & reciprocally generous.

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDSHIPS ACROSS LABS (INTERNAL)

Attend another lab's lab meetings

Attend social events (departmental or informal mixers)

- Don't just talk to people you already know!
- Regular repeating social events can help build meaningful/lasting connections (weekly or monthly get-together/party)

Attend or help plan events with regular meetings

- Journal or Book club
- Technical workshop series / internal conference
- Student government

Other suggestions?

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDSHIPS ACROSS LABS (EXTERNAL)

Attend external academic conferences / workshops

- Don't just talk to people you already know!
- Your advisor may introduce you to some people
- Ask good questions and send follow up emails to people whose work interests you (posters, talks)
- Go to lunch or dinner with a different lab, and/or attend a get-together for your lab's alumni
- In emails, ask friends / connections which conferences they will attend and try to set up lunch

HIDDEN CURRICULUM: WHAT'S A "GOOD" QUESTION?

- Thoughtful, polite, constructive
- Options:
 - raise a critical question about the research findings (technical or interpretational)
 - connect the findings to related literature (e.g. a paper you read or a finding you learned about in class)
- Remember, the speaker is your colleague and you ideally are not just socially posturing; you are trying to help them with their research and/or advance the field.

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDSHIPS ACROSS LABS (EXTERNAL)

Professional science twitter

- Follow people you meet at conferences / talks to record the connection
- Promote your work through the account (tweet out talks / posters / publications etc.)
- Engage in public discussions and connect to people that way

Other social media suggestions?

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDSHIPS ACROSS LABS (EXTERNAL)

Talks with invited speakers whose work interests you

- Seize opportunities to get lunch with or meet with them
- Try to ask good questions at the talk to raise your visibility
- If you are really interested in their work and/or think that your knowledge can help them on their project, you can email the professor afterwards. They will generally be more responsive than if you cold-contacted them.

CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLABORATORS

So you met with someone at a conference and had an idea for a collaboration -- great!

CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLABORATORS

Most of the time, conference collaboration ideas don't really materialize. But if you want it to, you'll need to follow up with them by email and set up a meeting, and then ideally set some clear milestones and/or set up semi-regular meetings, to solidify the commitment.

Again, it's a give and take. Be conscientious and try to follow through on developing projects, particularly if the collaborator put effort in to setting up something for you.

Once it's clear that it will really happen, try to clarify as soon as you can who does what, and potential credit assignment / authorship order (or how it would be determined). Ideally try to take on projects that are likely to move beyond a poster and result in a journal article.

CONTINUING EMOTIONAL AND CAREER SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY, INSIDE & OUTSIDE ACADEMIA

Some really great career advice comes from people outside academia

What are some examples of good advice you've gotten?

Any bad advice?

GROUP DISCUSSION / Q & A

Thanks for listening!

Ask me and the other trainees here anything!