BUILDING AN ONGOING MENTORSHIP AND SUPPORT NETWORK

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BUILDING A NETWORK? NETWORKING?

https://www.gempool.ie/insights/networking-is-one-of-the-best-tools-for-career-development

"… academics should not reject the very idea of networking out of hand, but embrace it as a valuable strategy for surrounding yourself with happy people who are happy to help you." (Streeter 2014)

DOING A PHD

- At some point, you become the only person who is the most knowledgeable in your topic/project than anyone else (in the lab, in your program, and in your entire field!)

- Doing a PhD is an amazing journey.
- …but can be a lonely one

- It's important to surround yourself with mentors and friends who will provide support along the way.

HOW YOUR MENTOR(S)/SUPPORT NETWORK CAN HELP YOU

- research
- long-term professional (career) goals
- well-being

YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK IN ACADEMIA

- primary faculty mentor(s)
- core support network
  - committee
  - cohort
  - labmates
  - postdocs
  - collaborators
- extended support network
  - people you meet at conferences & events

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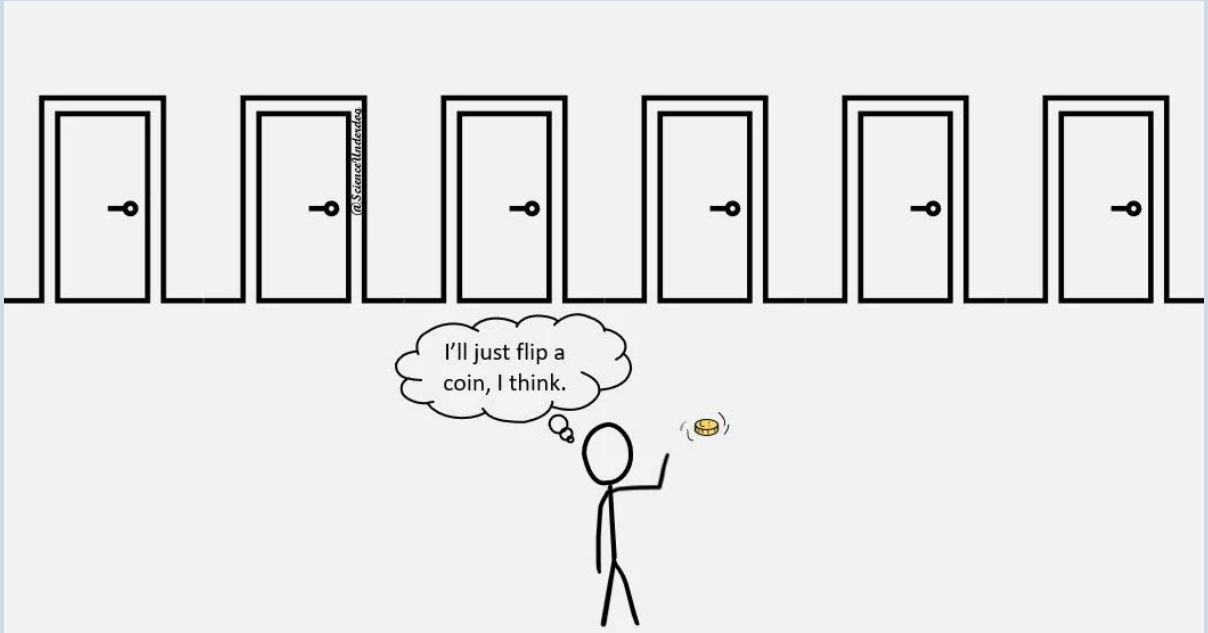
FINDING THE RIGHT FACULTY ADVISOR/LAB

- An advisor is choosing you (admissions) – but you're also choosing your advisor!
- But how do you choose the right mentor?



https://www.scienceunderdog.com/post/finding-the-right-phd-mentor

MARRIAGE vs. The Ph.D.

	Marriage	Ph.D.
Typical Length:	7.5 years	7 years
Begins with:	A proposal	A thesis proposal
Culminates in a ceremony where you walk down an aisle dressed in a gown:	✓	✓
Usually entered into by:	Foolish young people in love	Foolish young people without a job
50% end in:	Bitter divorce	Bitter remorse
Involves exchange of:	Vows	Know-how
Until death do you part?	If you're lucky	If you're lazy

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

WHAT FACTORS ARE YOU PERSONALLY CONSIDERING AS YOU CHOOSE A MENTOR OR MENTORS?

SOME THINGS YOU MIGHT CONSIDER…

- research interests
- mentorship style
- publication & placement records
- work-life balance
- issues for underrepresented students
- location
- … and more!

1. RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Do the **main research goals** of the lab align with your scientific interests?

- Keep an **open mind**!
  - Specific research projects, tools, techniques, etc. come and go.
  - Your interests can (and most likely will!) change and develop throughout your academic career.

- Ask yourself: Would you **intrinsically value** the work that you would do?

2. MENTORSHIP STYLE

- **hands-on** vs. **hands-off**
  - direction, efficiency, and support // micromanagement
  - independence/freedom // absence of mentorship
- **feedback style** – critic vs. cheerleader
- How much **one-on-one time**?
- **lab culture**
  - close knit vs independent
  - small vs. big
  - can change over time (students & postdocs come and go)

3. PUBLICATION & PLACEMENT RECORDS

- What's their publication record like?

- Where are the alumni now?
  - How many are postdocs/faculty at reputable schools or have excellent industry placements?

4. WELL-BEING

- Does your mentor encourage a healthy **work-life balance**?
- What are their expectations for **time spent in the lab**?

- Is your mentor oriented to helping you with **aspects of belonging to an underrepresented group**?

5. PROGRAM/SCHOOL

- location
  - Can I be happy there for 5-6 years?
- $$ / teaching load
- flexibility in switching labs/advisors
- number of potential advisors (if admissions is department-level, e.g. Linguistics)

INTERVIEW/VISIT WEEK: 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?

BE REALISTIC

- Be **realistic** about what any single mentor can do – **No mentor/lab is perfect!**
  - You don't have to treat your PI as your one source of support; it can be beneficial to seek support from people other than your primary faculty mentor.

- Consider your preferences.

- A mentor who works great for one student might not work out for another student.
  - A student's goals, personality, and training trajectory are **unique**, which means that **finding the 'right' mentor is also individual**.

MENTOR-MENTEE RELATIONSHIPS GO BOTH WAYS.

- Maintain these relationships in a **professional** manner.
- Show that you are a **responsible junior colleague**.
- Develop and demonstrate your abilities to be an **independent researcher**.

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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

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDSHIPS ACROSS LABS

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?

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BUILDING YOUR EXTENDED SUPPORT NETWORK

- Make the most out of conferences.
  - Don't just talk to people you already know!
  - Your advisor/labmates may introduce you to some people.
  - Ask good questions and send follow up emails to people whose work interests you (posters, talks)
- Make connections with fellow PhD students (especially those at other institutions)
  - Networking isn't just about talking to 'big names'!
- Go to invited talks / guest lectures.
  - lunches, dinners, individual meetings, …
- Academic Twitter
- Maintain your connections. Embrace the concept of giving and taking!

GOOD LUCK!